

**The Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness:
The Dialect of Lord and Bondsman in Hegel's *Phenomenology of
Spirit***

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"Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only as something acknowledged".¹

This sentence commences, and anticipates the key lesson from, what is perhaps the most-read section of any of Hegel's texts—the eight or nine pages headed "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage" and embedded within chapter 4 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The chapter itself, which is entitled "The Truth of Self-Certainty", is the only chapter of a section that is labelled "B: Self-Consciousness" and that follows the three-chaptered "A: Consciousness" and precedes "C: Reason".

The general idea summarily introduced here—that we are the sorts of beings we are with our characteristic "self-consciousness" only on account of the fact that we exist "for" each other or, more specifically, are *recognized* or *acknowledged* (*anerkannt*) by each other, an idea we might refer to as the "acknowledgment condition" for self-consciousness—constitutes one of Hegel's central claims in the *Phenomenology*. This is a substantial claim indeed, and is at the heart of the thesis of "the sociality of reason".² It is, however, introduced in a seemingly arbitrarily way in the paragraph prior to the "Independence and Dependence" section, and at the conclusion of a discussion examining "desire" as a model for self-consciousness. Exactly *why* we are meant to accept the acknowledgment condition is, to say the least, far from clear, and while even a cursory reading of the famous lord and bondsman "dialectic" that follows enables one to get the general picture, the philosophical significance we are meant to extract from it is not obvious. In Hegel's exploration of the nature and conditions of self-consciousness in these pages, much hangs on his use of the terms "being-in-itself", "being-for-itself", and "being-for-another", but as with so many of Hegel's characteristic expressions, while it is easy enough to get an

impression of what he means to convey with them, it is far from easy to make that impression explicit. This is an effort that really cannot be avoided, however, if we are to appreciate both the nature and grounds of Hegel's claims.

"Being-in-itself", "Being-for-itself", and "Being-for-another"

In our everyday unreflective experience of the world we usually presuppose that the objects we are experiencing are presented to us just as they "really" are "in themselves". That is, we assume that were they *not* being experienced they would still be *just as* they for us *in* our experience. This generally *realistic* assumption is a characteristic of the outlook Hegel calls "consciousness", and the experience undergone by such a "consciousness" through its sequence of "shapes" had been traced in section "A: Consciousness". In the opening paragraph of the following section, "B: Self-Consciousness", Hegel reiterates what has been learnt *from* this earlier experience. The realistic orientation of consciousness had been to take something *other than itself*, the seemingly independent "in-itself" [das Ansich] presented *to* it, to be reality.³ What had been revealed within the course of its experience, however, was that this supposedly independent in-itself is in fact "a manner [Weise] in which the object is only for an other" (§ 166, 137).

This generally realistic orientation of consciousness appears then not to have survived its experience, and by the beginning of section B, consciousness has been replaced by another more "idealistic" outlook that Hegel calls "self-consciousness". Perhaps the easiest way to get a grip on this new outlook is to describe it as a type of radicalized Kantian idealism. Kant had referred to the objects existing *for* consciousness as "appearances", and had regarded the *form* of such appearances as contributed by the knower. For example, in response to the question why we experience material objects in space as having three dimensions rather than, say, two or four, Kant's answer was in terms of the way *we* are, not the way space *itself* actually is (that is, is "in itself").

Kant contrasted these knowable, subject-related appearances to the "things in themselves" which we *cannot* know, but this distinction was itself later found to be problematic given we cannot know anything about one of its terms. But if one abandons the contrasting "in-itself", as did Fichte for example, the idealism of this outlook seems to *deepen*, as one now holds not only that the object as known is

subjectively constituted, but also that there is *no* further reality "in itself" with which it *can be* contrasted. In Hegel's *Phenomenology*, this is the general character of the orientation to which consciousness has been brought at the end of section A and that is the commencing shape of *self*-consciousness. That is, what had originally been taken to be an independent thing in itself, is now grasped as something *entirely* of a radically independent subject's own making. As Hegel cryptically puts it, now "the *in-itself* is consciousness" (§ 166, 137).

