

Chapter One

On Hegel's Claim That Self-Consciousness Is "Desire Itself" (Begierde überhaupt)

I

KANT HELD THAT what distinguishes an object in our experience from the mere subjective play of representations is rule-governed unity. His famous definition of an object is just "that in the concept of which a manifold is united" (B137). This means that consciousness itself must be understood as a discriminating, unifying activity, paradigmatically as judging, and not as the passive recorder of sensory impressions. Such a claim opens up a vast territory of possibilities and questions since Kant does not mean that our awake attentiveness is to be understood as something we *intentionally do*, in the standard sense, even if it is not also a mere event that happens to us, as if we happen to be triggered into a determinate mental state, or as if sensory stimuli just activate an active mental machinery.

Kant also clearly does not mean to suggest by his claim that the form of consciousness is a judgmental form that consciousness consists of thousands of very rapid judgmental

claims being deliberately made, thousands of "S is P's" or "If A then B's" taking place. The world is taken to be such and such without such takings being isolatable, intentional judgments. What Kant *does* mean by understanding consciousness as "synthetic" is quite a formidable, independent topic in itself.¹

Kant's main interest in the argument of the deduction was to show first that the rules governing such activities (whatever the right way to describe such activities) cannot be wholly empirical rules, all derived from experience, that there must be rules for the derivation of such rules that cannot themselves be derived, or that there must be pure concepts of the understanding; and second, that these non-derived rules have genuine "objective validity," are not mere subjective impositions on an independently received manifold, that, as he puts it, the a priori prescribed "synthetic unity of consciousness" "is not merely a condition that I myself require in knowing an object, but is a condition under which any intuition must stand in order to become an object for me" (B138). Kant seems to realize that he gives the impression that for him consciousness is a two-step process—the mere reception of sensory data, and then the conceptualization of such data—but he works hard in the pursuit of the second desideratum to disabuse his readers of that impression.

Aside from some Kant scholars, there are not many philosophers who still believe that Kant proved in this argument that we possess synthetic a priori knowledge, although there is wide admiration for the power of Kant's arguments about, at least, causality and substance. But there remains a great deal of interest in his basic picture of the nature of

¹ I present an interpretation of the point in "What Is Conceptual Activity?" forthcoming in *The Myth of the Mental?* ed. J. Shear.

conscious mindedness. For the central component of his account, judgment, is, as already noted, not a mental event that merely happens, as if causally triggered into its synthetic activity by sensory stimuli. Judging, while not a practical action initiated by a decision, is nevertheless an *activity* sustained and resolved, sometimes in conditions of uncertainty, *by* a subject and that means that it is normatively structured. The categorical rules of judgment governing such activity are rules about what ought to be judged, how our experience ought to be (must be) organized. For example, we distinguish or judge successive perceptions of a stable object as really simultaneous in time, and not actually representing something successive. This is a distinction that we must make; we experience successiveness in both cases and must be able to determine what ought to be judged simultaneous and what actually successive.² So such rules are not rules describing how we do operate, are not psychological laws of thought, but involve a responsiveness to normative proprieties. And, to come to the point of contact with Hegel that is the subject of the following, this all means that consciousness must be inherently *reflective* or *apperceptive*. (I cannot be *sustaining an activity*, implicitly trying to get, say, the objective temporal order right in making up my mind, without in some sense knowing I am so taking the world to be such, or without

² To be as clear as possible: we do not have an option or choice about the necessary distinguishability in our experience between accidental succession and causal succession. Experience would not be possible were there not this distinguishability, Kant argues in the Second Analogy. But that necessity is conceptual, not psychological (no concept of experience would be intelligible without the distinction and it being possible in principle for experiencers to make it), and we *do* actually have to determine *which* successions are accidental and which causally necessary, and that requires the activity of judgmental discrimination. We can thus get this wrong.

apperceptively taking it so. I am taking or construing rather than merely recording because I am also in such taking holding open the possibility that I may be taking falsely.) So all consciousness is inherently, though rarely explicitly, self-conscious. It is incorrect to think of a conscious state as just filled with the rich details of a house-perception, as if consciousness merely registers its presence; I take or judge the presence of a house, not a barn or gas station; or in Kant's famous formula: "the '*I think*' must be able to accompany all my representations." But what could be meant by "inherently," or "*in some sense* knowing I am taking or judging it to be such and such"? In *what* sense am I in *a relation to myself* in any conscious relation to an object? That is, the claim is that all consciousness involves a kind of self-consciousness, taking S to be P and thus taking myself to be taking S to be P. But in a self-relation like this, the self in question cannot be just another object of intentional awareness. If it were, then there would obviously be a regress problem. By parity of whatever reasoning established that the self must be able to *observe* itself as an object in taking anything to be anything, one would have to also argue that the *observing* self must also be observable, and so on. The self-relation, whatever it is, cannot be a two-place intentional relation, and the self-consciousness of consciousness cannot invite a two-stage or two-element picture: our conscious sentience and then, in addition, our self-monitoring self-relation. (As Kant and Hegel would put it: the latter is just consciousness again and we have not found self-consciousness.)³

³ The post-Kantian philosopher who first made a great deal out of this point was Fichte, and the modern commentator who has done the most to work out the philosophical implications of the point has been Dieter Henrich, starting with *Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1967).

Hegel's own most famous discussion of these issues is found in the first four chapters of his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* (hereafter PhG). The first three chapters of that book are grouped together under the heading "Consciousness" and the fourth chapter is called simply "Self-Consciousness." (That fourth chapter has only one subsection, called "The Truth of Self-Certainty," and that will be the focus of the following discussion.)⁴ Accordingly, especially given the extraordinarily sweeping claims Hegel makes about his indebtedness to the Kantian doctrine of apperception,⁵ one would expect that these sections have something to do with the Kantian points noted earlier, and so with the issue of the self-conscious character of experience and the conditions for the possibility of experience so understood. But there has been a lot of understandable controversy about the relation between the first three chapters of the PhG and the fourth. Since the fourth chapter discusses desire, life, a

⁴ This is quite a typical Hegelian title, and can be misleading. By "The Truth of Self-Certainty" (*Die Wahrheit der Gewißheit seiner selbst*), Hegel does *not* mean, as he seems to, the truth *about* the self's actual certainty of itself. He actually means, as we shall see, that the truth of self-certainty is not a matter of self-certainty at all, just as sense-certainty was not in the end certain. This relation between subjective certainty and its "realization in truth" is the key to the basic structure of the PhG. Its most elementary form is something like: the truth of the "inner" (any putative self-certainty) is the "outer" (a mediated relation to the world and to others), all in distinction from anything that might be suggested by the title (as in: how to explain the *fact* of such self-certainty). I am disagreeing here with Jenkins in the article cited earlier, p. 114.

