

## NOTES ON MASTER AND SLAVE IN HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

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Hegel's section on Master and Slave in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*<sup>1</sup> may, I propose, be interpreted along the following lines:

Two social consciousness (or human individuals) encounter one another. When they do, they are simply and solely creatures of monological and instrumental desire: they know nothing whatever of social or dialogical or recognitive existence. Because they are simply and solely creatures of desire, they have no alternative but to fight with one another. All more “polite” courses of action being denied to them, they count to one another merely as unpredictable and thereby dangerous threats. Because the threat which they pose to one another is potentially mortal, they have no alternative but to struggle to the death. Each seeks the death of the other (*PS* 187).

Note that the fight referred to by Hegel is not, thus envisaged, a fight *for recognition* but a fight *for the other's death*. It is, in other words, a fight fought for stakes that concern *not* recognition *but* the satisfaction of desire: the desire concerned is desire for survival and the continuation of 'life' (*PS* 168). So far, we may observe, there is nothing in Hegel's scenario which Hobbes – not the recognition-oriented Hobbes imagined by Strauss<sup>2</sup> but Hobbes read in a thoroughly traditional sense – could not approve.

As the fight proceeds, one self-consciousness falls into the power of the other. For example, one self-consciousness slips and tumbles and cowers on the ground as the other raises his or her arm to deliver the death-blow. Note that there is nothing in the least mysterious in this – but what happens next is all-important.

Having lost advantage, and exposed him or herself to attack, the self-consciousness who has slipped (and who will presently become Slave) experiences 'absolute fear'

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1 G.W.F. Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* [*PS*] trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1977) pp. 111-9. In what follows, numbers in brackets refer to paragraphs in Miller's translation.

2 L. Strauss *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Genesis* (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1963) ch. II.

(*PS* 196; see also 194). Fearfully, the Slave-to-be gazes into the triumphant self-consciousness's murderous and death-intending eyes. What the Slave-to-be sees in the eyes of the other (the eyes of the self-consciousness who will become Master) is *nothing but* his or her own death – or intended death. It is at this crucial point – we may say, summarising Hegel's line of thought – that the cowering and defeated self-consciousness cries “I submit!” With this cry of submission, Mastery and Slavery come into existence and the 'one-sided and unequal' recognition (*PS* 191) which paradigmatically characterises a Master-Slave relation is born.

It is at this point in Hegel's envisioned scenario that, strictly speaking, the “Master-Slave dialectic” begins. Famously, one-sided and unequal recognition as instanced in a Master-Slave relation is unstable and self-undermining: a Master (in order to count as a Master) depends on recognition by a Slave, but the Slave counts in the Master's view as a being too lowly – to enmeshed in 'thinghood' (*PS* 189) – to be capable of offering recognition. The Master requires but disparages the Slave's recognition. The Slave offers recognition but knows (insofar as he or she is a Slave) that his or her offer of recognition is void. The lesson a reader of the *Phenomenology* learns from pondering the “Master-Slave dialectic” is that one-sided and unequal recognition is contradictory or alienated. Only recognition which is mutual – a situation where where self-consciousnesses '*recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another*' (*PS* 183) – is recognition that exists in an uncontradicted or non-alienated form.

Standing back, I repeat my initial claim: Hegel's section on Master and Slave in the *Phenomenology* may be interpreted along the lines just sketched. The interpretation is, I confess, a controversial one – at any rate so far as the struggle-to-the death leading up to the emergence of the Master-Slave relation is concerned. But I do not argue in defence of it here.

Instead, I do three things. First, I explain the chief sense in which my proposed interpretation is controversial. Second, I outline the overall picture of which my proposed interpretation is a part. And third, I comment on how what I have termed the “all-important” step in the Master-Slave scenario may be understood.