Clearly the new outlook is somehow based upon our capacity for *self*-awareness—in the idealists' shorthand, the capacity for a conscious subject to be "for itself"—and to follow Hegel's account of the fate of self-consciousness here we need to understand something of his analysis of this mode of being. Equally clearly there is something of Descartes' *cogito* in the idealists' use of this term, as can be seen in Fichte's account in his "First Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*": "A thing ... may possess a variety of different features; but if we ask, "*For whom* is it what it is?" no one who understands our question will answer that "it exists for itself." Instead, an intellect also has to be thought of in this case, an intellect *for* which the thing in question exists. The intellect, in contrast, necessarily is for itself whatever it is, and nothing else needs to be thought of in conjunction with the thought of an intellect."⁴ But the Cartesian conception is not sufficient to capture what Fichte had meant by "being-for-itself", since in order to contrast with Descartes' notion of the mind as a thinking *thing* or *substance*, Fichte had characterized the intellect with the neologism "Tathandlung"—a "fact-act". That is, for Fichte it was crucial that the ego or intellect be aware of itself *as activity* rather than as some given thing or fact [Tatsache]. Only then, we might say, is the ego "for itself" *as it is in itself* rather than as it merely *appears to itself*. We might then describe Fichte's conception of the intellect as involving an *immediate unity* of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, a conception reflected in his description of it as an "*immediate unity of being and seeing*",⁵ suggesting, an immediate unity of a way of being (as activity) and awareness *of* this way of being.

This Fichtean characterization of self-awareness with its stress on immediacy and activity is clearly relevant to the shape from which Hegel's account of *self-consciousness* starts, "Self-certainty",⁶ but in the course of its experience this outlook will undergo a fate analogous to that undergone by "consciousness". In broad terms, Hegel's own resolution of the problems afflicting each of these competing criteria of

reality will be that the real is neither that which simply has "being-in-itself" (the outlook of realism) nor "being-for-itself" (the outlook of idealism), but that which has "being-in-and-for-itself", and this more fundamental category is to be understood such that "being-in-itself" and "being-for-itself" are relatively isolable abstractions from it. Indeed, Hegel's story of the lord and bondsman is crucial for adding flesh to this logical skeleton, as both lord and bondsman will be portrayed as realizing each of these one-sided abstractions. Furthermore, each will realize either of these one-sided abstraction *only* in virtue of the fact that each exists *for the other*—that is, that each is recognized *as* having this form of being *by* the other.⁷ The mutually entwined lives of lord and bondsman will then provide us with the first example of a form of existence in which "being-for-itself" and "being-in-itself" are combined in a *mediated* unity.

Self-Consciousness as Desire

By the end of section "A", *consciousness* (that attitude that had taken the status of something's *givenness* to it as indicating its independent existence) had learnt that what was apparently given was really constituted by its mode of *constructing*, and had thereby become *self-consciousness*. But constructing is an activity, and so the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness has also been a change from a primarily *contemplative* form of thought to one that is essentially *practical*. It should not then be too surprising that the shape of self-consciousness first encountered in this section is an overtly practical orientation—desire. In fact, desire seems to provide a good instantiation of the idea of a self grasping *itself* as the essence of its apparently given object. While we tend to think of desires as world-directed mental attitudes, on reflection it might be thought that since the desired object is picked out exclusively by the fact *that one desires it*, it can equally be considered as a projection or construction of one's own state. Hegel seems to have something like this in mind when he says at §167 that consciousness "as self-consciousness ... has a double object: one is the immediate object ... which ... 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; 139).

I have suggested that Hegel portrays the initial orientation of self-consciousness in generally "Fichtean" terms, but this needs qualification: Hegel's word for desire here,

Begierde, suggests *appetite*, and Fichte's essentially Kantian conception of *moral* self-consciousness was anything but a practical orientation based on *appetite*. Fichte had appealed to the idea of the mind's basic orientation to the world as a type of *striving* or *endeavouring* rather than a *passively contemplative knowing*, but such "striving" is clearly far from reducible to any naturalistic "appetite-driven" process. For Fichte as for Kant, it was the independence or autonomy of *moral* action that had been the key concern, thus Fichte considered the finite ego as striving against all that which *limits and determines it*, including its own apparently given inclinations and appetites. As such, the primacy of *practical* reason was for Fichte the primacy of the practical or moral *faculty* that, following Kant, he called the faculty of *Begehrung*, also translated as "desire", but used in this sense without the corporeal connotations of "*Begierde*". We might start to see, however, how from Hegel's perspective such moral intentionality still has an underlying structure most obviously manifested in *Begierde*. *Begierde* is fundamentally a negating attitude to anything that is given to it, and this is the attitude of the Fichtean moral subject to whatever threatens to determine it from without. Moral desire, it might be said, is a desire to be freed from any first-order desires or natural inclinations, and it treats *them* in the way that *they* treat their objects. In the next section I will further suggest that Hegel's use of *Begierde* is bound up with his introduction of the topic of appetite's natural context, the realm of *life*, but what should be noted here is the way that for Hegel the inadequacy of desire as a model for self-consciousness is connected to its *immediacy*.