⁵ "It is one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the unity which constitutes the unity of the *Begriff* is recognized as the original synthetic unity of apperception, as the unity of the I think, or of self-consciousness." *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Bd. 12 in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968–), p. 221; *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1969), p. 584.

struggle to the death for recognition between opposed subjects, and a resulting Lord-Bondsman social structure, it has not been easy to see how the discussion of sense-certainty, perception, and the understanding is being *continued*. Some very influential commentators, like Alexandre Kojève, pay almost no attention to the first three chapters. They write as if we should isolate the Self-Consciousness chapter as a free-standing philosophical anthropology, a theory of the inherently violent and class-riven nature of human sociality. (There are never simply human beings as such in Kojève's account. Our species status as one and all equal free subjects must be collectively achieved, and until the final bloody revolution ushers in a classless society, there are only Masters and Slaves.) Others argue that in Chapter Four, Hegel simply changes the subject to the problem of sociality. We can see why it might be natural for him to change the subject at this point, for it is a different subject. (Having introduced the necessary role of self-consciousness in consciousness, Hegel understandably changes the topic to very broad and different and independent questions like: what, in general, *is* self-consciousness? What is a self? What is it to be a being "for which" things can be, to use Brandom's language, who offers his own version of the change-of-subject interpretation?)⁶

⁶ There are other interpretations which tend to isolate the argument in Chapter Four in other ways, construing it as a kind of "transcendental argument" that aims to prove that the "consciousness of one's self requires the recognition of another self." Axel Honneth, "Von der Begierde zur Anerkennung: Hegels Begründung von Selbstbewußtsein," in *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes: Ein kooperativer Kommentar zu einem Schlüsselwerk der Moderne*, ed. K. Vieweg and W. Welsch (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2008). On that issue itself ("from desire to recognition") and on the one and a half pages of argument in Hegel that seek to establish this, Honneth has a number of valuable things to say. But, as I will be arguing, no convincing interpretation of the chapter is possible that does not explain the

More recently, some commentators, like John McDowell and Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, have argued that there is actually neither a new beginning nor a shift in topics in Chapter Four. In McDowell's treatment the problem is an extension and development of the one that emerged in the first three chapters but still basically concerns that issue: how to understand the right "equipose" between independence and dependence in the relations between subjects and objects. What appear to be the orectic⁷ and social issues of Chapter Four are for McDowell "figures" or analogies for what remains the problem of the mind's passive dependence on objects and active independence of them in our experience of the world, in just the sense sketched previously in the summary of Kant (i.e., neither independent subjective imposition, nor merely passive receptive dependence). What we have is a picture of our active, spontaneous self in a kind of mythic confrontation and struggle *with its own* passive empirical self, struggling at first futilely, for radical independence, and then an initial but doomed relation of

underlying structure of the "Consciousness-Self-Consciousness" argument in the book as a whole. And I don't believe that Honneth's very brief remarks about understanding ourselves as "creators of true claims" or "the rational individual . . . aware of its constitutive, world-creating [*welterzeugenden*] cognitive acts" (p. 190) presents that structure accurately. "World-creating" is much too abstract and so imprecise a term to capture what Hegel is trying to say about intentional consciousness and its implications for his phenomenology.

⁷ I use this Aristotelian term in distinction from Brandom's term for the connative dimensions of consciousness, "erotic," because the latter seems a bit misleading, contains the vague though delightful suggestion that all consciousness has a sexual dimension, and because Hegel's account seems to me suffused with an Aristotelian spirit. See Aristotle's discussion in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* on choice (*proairesis*) as either "desiring intellect" [*orektikos nous*] or "minded desire" [*orexis dianoêtikê*], 1139b5–6.

dominance (as if the soul tries to make of its own corporeal nature a *Knecht* or mere servant).⁸ So for McDowell, Hegel does not mean to introduce in a direct sense the topic of desire as a necessary element in the understanding of *consciousness* itself (as the text, however counterintuitively, would seem to imply). Rather, says McDowell, "Desire überhaupt" functions as a figure for the general idea of 'negating otherness' (admittedly an orectic issue of some sort), by appropriating or consuming, incorporating into oneself what at first figures as merely other, something that happens in perception, say."⁹ And "life," the next topic in the chapter, is said to exemplify the structure of *der Begriff*; let us say: the basic logical structure of all possible intelligibility, all sense-making.¹⁰ The struggle to the death for recognition is said to be a rich and colorful "allegory" of the possible relations of

⁸ Not that McDowell wants to say that this picture of dual and opposed elements remains Hegel's picture, with at some point just a kind of compromise or peace treaty. The *whole* picture of such a duality between apperceptive and passive-sensible elements or stages is what must be given up in McDowell's picture too. I want to say that giving this up is part and parcel of giving up a picture of opposed self-consciousnesses who ultimately reach some sort of compromise. Hegel's picture is much more radical and his argument for it begins here, in this chapter.

⁹ John McDowell, "The Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self: Towards a Heterodox Reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*" (hereafter AI) in *Hegel: New Directions*, ed. Katerina Deligiorgi (Chesham: Acumen, 2007), p. 38.

¹⁰ Especially the relation between universal and particular, as is clearest in ¶169. And there is a good deal of truth in that characterization. The experiencing subject inevitably becomes aware of itself as a living being *of a kind*, a species form it shares with all other such beings, all sharing the generic form of life, and itself as a *singular* subject, whose own life is not "life" in general or its species life. (Thus, McDowell would point out, his interpretation is not overly or excessively allegorical. It is important to his account, he says (in correspondence), that life be *life*, not a figure for something other than life.)

both independent and dependent sides *within one consciousness*. And so McDowell asserts that Chapter Four does not yet directly introduce the issue of sociality at all, despite the famous phrase there about the new presence of an “I that is a We and a We that is an I.”

This interpretation has the very great virtue of preserving a connection with the first three chapters, but, as I will argue, while the general issue of the logic of the relation between independence and dependence is certainly applicable to the relation between spontaneous apperception and the passive empirical self, McDowell’s interpretation, however rich in itself, fails to do justice to the radicality of what Hegel actually proposes. I want to argue that when Hegel says that self-consciousness *is* “desire überhaupt”¹¹ he means that to be relevant to the question of the apperceptive nature of consciousness itself; and that *thereby* he provides the basis for the claim that self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.¹² Defending that interpretation is the task of this book.

¹¹ Hegel’s developmental procedure here requires a general cautionary note. The identification of self-consciousness with desire occurs at a very early stage, as Hegel begins to assemble the various dimensions and elements he thinks we will need in order to understand the self-conscious dimension of consciousness. Initially Hegel is only saying: we have *at least* to understand that self-consciousness must be understood as mere desire (another sensible translation of “*Begierde überhaupt*”). It will prove impossible to consider such self-consciousness as merely desire and *nothing else*, and that impossibility is the rest of the story of the chapter. But this procedure means that from now on self-consciousness must be still understood as inherently oretic, whatever else it is.

¹² Brandom also thinks of the PhG as an allegory, in his case an allegory of various dimensions of the issue of conceptual content. Robert Brandom, “The Structure of Desire and Recognition: Self-Consciousness and Self-Constitution,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 33 (2007) (hereafter SDR). For example, he thinks of Hegel’s treatment of the struggle to the death as a “metonymy” for the issue of commitment (of “really” being

So here stated all at once is the thesis I would like to attribute to Hegel. (That is, the thesis worked out and defended in Chapter Four. As noted, the entire book is a meditation on self-consciousness, on the becoming self-consciousness of *Geist*.) I think that Hegel’s position is that we misunderstand all dimensions of self-consciousness, from apperception in consciousness itself, to simple, explicit reflection about myself, to practical self-knowledge of my own so-called identity, by considering any form of it as in any way observational or inferential or immediate or any sort of two-place intentional relation. However we come to know anything about ourselves (or whatever self-relation is implicit in attending to the world), it is not by observing an object, nor by conceptualizing an inner intuition, nor by any immediate self-certainty or direct presence of the self to itself. From the minimal sense of being aware of being determinately conscious at all (of judging), to complex avowals of who I am, of my own identity and deep commitments, Hegel, I want to say, treats self-consciousness as (i) a practical *achievement* of some sort.¹³ Such a relation must be understood as

committed). But it is only that, one of many possible exemplifications of what it means in fact to have the commitment that one avows. Being willing to lose one’s job, for example, could be another exemplification. Here and throughout, I want to resist such allegorical or figurative interpretations in both Brandom’s and McDowell’s accounts. I discuss Brandom’s interpretation in the next chapter. (Denying allegorical readings, one should note immediately, does not mean, by contrast, to imply a claim that Hegel is talking about something historical or literal. The chapter *is* a philosophical fable of sorts but its elements do not stand at some figurative remove from what they seem to be about, any more than Hobbes on the state of nature or Rousseau on the solitary savage are allegorical in that sense.)

¹³ This is contrary to the interpretation by Fred Neuhauser, “Desire, Recognition, and the Relation between Bondsman and Lord,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel’s Phenomenology*, ed. K. Westphal (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 37–54, who argues that Hegel in effect changes the

the *result of an attempt*, never, as it certainly seems to be, as an immediate presence of the self to itself, and it often requires some sort of striving, even struggle (and all of this even in accounting for the self-conscious dimension of ordinary perceptual experience). Self-consciousness, in all its forms, is some mode of mindedness that we must achieve (be continually achieving), and that must mean: can ultimately fail to achieve fully and once having achieved can lose. It is nothing like turning the mind's eye inward to inspect itself.¹⁴

subject from apperception to a practical self-conception and self-evaluation. I think Hegel's presentation is motivated by the internal inadequacies of the Kantian notion of apperception *in general*. Without that issue in view, we won't have a sense of *why* the problem of self-consciousness's unity with itself should emerge here, why such a unity "must become essential to it," and the discussion of a single self-conscious being certain of its own radical and complete independence (*Selbstständigkeit*) will have to appear unmotivated, simply a new theme. Cf. p. 42.

¹⁴ This is a potentially quite misleading way of putting the point, but I can't think of a better way. As baldly stated, it seems to imply that some "failed self-consciousness" could be imagined wandering around, unable to have determinate experience of objects, perhaps in the "less than a dream" state once entertained by Kant. Qualifications galore on the "achievement" notion will begin presently, but it must be stressed that this achievement language refers primarily to collective mutually recognitive mindedness, is not a matter of individual achievement or one which invites any real historical genealogy, and that, however initially counter-intuitive, there *is* some sense in which Hegel *does* want to maintain that under some forms of normative self-regulation—so deeply habitual, shared, and taken for granted as to be almost inaccessible to reflection—some community can be said to prevent, to deny itself, a proper responsiveness to defeasibility and challenge constitutive of what will turn out to be proper or successful (non-distorted) experience. Hegel's point is not that archaic subjects who responded to natural forces as purposive agents held false beliefs ultimately corrected by empirical disconfirmation. Although the beliefs *were* false, his point is that they held each other to account and experienced the world in ways not open to such disconfirmation. So the account of the collapse of such a practice must look elsewhere for the proper explanation, to *Geist's* "experience of itself." This

Admittedly, it seems *very* hard to understand why anyone would think that my awareness, say, not just of the contents of a lecture I am giving, but whatever kind of awareness I have of my being in the process of giving a lecture, of actually following appropriate lecturing rules, should involve any such practical activity or achievement. It seems effortless to be so self-aware; there is no *felt* desire or striving or struggle involved, and as a report of what seems to me to be the case, it even appears incorrigible. But Hegel wants to claim that as soon as we properly see the error of holding that the self in any self-awareness is immediately present to an inspecting mind, or that it is a higher level mode of self-monitoring, his own interpretation is just thereby implied. If the self's relation to itself *cannot* be immediate or direct or "of an object," but if some self-relation is a condition of intentional awareness, the conclusion that it is some sort of *to-be-achieved* follows for him straightforwardly.¹⁵ Even a minimal form of self-conscious taking-to-be-so opens up the possibility of taking falsely or in a way inconsistent with other (or all) such takings and so sets a certain sort of task. More on this in a minute; this is the

"achievement" language accompanies almost all of Hegel's discussions of *Geist*, especially about the achieved status of freedom, a topic deeply connected to the self-consciousness issue. And as in other dimensions of this issue, the achievement is not something I *set out to do*. It is constitutively part of what it is to be open to the world as a human experiencer. See *Hegel's Philosophie des subjektiven Geistes/Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, 3 volumes, ed. and trans. M. Petry (Dordrecht: Riedel, 1978), I, pp. 52–3 (hereafter PSS). I am indebted to Terry Pinkard for correspondence about this point.