It had been Fichte's assumption of the *immediate* unity of the ego's in-itselfness and for-itselfness that precluded the possibility of Self-certainty being *mistaken* about itself. In contrast, from Hegel's perspective, it is the difference between the way that the ego is *immediately for itself* and the way that it is *in itself* that creates the space that it can traverse in its experiential journey to the *truth* of its self-understanding—its being-*in-and-for-itself*. But there are other consequences of this initial gap which are crucial to Hegel's approach, as the fact that we can always counter the question of how self-consciousness is *immediately* for itself with that concerning how it is *in itself* introduces the issue of how a self-consciousness can be *for another*. One consequence of this concerns the place it provides for the consciousness or viewpoint shared by "we" observers of the journey of consciousness, the so-called "phenomenological

we".⁸ Another is that it introduces a place for a certain "nature-philosophical" inflection into the "Fichtean" dimension of Hegel's account.

Desire in the Context of Life

In his earlier *Differenzschrift* of 1801, written in a more Schellingian idiom,⁹ Hegel had criticized Fichte for being limited in his account to a "subjective", and as lacking a complementary "objective"—there a type of nature-philosophical—conception of the autonomous self-conscious subject, the so-called "subject-object". That Fichte had been restricted to a "subjective" conception of the "subject-object" (or what Hegel was later to label "Idea" as "what is true *in and for itself, the absolute unity of Concept and objectivity*")¹⁰ was to remain Hegel's basic complaint against him.¹¹ In the *Phenomenology*, this charge effectively had become the idea that in the *desire* model of self-consciousness, the "for itself" (subjective and independent) aspect of self-consciousness predominates over or eclipses the "in itself" (objective and dependent) aspect. Moreover, the nature-philosophical viewpoint to which Hegel had appealed in the *Differenzschrift* had provided a new sense to the notion of what it is to be "for oneself", a sense freed from the more Cartesian aspects of Fichte's usage with which we started. Self-maintaining and self-directing organisms manifest a form of "for-selfness" in those very activities. But an organism is, of course, an objectively existing thing—an "in-itself" which, in contrast to a Cartesian mind, can exist as something *for another*.¹²

Throughout section "A", because we had taken a consciousness that was *for us* as an "in-itself", we phenomenological observers had been able to grasp something about the nature of consciousness that eluded consciousness itself: its *active* role in constituting its object. Now, in the chapter on self-consciousness, where Self-certainty grasps itself as subjective activity and its object as dependent on it and so a "nothing", the situation is in some sense reversed. We observe a self-consciousness that is immediately for itself as a type of active self-moving object, and we grasp it as acting on objects that, although *it* regards as *nothings*, must *for us* essentially belong to the same objective order as this self-consciousness itself. To be *observed* to act, one needs, as it were, something *upon* which to act. That is, *we* understand how the objects with which it interacts have more to them than what self-consciousness itself *intends* for them—we can see how self-consciousness's activity is itself *dependent* on

these objects, and this is what self-consciousness must itself learn through its practical experience.¹³ *It too* must learn that they possess a necessary *independence* (§168; 139).

It is in this way, then, that Hegel introduces the theme of *life* in §168 when he notes: "But *for us*, or *in itself*, the object which for self-consciousness is the negative element 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" (ibid.). From the subjective or first-person point of view, desire might be experienced immediately as the desire to negate some object, but from an external, objective point of view (that of "we" phenomenological observers), desire is the sort of attitude that is expressed in the teleological action of an organism interacting with others in order to preserve itself—to take for itself, as it were, *the life* that they possess. But while we may see such desire as aimed at a universal—life itself—this universal must be presentable to the desiring subject itself *as* a distinct object, its desire must be directed at the "*living thing*" whose life it will attempt to appropriate. And with this we see how self-consciousness must incorporate the multi-faceted development characteristic of consciousness such that its mediating object has the characteristics of objects of those shapes of consciousness explored in chapters 1 to 3: Sense-certainty (*die sinnliche Gewissheit*), Perception (*die Wahrnehmung*), and Understanding (*der Verstand*). "What self-consciousness distinguishes from itself as having *being*" notes Hegel, "also has in it, in so far 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*]" (ibid.).

It can seem as if Hegel simply *presupposes* this "nature-philosophical" account that is introduced here, but on closer inspection it is clear that Hegel believes he is entitled to so locating desire in the living realm from what has been learnt throughout chapters 1 to 3.¹⁴ Consciousness had started out taking the immediate qualitatively determined "this" of Sense-certainty as the *truth* of its object and had come to learn that such immediately perceivable quality is just an aspect of the more complex object of *Perception*. In contrast to the simplicity of the "this" of sense certainty, the perceived object has an internal structure such that an underlying substrate has changeable phenomenal properties. But in turn Perception learns that that *its* object is in truth more complicated again, the distinction between it and the Understanding

roughly enacting the distinction between the everyday common-sensical and scientific views of the world. While from the point of view of Perception we might think of the world as simply an assemblage of propertied objects, from the point of view of the Understanding, such objects will be integrated as interacting components of a single, unified, law-governed world.