¹⁵ So self-consciousness, while not "thetic," to use the Sartrean word, or intentional or positional, is not sort of or vaguely positional, caught at the corner of our eye, or glimpsed on the horizon. It is not intentional or object-directed at all. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991).

central motive for *his* version of the claim that consciousness is apperceptive.¹⁶

Another way of putting this point, one that ties in with almost every aspect of Hegel's philosophical approach, would

¹⁶ John McDowell has suggested (in a response to a presentation of an earlier version of this lecture at the Kokonas Symposium at Colgate University in November 2008) that the notion of "achievement" is a misleading term here, that whatever achievement is involved in being able to judge apperceptively should be understood along the model of learning a language, of simply being initiated into a linguistic community, something that involves no notion of struggle or practical achievement in the usual sense. It just happens. But (a) Hegel is here describing the minimal conditions for such a capacity to be in effect and it is only as he explores the implications of the realization of this capacity that he introduces the orrectic and social issues that follow; and (b) what Hegel is describing *is* like the acquisition of a linguistic capacity as long as we admit that such an acquisition finally has to involve much more than acquiring rules of grammatical correctness. To be initiated into a linguistic community is to be initiated into all the pragmatic dimensions of appropriateness, authority, who gets to say what, when, and why. One is not a competent speaker as such until one has learned such matters of linguistic usage, and Hegel wants to treat such norms in terms of their historical conditions, primarily in this chapter the social conditions and social conflict "behind" any such norms. See also McDowell's "On Pippin's Postscript," in *Having the World in View* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 185–203 (hereafter HWV). Cf. Habermas's account of what a full pragmatics of language has to take in, how full initiation into a linguistic community means that speakers "no longer relate *straightaway* to something in the objective, social, or subjective worlds; instead they relativize their utterances against the possibility that their validity will be contested by other actors." Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, vol. I (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), pp. 98–99. In Hegel's account, the standards for this unique kind of challenge to a speaker or agent cannot be made out transcendently or "quasi-transcendently," as Habermas sometimes says, but will require the unusual reconstructive phenomenology under consideration here. (For those who know Habermas: this also means that there is not that strict distinction possible, so important to Habermas, between the "logic of historical self-education" in, and the transcendental "logic of justification" for, norms. Insisting on such a distinction is why Habermas is not a Hegelian.)

be to note that if self-consciousness or any form of taking oneself to be or being committed to anything is not introspective or observational, then it must always be *provisional*. Such a self-regard requires some confirmation or realization out in the world and for others if it is to count as what it is taken to be. The clearest examples of this occur in Hegel's theory of agency where one cannot be said to actually have had the intention or commitment one avows, even sincerely avows, until one actually realizes that intention and the action turns out to count as that action in the social world within which it is enacted. (And of course, people can come to find out that their actual intentions, as manifested in what they actually are willing to do, can be very different from those they avow, even sincerely avow.)¹⁷

And (ii)¹⁸ Hegel sees such an attempt and achievement as necessarily involving a relation to other people, as inherently social. This last issue about the role of actualization begins to introduce such a dependence, but it is hard to see at the outset why other people need be involved in the intimacy and privacy that seems to characterize my relation to myself.

His case for looking at things this way has three main parts. In a way that is typical of his procedure, he tries to begin with the most theoretically thin or simple form of the required self-relation and so first considers the mere sentiment of self that a living being has in *keeping itself alive*, where *keeping itself alive* reflects this minimal reflective *attentiveness to self*. Such a minimal form of self-relatedness is shown not to establish the sort of self-relatedness (normative self-determination) required as the desideratum in the

¹⁷ This issue is the central one and is explored at length in my *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁸ (i) was the "practical achievement" claim.

first three chapters. He then asks what alters when the object of the desires relevant to maintaining life turns out not to be just another object or obstacle but another subject. In effect, he argues that everything changes when our desires are not just thwarted or impeded, but challenged and refused. And he then explores how the presence of such an other subject, in altering what could be a possible self-relation, sets a new agenda for the rest of the *Phenomenology*, for the problems of both sapience and agency.

II

The central passage where the putative “practical turn” in all this takes place is the following:

But this opposition between its [self-consciousness’s] appearance and its truth has only the truth for its essence, namely, the unity of self-consciousness with itself. This unity must become essential to self-consciousness, which is to say, self-consciousness is *desire* itself. (§167) (“*Begierde überhaupt*,” which could also be translated as “desire in general,” or “desire, generally” or “mere desire.” I am following here Terry Pinkard’s translation.)¹⁹

The passage presupposes the larger issue we have been setting out—the way Hegel has come to discuss the double nature of consciousness (consciousness of an object, a this-such, and the non-positional consciousness or implicit

¹⁹ Pinkard’s translation is a valuable facing-page translation and is available at http://web.mac.com/titpaul/Site/About_Me_files/Phenomenology%20of%20Spirit%20%28entire%20text%29.pdf

The paragraph numbers in the text refer to his translation as well.

awareness of my taking it to be this-such).²⁰ He discusses this as what he calls an “opposition,” or, as he says, the “negativity” that this doubleness introduces within consciousness, the fact that consciousness is not simply absorbed into (“identified with”) its contents, but has also, let us say, taken up a position toward what it thinks.²¹ To understand this, we need the following passage from the Introduction:

However, consciousness is for itself its concept, and as a result it immediately goes beyond the restriction, and, since this restriction belongs to itself, it goes beyond itself too. (§80)²²

²⁰ As self-consciousness, consciousness henceforth has a doubled object: the first, the immediate object, the object of sense-certainty and perception, which, however, is marked *for it* with the *character of the negative*; the second, namely, *itself*, which is the true *essence* and which at the outset is on hand merely in opposition to the first. (§167)

²¹ His formulation later in the *Berlin Phenomenology* is especially clear:

There can be no consciousness without self-consciousness. I know something, and that about which I know something I have in the certainty of myself [*das wovon ich weiss habe ich in der Gewissheit meiner selbst*] otherwise I would know nothing of it; the object is my object, it is other and at the same time mine, and in this latter respect I am self-relating.

G.W.F. Hegel: The Berlin Phenomenology, trans. M. Petry (Dordrecht: Riedel, 1981), p. 55 (hereafter BPhG).

²² He also introduces here a claim that will recur much more prominently in this account of the difference between animal and human desire:

However, to knowledge, the goal is as necessarily fixed as the series of the progression. The goal lies at that point where knowledge no longer has the need to go beyond itself, that is, where knowledge works itself out, and where the concept corresponds to the object and the object to the concept. Progress towards this goal is thus also unrelenting, and satisfaction [n.b. the introduction of *Befriedigung*] is not to be found at any prior station on the way. What is limited to a natural life is not on its own capable of going beyond its

He is actually making two claims here. The first is the premise of his inference: that “consciousness is for itself its concept.” The idea seems to be: If we understand this first premise properly, we will understand why he feels entitled to the “and as a result,” the claim that consciousness is thereby immediately “beyond” any such restriction or concept that it sets “for itself.” (I want to claim that this all amounts to a defense of the claim that consciousness must be understood as apperceptive.) He means to say that the normative standards and proprieties at play in human consciousness are “consciousness’s own,” that is, are *followed* by a subject, are not psychological, empirical laws of thought, to return to the point made earlier. This is his version of the Kantian principle that persons are subject to no law or norm other than ones they have subjected themselves to.²³ (This is what is packed into the “for itself” here.) This does not mean either in Kant or in Hegel that there are episodes of self-subjection or explicit acts of allegiance or anything as ridiculous as all that; just that norms governing what we think and do can be said to govern thought and action only insofar as subjects, however implicitly or habitually or unreflectively (or as a matter of “second-nature”), accept such constraints and sustain allegiance; they follow the rules, are not governed by them. It is only because of this that someone like Socrates or Galileo or Freud can occasion intellectual crises. (As all the post-Wittgensteinian discussion of rule-following has

immediate existence. However, it is driven out of itself by something other than itself, and this being torn out of itself is its death. (§80)

²³ This principle is of course primarily at home in Kant’s practical philosophy, but it is also at work in the theoretical philosophy, particularly where Kant wants to distinguish his own account of experiential mindedness from Locke’s or Hume’s.

shown, there cannot be any rules for the following of these rules, so one can be said to be following such rules in carrying out what is required without any explicit calculation of how to do so.) How the allegiance gets instituted and how it can lose its grip are matters Hegel is very interested in, but it has nothing to do with individuals “deciding” about allegiances at moments of time. Or, to invoke Kant again, knowers and doers are not explicable as beings subject to laws of nature (although as also ordinary objects, they *are* so subject), but by appeal to their representation of laws and self-subjection to them.²⁴

And Hegel means this to apply in ordinary cases of perceptual knowledge too. I know what would count as good perceptual reasons for an empirical claim on the basis of whatever “shape of spirit” or possible model of experience is under consideration at whatever stage in the PhG. That is, Hegel considers empirical rules of discrimination, unification, essence/appearance distinctions, conceptions of explanation, etc., as normative principles, and he construes some set of these as a possible determinate whole, as all being

²⁴ So I think that Sebastian Rödl is wrong when he says that Kant’s autonomy doctrine can have it that laws for action can be “one’s own” by having a certain “logical form”; see *Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 117. Kant’s own famous account of autonomy states unambiguously that I must be able to regard myself as the “author” [*Urheber*] of the law. I. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. L.W. Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1990), p. 48. Rödl apparently thinks that any notion of “giving oneself the law” would involve “arbitrary, lawless” acts (*ibid.*). But this is not so; it is quite possible to interpret Kant’s clear insistence on self-legislation without any bizarre moment of Sartrean election. The whole point of starting out by noting that Kant’s formulation is paradoxical is to insist that, whatever he means by the “*Urheber*” language, he *cannot* mean *that*, arbitrary willing. See my *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, and the critique therein of Korsgaard, Chapter Three.

simply manifestations of the overriding requirements of a “shape of spirit” considered in this idealized isolation of capacities that makes up Chapters One through Five, and he cites possible illustrations of such a shape and such internal contradictions (determinate illustrative actual cases like trying to say “this here now,” or trying to distinguish the thing which bears properties from those properties). The concepts involved in organizing perceptual experience are also norms prescribing how the elements of perceptual experience ought to be organized (especially in Kant temporally organized) and so they do not function like fixed physiological dispositions. We are responsive to a perceivable environment in norm-attentive ways.

Another way to put this would be to say that our discriminated attentiveness never occurs episodically, but as part of a totality or whole within which any such discrimination must fit, and so any such attentiveness is subject to a certain sort of strain when it threatens not to fit. That totality is a norm, not a law of thought. On a certain (empiricist) way of thinking, it can seem very odd to say that such a totality and its properties can be in any sense held in mind, that one is attentive “in the light” of such a totality and its requirements, without that totality being another idea or representation one attends to. But that would be most paradoxical. Such an idea would just be another one in and subject to the requirements of such a totality, and we would be no better and much worse off postulating it. This issue is of a piece with the same deeply misleading temptation to think that any “achievement” language, like that introduced earlier, must refer to a separate enterprise I set out to accomplish after I realize something about a claim or practical project.

Finally—and this is the most important indication of their normative status—since the principles involved guide my behavior or conclusions only insofar as they are accepted

and followed, they can prove themselves inadequate, and lose their grip. This is what Hegel means in the conclusion of his inference by saying that consciousness “immediately goes beyond this restriction.” It is always “beyond” any norm in the sense that it is not, let us say, stuck with such a restriction as a matter of psychological fact; consciousness is always in a position to alter norms for correct perception, inferring, law-making, or right action. Perception of course involves physiological processes that are species-identical across centuries and cultures, but perceptual knowledge also involves norms for attentiveness, discrimination, unification, exclusion, and conceptual organization that do not function like physiological laws. And so (as Hegel says, “as a result”) we should be said to stand always by them and yet also “beyond them.” This can all still seem to introduce far too much normative variability into a process, perception, that seems all much more a matter of physiological fact. But while Hegel certainly accepts that the physiological components of perception are *distinguishable* from the norm-following or interpretive elements, he also insists that the physiological and the normative aspects are *inseparable* in perception itself. (As in Heidegger’s phenomenology, there are not two stages to perception, as if a perception of a white rectangular solid is then “interpreted as” a refrigerator. What we *see* is a refrigerator.)

The second dimension of this claim from ¶80 concerns how such consciousness is “beyond itself” in another way. Besides the claim that consciousness, as he says, “negates” what it is presented with, that it does not merely take in but determines what is the case, the claim is also that ordinary, everyday consciousness is *always* “going beyond itself,” never *wholly* absorbed in what it is attending to, never simply or only *in* a perceptual state, but always resolving its own conceptual activity; and this in a way that means it can be said

both to be self-affirming, possibly issuing in judgments and imperatives, but also potentially “self-negating,” aware that what it resolves or takes to be the case might not be the case. It somehow “stands above” what it also affirms, to use an image that Hegel sometimes invokes (although he again means: stands above *in* so resolving, not *in addition to*). It adds to the interpretive problems to cite below the canonical formulation of this point, but it might help us see how important it is for his whole position and why he is using language like “negativity” for *consciousness itself*. (Such terminology is the key *explicans* for his eventual claim that self-consciousness is desire.) This formulation in Hegelese is from the “Phenomenology” section of the last version of his *Encyclopedia* (the “Berlin Phenomenology” again):

The I is now this subjectivity, this infinite relation to itself, but therein, namely in this subjectivity, lies its negative relation to itself, diremption, differentiation, judgment. *The I judges, and this constitutes it as consciousness*; it repels itself from itself; this is a logical determination.²⁵