"Self-certainty", the immediate form of self-consciousness, is the practical analogue of *Sense-certainty*. Here a felt appetite is directed to some particular sensuously presented "this" in which desiring self-consciousness is aware of itself. At its most basic, my desire is directed to *this* sensuous thing before me—a succulent ripe pineapple, say—but presented to me *as* this bare singular thing known only in terms of an appealing sensuous quality that determines it as something to be, literally, negated as an independent existence. But this is only the immediate form in which the mediating desired object is presented, and it must in fact be far more complex, as it is a fundamental principle of Hegel's method that each subsequent phase of consciousness or self-consciousness retains in negated, or "*aufgehoben*", form all aspects revealed in previous stages. Self-certainty must learn that the immediate "this" is not the *truth* of its object, but *we* phenomenological observers, who know that its object is *not* a mere nothing, know this object as also having the aspects revealed to Perception (the desired object must have the property of being *living*) and, crucially, to the Understanding. A little background is needed in order to appreciate what Hegel thinks grasping objects in this third way entails.

First, in relation to the Understanding, we must note the particular *dynamicist* interpretation that Hegel, essentially following in the tradition of Leibniz and Kant, had given to the Newtonian view of the world. In contrast to the prevalent mechanistic interpretations, the dynamicists conceived of Newton's laws as not holding of moving lumps of inert matter but of "moving forces" which interact via attraction or repulsion. These moving forces will effectively form the templates for the *self-moving*, i.e., *organic* elements of the nature-philosophical account in Chapter 4. Indeed, Fichte himself had developed such a conception of the organic realm based on a dynamic account of physics in his 1794–95 *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre*,¹⁵ but it was as part of his foundation for *practical*, not *theoretical* knowledge, and so, in Hegel's terms, conceived *negatively* as an realm to be *striven against*. Next, for Hegel "the Understanding" represents a form of epistemic relation

to the world which is locked into the finite cognitive forms that Kant had opposed to "reason" ("*die Vernunft*"), and which is restricted to the realm of "appearance". Thus for Kant (as also for Fichte) explanatory posits such as forces could never represent the *ultimate* constituents of the world *in itself*, but only the world as it is *for a subject*. In scientific explanation a force might be posited to *explain* some empirical law-governed regularity, the posited *explanans* thus being distinguished from the phenomena being explained. But the Kantian idea of the unknowability of reality as it is in itself implies for Hegel that "this difference is no difference" and that the explaining force and explained law are, rather, "constituted exactly the same" (§154, 125). Thus Hegel describes the Understanding as positing a difference only to withdraw it: to its initial claim to know the *world* it then adds the meta-claim that what is known is an appearance that it itself constitutes (§163, 133–4). The Understanding is so constituted to *posit a difference* and then *deny* it, but *we* can see that this activity in which a difference is posited only to be then somehow reabsorbed within a subsequent identity is characteristic of this form of conceptually articulated consciousness itself. (We see this explicitly, for example, in what "desire" does in positing the desired object that mediates it *qua* self-consciousness.) "What is, for the Understanding, an object in a sensuous covering, is *for us* in its essential form as a pure concept" (§ 164; 134).

With this we might now start to glimpse how Hegel at least *believes* that he has purchased the nature-philosophical position (and much else besides) that seems to be presupposed in Chapter 4. The "*Aufheben* principle" implies that the essential object that mediates self-consciousness must, despite self-consciousness's initial way of conceiving it, behave something like those reciprocally interacting forces posited by the Understanding. The action of a desiring organism on another will be met by a reciprocal action of another, opposed, desiring organism. Furthermore, we know these dynamic and self-moving objects to have a structure exhibited by the Understanding itself. This movement (which is implicitly self-consciousness) involves the positing of differences which are then overcome or superseded. But this is just the type of "movement" can be *seen in* the interactions of those self-moving forces or powers of the *organic* world.