So the large question to which Hegel thinks we have been brought by his account of consciousness in the first three chapters is: just *what is it* for a being to be not just a recorder of the world’s impact on one’s senses, but to be *for itself* in its engagements with objects? What is it in general *for a being to be for itself*, for “itself to be at issue for it in its relation with what is not it”? (This is the problem that arose with the “Kantian” revelation in the *Understanding* chapter of the PhG that, in trying to get to the real nature of the essence of appearances, “understanding experiences only itself,” which, he says, raises the problem: “the cognition of *what consciousness knows in knowing itself* requires a still more complex

²⁵ BPhG, 2, my emphasis.

movement” [¶167, my emphasis].) This is the fundamental issue being explored in Chapter Four. That the basic structure of the Kantian account is preserved until this point is clear from the following:

With that first moment, self-consciousness exists as *consciousness*, and the whole breadth of the sensuous world is preserved for it, but at the same time only as related to the second moment, the unity of self-consciousness with itself. (¶167)²⁶

This passage and indeed all of ¶167 indicate that Hegel does have in mind a response to the problem of a self-conscious consciousness (of the whole breadth of the sensible world) developed in the first three chapters (what is the relation to itself inherent in any possible relation to objects?), and that he insists on a commonsense acknowledgment that whatever account we give of a self-determining self-consciousness, it is not a *wholly* autonomous or independent self-relating; the “sensuous world” must be preserved.

But it is at this point that he then suddenly makes a much more controversial, pretty much unprepared for, and not at all recognizably Kantian, claim:

But this opposition between its appearance and its truth has only the truth for its essence, namely, the unity of self-consciousness with itself. This unity must become essential to self-consciousness, which is to say, self-consciousness is *desire* itself. (¶167)

Hegel is talking about an “opposition” between appearance and truth here because he has, in his own words, just

²⁶ Cf. again the *Berlin Phenomenology*: “In consciousness I am also self-conscious, but *only also*, since the object has a side in itself which is not mine” (BPhG, 56).

summarized the issue of consciousness's "negative" relation to the world and itself this way:

Otherness thereby exists for it *as a being*, that is, as a *distinguished moment*, but, for it, it is also the unity of itself with this distinction as a *second distinguished moment*. (§167)

That is, consciousness may be said to affirm implicitly a construal of some intentional content, but since it has thereby (by its own "taking") negated any putative immediate certainty, since it is also always "beyond itself," its eventual "unity with itself," its satisfaction that what *it* takes to be the case *is* the case and can be integrated with everything else it takes to be the case, requires the *achievement* of a "unity with itself," not any immediate certainty or self-regard. (This is his echo of the Kantian point that the unity of apperception must be achieved; contents must be, as Kant says, "brought" to the unity of apperception.)

But still, at this point, the gloss he gives on the claim that "self-consciousness is desire" is not much help. The gloss is, as if an appositive, "This [the unity of self-consciousness with itself] "must become essential to self-consciousness, which is to say, etc." The first hint of a practical turn emerges just here when Hegel implies that we need to understand self-consciousness as *a unity* to be *achieved*, that there is some "opposition" between self-consciousness and itself, a kind of self-estrangement, which, he seems to be suggesting, we are moved to overcome. The unity of self-consciousness with itself "*muß ihm wesentlich werden*," must become essential to the experiencing subject, a practical turn of phrase that in effect almost unnoticed serves as the pivot around which the discussion turns suddenly and deeply practical. (As we shall see, this unity eventually does much more clearly "become essential" as a result of a putative encounter with another and opposing self-conscious being. And it is clearly practical

in the everyday sense in which we might say to someone, "You're wasting chances for advancement; your career must *become* essential to you.")

There would be no problem here, or not as much of one, if Hegel had just noted that human desire is self-conscious desire (something he also of course holds). That would be to make the point that self-conscious desirers do not desire in episodic and isolated moments of desire; they desire in the light of the other things they desire, for one thing, and that alone is a way of saying that the desire itself is self-conscious (and not that human desires are like animal desires but "then" can be also self-monitored). But Hegel's speculative "reverse" predication is what requires a deeper interpretation.

Since the self-conscious aspect of ordinary empirical consciousness is much more like a self-determination, or one could say a resolve or a committing oneself (what Fichte called a self-positing) than a simple self-observation or direct awareness, Hegel begins again to discuss consciousness as a "negation" of the world's independence and otherness. He means to say: we are, just in actively attending to the world, overcoming the indeterminacy, opacity, foreignness, potential confusion, and disconnectedness of what we are presented with by resolving what belongs together with what, tracking objects through changes and so forth.²⁷ Hegel

²⁷ Cf.

The 'I' is as it were the crucible and fire which consumes the loose plurality of sense and reduces it to unity . . . The tendency of all man's endeavors is to understand the world, to appropriate and subdue it to himself; and to this end the positive reality of the world must be as it were crushed and pounded, in other words, idealized.

Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften, Erster Teil. Die Wissenschaft der Logik, in *Werke* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969–79), Bd. 8, p. 118; *Hegel's Logic, Being Part One of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. W. Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 69.

then makes another unexpected move when he suggests that we consider the most uncomplicated and straightforward experience of just this striving or orectic for-itself-ness, what he calls “life”:

By way of this reflective turn into itself, the object has become *life*. What self-consciousness distinguishes from itself *as existing* also has in it, insofar as it is posited as existing, not merely the modes of sense-certainty and perception. It is being which is reflected into itself, and the object of immediate desire is something *living*. (§168)

This is the most basic experience²⁸ of what it is to be at issue for oneself as one engages the world. As Hegel says, we begin with what we know we now need, a “being reflected into itself,” and our question, how should we properly describe the self of the self-relation necessary for conscious intentionality and ultimately agency, is given the broadest possible referent, its own mere life. We have something like a sentiment of self as living and, as we shall see, as also needing to-be-achieved, requiring that the living being act purposively in order to live. Other objects too are not now merely external existents, “*not merely the modes of sense-certainty and perception*” (although they are *also* that) but, in order to move beyond the empty formality of “I am the I who is thinking these thoughts,” they are now also considered as *objects for the living subject*, as threats to, means to, or indifferent to such life-sustaining. This brute or simple *for-itself* quality of living consciousness (which form of self-relation we share with animals) will not remain the focus of Hegel’s interest for long, but, if it is becoming plausible that Hegel is indeed trying to extend the issue raised in the

²⁸ That is, the one that presupposes the least.