The natural world, understood in this way, will thus provide a model for the dynamic context within which self-consciousness is possible. However, self-

consciousness cannot be understood as possible within the *merely* living world. We can see how that which is expressed in an organism's behaviour might be regarded as a "desire" not only for the particular thing with which it interacts, but for the "living" property that it bears (*qua* object of Perception), and how this might be extended to desire *to be* a participant in the round of "life" itself, *qua concrete* universal, the implicit object of the systematic Understanding. However, the mere organism cannot learn this, as the merely living system is unable to produce the point of view from which the universal *could* be recognized as an end: the dynamic genus of life "does not exist for itself" but "points to something other than itself, viz. to consciousness, for which life exists as a unity, or as genus [Gattung]" (§ 172; 143).¹⁶ And with this inability to grasp the universal, *natural* desire cannot be an adequate model for self-consciousness: caught in the problem of a contradictory relation to its immediate object, desire *is dependent upon* its object in order to *show its independence* in its act of negating it. This conceptual problem will equally afflict Fichtean moral self-consciousness, conceived as it is as a *meta-desire*. Moral self-consciousness strives to free itself from dependence on objects by negating its own inclinations, but here "satisfaction" will deprive self-consciousness of the resources necessary for its existence.

Neither desire nor the moral self-consciousness modelled on it can therefore be regarded as self-sufficient. Self-consciousness can, Hegel says, achieve satisfaction, not by negating the object, but "only when the object itself effects the negation within itself". But of course self-negation is, as we have seen, just what Fichtean self-consciousness as meta-desire itself *does*. Thus the new model is one in which "*self-consciousness achieves satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*" and with this Hegel has introduced the theme of recognition/acknowledgement (*Anerkennung*). Self-consciousness exists in and for itself "only as something acknowledged" by another self-consciousness. Now the realm of *mere life* will be replaced by another concrete universal, that which Hegel calls "spirit" (*Geist*), the universal within which distinctively human lives are lived out within patterns of intersubjective and conceptually mediated recognition, a realm of *self-conscious life*.

Life, Recognition, and Spirit

Far from being original to Hegel, the notion of *Anerkennung* is again taken over from Fichte, specifically from his theory of *rights* in the 1796-7 *Foundations of Natural Rights*.¹⁷ Indeed, in treating the subject's recognition of rights of others as a necessary condition for self-consciousness, Fichte had made recognition central to his model of self-consciousness. Hegel was to employ Fichte's recognitive conception of rights in his later *Philosophy of Right* where the relation of contract was to be treated as a matter of the mutual recognition by the contractors of each other's abstract rights as proprietors.¹⁸ But for Hegel this legalistic approach to recognition does not get at its essence: in fact, in its *formal* character Fichte's conception of recognition testified to the fact of its still being in the thralls of the *desire model* of self-consciousness. In the formal recognition of the other's right, recognition is just *the other side* of an act of negation or annihilation of one's own desire. To acknowledge another's right to an object is just to limit one's own interested actions towards that object.

Just as in the realm of life, the concrete universal or "genus" of life itself pointed to a consciousness "for which life exists as a unity, or as a genus" (§172; 143), in the realm of abstract right as Hegel treats it in the *Philosophy of Right*, the abstract, legalistic sphere of the recognition of rights found in "civil society" is dependent on another realm within which the circle of recognition itself can be grasped as a genus—the family. In the family, members are conscious of the genus as their essence (there the participants grasp themselves primarily *as* family members), and recognition is not *opposed* to felt impulses or affections but is in immediate identity with them.¹⁹ And, of course, the family, as a more *immediate* form of objectified spirit, is closer to the realm of *natural life*. In this way, then, the opposed recognitive realms of family and civil society in Hegel's later philosophy instantiate the categories of the "in itself" and the "for itself", with both being incorporated into the more self-sufficient expression of spirit objectified in nature (objective spirit), the state, which in contrast to the family and civil society, is "in and for itself". But the roots of this later treatment are already discernable in the *Phenomenology's* treatment of recognition.²⁰

The protagonists of a *merely* living sphere, as we have seen, cannot grasp their desired object in terms of the universal that we can see it to be: this capacity is available only to a genuinely or fully self-conscious being. And if we now reflect on

this we can quickly grasp the type of consequences that *could* flow from the possession of the capacity to recognize the universal by a self-conscious member of a realm of struggle. If one *could* grasp that beyond the desired annihilation of the other's independence lies the desire for a universal, such as life itself, one could then grasp the possibility of there being *alternate ways* of realizing that desire. And this is indeed what is grasped by one antagonist of the sort of struggle that Hegel describes among *self-consciously* living beings. Struggle in this realm can end in the *submission* of one antagonist to the other, thereby establishing a relation of lord to bondsman.²¹

Hegel's actual *story* itself is reasonably clear, at least in its broad outlines. Against the contrasting background of the struggling organic world, the realm of nature "red in tooth and claw" —perhaps Hobbes's "state of nature"—we see another type of struggle with a possible resolution other than that of annihilation of one of the antagonists. The movement in this sphere, Hegel says, "repeats the process which presented itself as the play of Forces", but the process obtaining within the concrete universal of life is "repeated now in consciousness", that is, the elements in their full logical articulation (*qua* objects of Sense-certainty, Perception, and Understanding) are now available *for* the protagonists themselves. In contrast to the sphere of mere life, the protagonists thus have a more complexly negating attitude to each other, for each has the other before it not "merely as it exists primarily for desire, but as something that has an independent existence of its own, which, therefore, it cannot utilize for its own purposes, if that object does not, of its own accord do what the first does to it" (§ 182; 146).