Consciousness section (and neither changing the subject, nor repeating the problem and desideratum in a figurative way), it already indicates what was just suggested: that he is moving quickly away from Kant’s transcendental-formal account of the apperceptive nature of consciousness. The I is “for itself” in consciousness for Kant only in the sense that the I (whoever or whatever it is) must be able to accompany all my representations. The world is experienced as categorically ordered because I in some sense order it (*I think* it as such and such), and that activity is not merely triggered into operation by the sense contents of experience. I undertake it, but I do so only in the broad formal sense of temporally unifying, having a take on, the contents of consciousness, bringing everything under the unity of a formally conceived apperceptive I. (This simply means that every content must be such that *one continuous I can think it*.) The “I” is just the unity effected. The subject’s relation to objects is a self-relation only in this sense, and Hegel has introduced what seems like a different and at first arbitrary shift in topics to my sustaining my own life as the basic or first or most primary model of this self-relation, not merely sustaining the distinction between, say, successions of representations and a representation of succession.

Now the whole section on life, essentially §168 to §174, is among the most opaque of any passages in Hegel (which is saying something). I should note that what I need here is Hegel’s basic framework, in which he starts with the claim that with our “reflective turn” (“*durch diese Reflexion in sich selbst*”) consciousness is related to “life.” Self-relation as mere sentiment of oneself as living and as having to maintain life does not, however, establish my taking up and leading my determinate life as an individual. I am just an exemplar of the species requirements of my species, playing them out

within the infinite “totality” of life itself as genus. Just by living I am nothing but a moment in the universal process of life, a kind of Schellingean universal (and Schelling talked this way about life). But throughout, the framework is: the first *object* of self-consciousness is life. That is, Hegel does not suddenly decide to talk about life, just qua life. As he says several times, he wants to understand life as the immediate object of desire (itself the most immediate form of self-relation), a sentiment of self that opens a gap, something negative to be filled (requiring the negation of barriers to life and the negation of stasis, in the face of the need to lead a life). That is, I take a main point to be that introduced in ¶168: in this self-relation, there is an “estrangement” (*Entzweiung*), “between self-consciousness and life,” as he says. All through the phenomenology of “life as the infinite universal substance as the object of desire,” the problem Hegel keeps pointing to is how, under what conditions, the self-relating can be said to become a relating to self that is a relation to *me*, a distinction within the universal genus, life. I seem rather just to be subject to the imperatives or demands of life for my species. *Rather than being the subject of my desires, I am subject to my desires.*

The first three chapters have already established the need to understand some sort of normative autonomy, and this first actuality of self-relatedness, life and leading a life, conflicts with this requirement unless such a subject can establish its independence from life. What is important to my account here is the course of this “becoming determinate” account until it begins to break into its conclusion, toward the end of ¶172, until “this estrangement of the undifferentiated fluidity is *the very positing of individuality*” (“*dies Entzweien der unterschiedlosen Flüssigkeit ist eben das Setzen der Individualität*”). Such a self-determined individual must

be *established* and that especially requires a different, non-natural relation with another subject who must realize the same self-relatedness. This will be the subject of chapter 2. What Hegel struggles to say after this is why, without the inner mediation by the outer, that is, without a self-relation in relation to another self, this all fails, a typically Hegelian coming a cropper.²⁹

This shift to the topic of life is also not arbitrary because Hegel has objected, and will continue to object throughout his career, to any view of the “I” in “I think” as such a merely formal indicator of “the I or he or it” (in Kant’s phrase) which thinks. In Hegel’s contrasting view, while we can certainly make a general point about the necessity for unity in experience by abstracting from any determination of such a subject and go on to explore the conditions of such unity, we will not get very far in specifying such conditions without, let us say, more determination already in the notion of the subject of experience. This criticism is tied to what was by far the most widespread dissatisfaction with Kant’s first *Critique* (which Hegel shared) and which remains today one of its greatest weaknesses: the arbitrariness of Kant’s Table of Categories, the fact that he has no way of deducing from “the ‘I think’ must be able to accompany all my representations” *what* the I must necessarily think, what forms it must employ, in thinking its representations. The emptiness of Kant’s “I” is directly linked for Hegel to the ungroundedness and arbitrariness of his Table of Categories.³⁰

²⁹ See the different account in Neuhouser, “Desire, Recognition, and the Relation between Bondsman and Lord,” p. 43.

³⁰ Hegel’s formulation of this point is given in ¶197 in his own inimitable style.

To *think* does not mean to think as an *abstract I*, but as an I which at the same time signifies *being-in-itself*, that is, it

However, understanding this charge would take us deep into Hegel's criticisms of Kantian formality. What we need now is a clearer sense of what Hegel is proposing, not so much what he is rejecting. Let me first complete a brief summary of the themes in Chapter Four (once we begin reading it this way) and then see where we are.

III

As we have seen, if a self-conscious consciousness is to be understood as striving in some way, then the most immediate embodiment of such a striving would be a self's attention to itself as a living being.³¹ That is how it is immediately for

has the meaning of being an object in its own eyes, or of conducting itself vis-à-vis the objective essence in such a way that its meaning is that of the *being-for-itself* of that consciousness for which it is.

³¹ This is relevant to another broad point. Hegel's is not a genetic account; there is no matter-of-historical-fact development from a merely conscious state to a self-consciously conscious one. But the "phenomenologically" developmental structure of the PhG helps highlight that no one ever simply *is* apperceptively conscious just as such (at least not without a distorting, extreme abstraction similar to Kant's insistence on formality). One is apperceptively conscious in some structural way or other, open to challenges in one way and not another, "beyond itself" in one way rather than another. If apperceptive consciousness is ultimately to be the maker of claims for which one is responsible, then one must be in a position to redeem them and in that sense being such an apperceptive subject always involves, commits one to, the achievement of such redemption in some way rather than another. This can be more or less successful, and so the achievement can be more or less realized. (And until modernity, in Hegel's account, such a realization was almost wholly implicit, barely realized.) Although it is clearly possible on the logical level to distinguish capacity and realization, Hegel is forever going on about the distortions that result from strictly separating questions of the content of some capacity (say,

itself in relation to other objects. Living beings, like animals, do not exist in the way non-living beings (like rocks or telephones) *merely* exist; they must strive to stay alive, and so we have our first example of the desideratum, a self-relation in relation to objects. Life must be led, sustained, and this gap between my present life and what I must do to sustain it in the future is what is meant by calling consciousness *desire* as lack or gap, and so a negation of objects as impediments or mere things.³² If consciousness and desire can be linked as closely as Hegel wants to (that is, identified), then consciousness is not an isolatable registering and responding capacity of the living being that is conscious. And if this all

"justifiability") from realization, as in the first paragraph of the *Philosophy of Right*, for example. "The subject matter of the philosophical science of right is the Idea of right—the concept of right and its actualization." *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. A. Wood, trans. H. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 28.