The minimal proto-society of lord and bondsman that resolves such self-conscious struggles is a conventional form of life in which two individuals live out distinctive existences *via* the differentiated and coordinated social roles of victor and vanquished—lord and bondsman. "They exist as two opposed shapes of consciousness; one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is lord, the other is bondsman" (§189; 150).

The Dynamics of Lordship and Bondage

In this model each member has taken on one side of the "in-and-for-itself" structure which is the essence of self-consciousness: the lord maintains the orientation of an

independent desiring "for-self" while the bondsman, by having abandoned its own desire and accepted the role of a mere object or instrument of the other's will, opts for the status of a dependent "in-itself", an object utilized by the lord for the satisfaction of his desire. But it is important that the bondsman's role has been *chosen*, rather than simply accepted as "given". His existence is *implicitly independent*—the lord cannot utilize the bondsman "for his own purposes" unless the bondsman does "of its own accord what [the lord] does to it" (§182; 146). The bondsman has, we might say, *committed* himself to this identity in exchange for his life and he *holds himself to* this commitment in his continual acknowledgement of the other as *his* lord by treating him as such.²² This structure of holding and being held to such commitments is constitutive of such social roles and is, for Hegel, fundamentally *conceptual* or rule-governed, the interactions of lord and bondsman being mediated by the linked pair of action-guiding concepts, "lord" and "bondsman". Because of this participation of conceptuality, this primitive form of sociality is an instantiation of reason within the realm of life, albeit a primitive one.

The society of lord and bondsman thus instantiates, although in an immediate and inadequate way, the type of structure whose essential shape Hegel has posited as that which responds to the inadequacies of the model of self-consciousness as desire. "*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*" (§175; 144), and this is what the lord has found in his bondsman, a self-consciousness that in renouncing his desire "effects the negation within itself". And so with this sphere "we already have before us the concept of *Spirit*" (§177; 144–5), a realm not abstractly opposed to *mere* life but one in which life's dynamics has been integrated (*aufgehoben*) within it: a realm of *self-conscious* life. In fact, to ignore this fact and think of spirit and life as *simply* opposed would be to remain, like Fichte, in the grip of the desire model.²³ But while such truths about spirit can at this point be recognized by "we" phenomenological observers, "the experience of what spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'" as yet "lies ahead *for consciousness*" (ibid.).

In the ensuing pages we learn how this embryonic society of lord and bondman is unstable and how each member actually comes to take on the characteristics of the other. This dialectical development follows from the initial *non-reciprocal*

distribution of independence and dependence, "one being only *recognized*, the other only *recognizing*" (§185; 147): *qua* condition of self-conscious life this social arrangement does not live up to its essence. As we have seen, the bondsman, by his self-denial, effects negation within himself, but the same cannot be said for the lord. The lord, as victor, has not had his immediately "for self" character shaken. His self-consciousness still remains modelled on *desire*, and this means that as a structure of recognition, that obtaining between lord and bondsman will be rent by contradiction. The lord cannot become adequately conscious of *himself* as a self-conscious individual in the recognition of the bondsman, because, treating him as a thing, he doesn't explicitly *recognise* the bondsman *as* a self-consciousness. And so *qua* object for the lord, the bondsman "does not correspond to its concept" (§192; 152), and in failing to recognize the bondsman as a self-consciousness, the lord negates the very conditions for his own self-consciousness.

As for the bondsman, "just as lordship showed that its essential nature is the reverse of what it wants to be, so too servitude in its consummation will really turn into the opposite of what it immediately is" (§193; 152). In the work performed for the lord, the bondsman himself, by working on and transforming the objects of the world, learns to *master* it. He attains the *negating* orientation to the objective world that goes beyond the more primitive "for self" orientation of the lord whose negations essentially are tied to the satisfactions of immediate desire. It is thus the bondsman who "through his service ... rids himself of his attachment to natural existence in every single detail; and gets rid of it by working on it" (§194; 153). Moreover, in the transformations of natural objects brought about by his work, the bondsman has the chance to recognize his own *negating* activity: "Through his work ... the bondsman encounters himself [kommt ... zu sich selbst]" (§195; 153). With this then, we can see the beginnings of a *dynamic* process internal to this proto-society that puts it on a developmental path. It will be the servile consciousness marked by formative activity and "*inhibited* desire [*gehemmte* Begierde]" (§195; 153), and not the lord, who will inherit the earth.

With this we see the beginnings of *history* as a process in which the conditions of *reciprocal* recognition essential to the development of self-consciousness are gradually brought about, but Hegel's final paragraph of this section signals a warning concerning how to understand the labouring self-consciousness's final victory. "In

fashioning the thing" Hegel remarks, "the bondsman's own negativity, his being-for-self, becomes an object for him only though his negating the existing *shape* confronting him" (§196; 154). That is, ultimately, it would seem, as a vehicle for or model of self-consciousness "fashioning" self-consciousness suffers from the same limitations as desire. The bondsman's initial orientation was that of fear—fear of the lord, but also fear of something more general that had been represented by the lord, "the fear of death, the absolute Lord" (§194, 153). This was the attitude of the bondsman as it initially had been "in itself", but its concluding attitude, its explicitly "for self" moment, is that the shapes of the external realm confronting him are negated. Again, the truth of self-consciousness can only be understood as the mediated unity of these two moments. "If consciousness fashions the thing without that initial absolute fear, it is only an empty self-centred attitude; for its form or negativity is not negativity *per se*, and therefore its formative activity cannot give it a consciousness of itself as essential being" (§196; 154.)

The Place of Recognition in the Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Hegel's comments concerning the limits of the bondsman's "fashioning" self-consciousness may be taken as a warning against readily accepting as Hegel's own view the reading (or perhaps "creative misreading") given by Alexandre Kojève in his influential *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*.²⁴ In Kojève account, which projects into Hegel's story concepts derived from the early Marx as well as from Heidegger, the lord-bondsman episode, and the "struggle for recognition" which it exemplifies, are taken as the interpretative key to a reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology* as a type of philosophical anthropology describing the bondsman's—effectively *humanity's*—historical self-liberation through the collectively achieved conscious fashioning of the world. Regardless of the value of Kojève's work as an original piece of political philosophy, it is questionable as an accurate rendering of Hegel's own account. In the *Phenomenology* the lord-bondsman dialectic is just one of a series of similar dialectics within which the notion of "recognition" plays a central role. Moreover, neither would it seem that the concept of recognition is a fundamentally *practical* notion restricted to a constitutive role in the *institutional* realm of "objective spirit". As H. S. Harris has pointed out,²⁵ Hegel's first use of the idea of "reciprocal recognition" had appeared in his early "critical" treatment of the conflicts between antithetical *philosophical*

views.²⁶ "Recognition", this would seem to suggest, would thus play a role in the realm of *absolute* spirit—the realms of art, religion and philosophy—and not only those of *objective* spirit.

With this in mind, it might be conjectured that the concept of reciprocal recognition is implicit within the very fabric of the *Phenomenology* itself. As we have seen, Hegel relies on the existence of a distinct philosophical point of view, that of the "phenomenological we" at which the reader is located and for which each shape of consciousness or self-consciousness can be presented as an "in-itself". It might be asked, however, how one is to stop a threatening infinite regress of "meta"-consciousnesses here? Is not a *further* consciousness required for which *our* consciousness and *its* orientation could be described objectively as an "in-itself"? Hegel's solution to this problem seems bound up with the central insight of chapter 4—*recognition*. Towards the conclusion of the *Phenomenology* and on the threshold of "Absolute Knowledge"—the standpoint of "science" itself—Hegel briefly reviews the development that has unfolded in the book to that point. With this he seems to be inviting we philosophical readers to recognize *ourselves* in the history of developing forms of consciousness: it is *our history*, and in grasping this we return from this "meta" position to the world itself. With this the circle of spirit as self-conscious life is finally closed. *Qua* readers of the *Phenomenology* we supposedly have now been brought to the standpoint of science—philosophy—*itself*.²⁷

¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes (Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969), vol 3), 145; English translation by A. V. Miller *Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), § 178. (Occasionally the translation has been modified as here.) Henceforth references to Hegel's *Phenomenology* will be given parenthetically, the page number of the German edition following the paragraph number of the English translation.

² Cf., Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

³ These various "shapes" of consciousness had been differentiated by their respective assumptions regarding the fundamental characteristics of that independent "in-itself".