It may help establish the plausibility of this reading by noting how much this practical conception of normativity and intentionality was in the air at the time. I have already indicated how indebted this chapter is to Fichte. Ludwig Siep has clearly established how much Hegel borrowed from Fichte for the later sections on recognition and for his practical philosophy in general. See his *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie* (Alber: Freiburg/Munich, 1979) and many of the important essays in *Praktische Philosophie im deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992).

³² Readers of Peirce will recognize here his category of "Secondness." As in "you have a sense of resistance and at the same time a sense of effort. . . . They are only two ways of describing the same experience. It is a double consciousness. We become aware of ourself [sic] by becoming aware of the not-self." C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vols. I–VI, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931–35), I, p. 324. An excellent exploration of the links between pragmatism and Hegel: Richard Bernstein, *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).

can be established, then we will at this step have moved far away from considering a self-conscious consciousness as a kind of self-aware spectator of the passing show and moved closer to considering it as an engaged, practical being, whose practical satisfaction of desire is essential to understanding the way the world originally makes sense to it (the way it makes sense of the world), or is intelligible at all. Hegel's claim is that consciousness *is* desire, not merely that it is accompanied by desire. (Obviously this claim has some deep similarities with the way Heidegger insists that *Dasein's* unique mode of being-in-the-world is *Sorge*, or care, and with Heidegger's constant insistence that this has nothing to do with a subject projecting its pragmatic concerns onto a putatively neutral, directly apprehended content.)

At points Hegel tries to move away from very general and abstract points about living beings and desire and to specify the distinctive character of desire that counts as "self-consciousness," as was claimed in his identification. He wants, that is, to distinguish actions that are merely the natural expression of desire (and a being that is merely subject to its desires), and a corresponding form of self-consciousness that is a mere sentiment of self, from actions undertaken in order to satisfy a desire, the actions of a being that does not just embody its self-sentiment but can be said to act *on* such a self-conception. He wants to distinguish natural or animal desire from human desire and so tries to distinguish a cycle of desires and satisfactions that continually arise and subside in animals from beings *for whom* their desires can be objects of attention, issues at stake, ultimately *reasons* to be acted on or not. This occurs in a very rapid series of transitions in ¶175 where Hegel starts distinguishing the cycle of the urges and satisfactions of mere desire from a satisfaction

that can confirm the genuinely self-relating quality of consciousness, rather than its mere self-sentiment.³³

That is, we have already seen a crucial aspect of the structure of Hegel's account: that any self-relating is always also in a way provisional and a projecting outward, beyond the near immediacy of any mere self-taking. Conscious takings of any sort are defeasible, held open as possibilities, and so must be tested; and avowed commitments must be realized in action for there to be any realization of the avowed intention (and so revelation of what the subject was in fact committed to doing). The projected self-sentiment of a merely living self is *realized* by the "negation" of the object of desire necessary for life, part of an endless cycle of being subject to one's desires and satisfying them. This all begins to change at the end of the paragraph (¶175), as Hegel contemplates a distinct kind of object which in a sense "*negates back*," and not merely in the manner of a prey that resists a predator, but which can also, as he says, "effect this negation in itself"; or, come to be in the self-relation required by our desiring self-consciousness. That is, Hegel introduces into the conditions of the "satisfaction" of any self-relating another self-consciousness, an object that cannot merely be destroyed or negated in the furtherance of life without the original self-consciousness losing its confirming or satisfying moment.

³³ Eventually, at a certain stage in his argument, Hegel (and I) will begin referring to "desire" as an ellipsis for distinctly human desire, whereas he starts off with a merely "animal" notion of desire, something already suggested by the somewhat cruder word, *Begierde* (not *Begheren*, for example). The context should make clear the different uses, with an occasional reminder to make clear that he thinks there is something qualitatively different about human desire, and that a major point of his phenomenology is to make that distinction clear.

He then identifies a further condition for this distinction that is perhaps the most famous claim in the *Phenomenology*.

It is this one. “Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness” (§175). He specifies this in an equally famous passage from §178. “Self-consciousness exists *in* and *for itself* because and by way of its existing in and for itself for an other; i.e., it exists only as recognized.”

As we shall see in more detail in the analysis of this claim in the next chapter, Hegel wants to introduce a complication into any account of the self-relation he is trying to show is constitutive for intentional consciousness and purposive deeds. As we have seen, consciousness is said to be “beyond itself” because its self-relating self-determining is always defeasible (or challengeable in the case of action) and so its being in its very self-relation in some way “held open” to such a possibility is considered a constitutive condition. In the broadest sense this means that such takings and doings are supported by reasons, even if mostly in deeply implicit and rarely challenged ways. (Conscious takings can always “rise” to the level of explicit judgments and defenses of judgments; habitual actions can be defended if necessary.) Hegel now introduces the possibility—unavoidable given the way he has set things up—that all such considerations are uniquely open to challenge by other conscious, acting beings. Such challenges could initially be considered as merely more natural obstacles in the way of desire-satisfaction in all the various forms now at issue in Hegel’s account. But by considering imaginatively the possibility of a challenge that forces the issue to the extreme (where attachment to life and mere subjection to desire can be said to become an *option*), a “struggle to the death,” Hegel tries to show how the unique nature of such a challenge from another like-minded being forces the issue of the normative

(or not just naturally explicable) character of one’s takings and practical commitments, and any possible response, to the forefront. To be norm-sensitive at all is then shown not just to be *open* to these unique sorts of challenges, but to be finally *dependent* on some resolution of them. It is on the basis of this account, how we can be shown to open ourselves to such challenges and such dependence just as a result of a “phenomenological” consideration of the implications of the apperception thesis, that Hegel begins his attempt to establish one of the most ambitious claims of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: the sociality of consciousness and action.

IV

Before concluding this chapter, let me pause here to consider both the objections John McDowell has made to this sort of reading and his alternative interpretation. He says that in the crucial *Begierde* passage of §167, “There is no suggestion here of anything as specific as a mode of consciousness that has its objects in view only in so far as they can be seen as conducive or obstructive to its purposes,”³⁴ and he says that my reading takes the notion of desire “too literally.” My response is of course that there is no question of a more or less literal understanding; that by using the word desire, Hegel simply means to introduce the topic of desire as a continuation of his discussion of consciousness, and goes on in that register, discussing life as the object of desire, the conflict between desiring beings, and ultimately the impossibility of understanding a subject’s relation to itself and the

³⁴ McDowell, AI, p. 38.