⁴ J. G. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, trans and ed, Daniel Breazeale, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 21.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ In this outlook "being-*in-itself*" and being-*for-an-other* are one and the same" (Ibid.). While it is true that Hegel is here not concerned with particular philosophical theories, it seems clear that with "the truth of Self-certainty" Hegel intends a model of self-consciousness that finds its most explicit and developed philosophical account in Fichte.

⁷ We have already seen something of how important recognition will be to "being-in-and-for-itself", since, as the experience of "consciousness" had itself revealed, that to *have* the character of an "in-itself" implies one has being-*for-another*.

⁸ As with many components of Hegel's account this too seems to have its origin in Fichte's philosophy, as Fichte distinguished philosophical consciousness as a type of higher-order consciousness aware of the activity of first-level consciousness. See Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre*, 48–9.

⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*, (Werke, 2), translated as *Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1973). Hegel's complaint against Fichte outlived his allegiance to Schelling. In fact even in the *Differenzschrift*, Hegel had departed from Schelling in crucial ways.

¹⁰ *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse 1830, Erster Teil: Die Wissenschaft der Logik Mit den mündlichen Zusätzen*, (Werke, 8), translated as *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), § 213. Hegel further characterizes the idea as "*the Subject–Object*" at § 214.

¹¹ Such an analysis of the failings of Fichte's system is fully apparent, for example, in Hegel's comments in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Volume 3, Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), (Werke, 20): Section three, C1.

¹² Thus as Schelling had asserted: "Every organic product exists *for itself*; its being is dependent on no other being." F. W. J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of*

Nature, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 30.

¹³ As desire "self-consciousness, by its negative relation to the object, is unable to supersede [aufzuheben] it" (§ 175; 143).

¹⁴ Ludwig Siep *Der Weg der Phänomenologie des Geistes*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 100) raises the question as to whether Hegel simply assumes metaphysical nature-philosophical notions here. Jon Stewart (*The Unity of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Systematic Interpretation*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 117) defends Hegel against any such "vitalist" interpretation by construing "life" as a purely *logical* category, while Robert Williams, (*Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 48) interprets "life" here in essentially *practical* terms. H. S. Harris (*Hegel's Ladder I: The Pilgrimage of Reason*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), ch. 7) has an extensive account of Hegel's use of this notion here, grounding its introduction in the earlier account of "Understanding".

¹⁵ *Grundlagen der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, translated as "Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge" in J. G. Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), part III, § 7.

¹⁶ Effectively here Hegel follows Aristotle: merely living, non-human animals can recognize only particulars.

¹⁷ J. G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, ed. Frederick Neuhouser, trans. Michael Baur (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, (*Werke*, 7), translated as *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet, (Cambridge: Cambridge 1991), § 71, Zusatz.

¹⁹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §§158–180.

²⁰ On the unity of Hegel's early and later approaches to recognition see Robert R. Pippin, "What is the Question for which Hegel's Theory of Recognition is the Answer?", *European Journal of Philosophy*, 8, 2 (2000): 155–72.

²¹ "In this experience, self-consciousness learns that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness" (§189; 150).

²² Thus the bondsman "sets aside its own being-for-self, and in so doing itself does what the first does to it", the act which Hegel describes as the first "moment of recognition" (§191; 152).

²³ This tendency that may, in fact, be manifest in the popular interpretation that sees at the centre of Hegel's account a "struggle for recognition" which is abstractly opposed to the more naturalistic Hobbesian accounts of an original struggle over survival.

²⁴ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. J. H. Nichols, Jr, (New York: Basic Books, 1969). Kojève's reading was crucial in shaping the "Hegel" that was first embraced in France in the 1940s and 50s and popularised by Sartre, but later denounced by structuralists and post-structuralists.

²⁵ In "Skepticism, Dogmatism and Speculation in the Critical Journal", in George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris (eds), *Between Kant and Hegel*, (Albany, N. Y.: State University of New York Press, 1985), 253–4.

²⁶ In the "Introduction" to *The Critical Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 1 no. 1, (1802), "Über das Wesen der philosophischen Kritik überhaupt und ihr Verhältnis zum gegenwärtigen Zustand der Philosophie insbesondere", (*Werke* 2, 173), translated in di Giovanni and Harris, *Between Kant and Hegel*, p 276. Hegel describes the polemical situation between a philosophy and an "*unphilosophy*" that does not self-consciously grasp its views *as* philosophical. Because they no longer share the "Idea" of philosophy, reciprocal recognition here has been "suspended [aufgehoben]".

²⁷ I would like to thank Frederick Beiser, Jean-Philippe Deranty, Simon Lumsden, George Markus, Emmanuel Renault and Robert Sinnerbrink for very helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.