## I

My interpretation is controversial not least because commentators on the section have traditionally construed it as an account of struggle for recognition.<sup>3</sup> In the sketch

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. A. Kojève *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (New York: Basic Books 1969) pp. 7, 11-2, 41; A. Kelly 'Notes on Hegel's “Lordship and Bondage”' in A. MacIntyre, ed., *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: University of Notre Dame Press 1976) p. 195; A. Honneth *The Struggle for Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1995) pp. 62, 145; L. Siep in J. O'Neill, ed., *Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition* (Albany: State University

given above I stress that the 'life-and-death struggle' (*PS* 187) presented by Hegel in the Master-Slave section is a struggle not *for recognition* but *for survival*. My suggested interpretation allows me to view the struggle as one which is embarked upon for reasons that make sense in terms of 'desire' and 'life' (*PS* 167-75); issues concerning 'recognition' (*PS* 177-84) are not seen as present at the outset and come into play only as the struggle proceeds. Notions concerning recognition are not presumed in the struggle but emerge only in and through the struggle itself. By contrast, the traditional view assumes that issues concerning recognition are present in the minds of self-consciousnesses at the moment when – or indeed, in the period before – combat is joined. Because it assumes that the struggle is, from the beginning, motivated by issues concerning recognition, the traditional view takes it for granted that recognition is a familiar notion even in a pre-struggle condition or state.

I have said that the present note does not argue for my proposed interpretation. However, I note a terminological point which tells in its favour. According to Emmanuel Renault, Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Political Sciences* contains 'three instances of *Kampf des Anerkennens*, only one for *Kampf um Anerkennung*' whereas 'the two expressions are absent from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*'.<sup>4</sup> In drawing attention to Renault's observation, my aim is not balance or compare the quoted phrases; it is to suggest that the infrequency of either – and their non-occurrence in the *Phenomenology* – should be taken as a warning against interpreting the Master-Slave section in traditional terms.<sup>5</sup>

I close this short section of my notes by underlining an advantage to my interpretation. Unlike the “struggle-for-recognition” approach, my suggested reading allows Hegel's passage on a 'life-and-death struggle' which results in Mastery and Slavery to be seen as a non-circular account of the process through which recognition – as an issue (in “theory”) and as a social reality (in “practice”) – comes into existence. Read as an account of recognition's coming into being, the “struggle-for-recognition” approach is conceptually circular: it presupposes both the *recognition* and the *consciousness of recognition as an issue* which, as an account of origination, it was supposed to show.<sup>6</sup>

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of New York 1996) p. 273; R. Stern *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: Routledge 2002) pp. 77-8; F. Beiser *Hegel* (London: Routledge 2005) p. 187. F. Fukuyama's notorious *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin Books 1992) takes the same view.

4 E. Renault in H.-C. Schmidt am Busch and C.F. Zurn, eds., *The Philosophy of Recognition: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Plymouth: Lexington Books 2010) p. 255.

5 Whilst in breach of my promise not to argue for my reading of the Master-Slave section, I add a comment on how a seeming objection to my interpretation may be removed. In a well-known passage, Hegel declares that an 'individual who has not risked his life' does not attain 'the truth of...recognition as an independent self-consciousness' (*PS* 187). Does not this passage present *risk for the sake of recognition* as valuable for its own sake? And where may *risk for the sake of recognition* occur, other than in a struggle for recognition? Such a construal of Hegel's passage is needless. Struggling or fighting *per se* involves risk, and does so whether the fought-after goal is recognition or life's survival. All that the passage says is that recognition comes into being through a scenario involving a struggle or fight.

6 Strauss raises the question the question of circularity in his correspondence with Kojeve: 'The deduction of the desire for recognition [in Hegel, as Kojeve reads him] is convincing if...one presupposes everything at issue.' (The Strauss-Kojeve correspondence is given in L. Strauss *On Tyranny*, Chicago: Chicago University Press 2000; the quoted passage appears at p. 237.) In effect, the present notes attempt to rescue Kojeve from Strauss's objection – and do so, by rejecting the notion of a recognition-founding struggle for recognition.

By contrast, my proposed interpretation is one where, at the start of the fight, the issue of recognition is unheard-of and absent; by the end of the fight, recognition is not merely an issue but is – in the form of the 'one-sided and unequal' recognition that characterises Mastery and Slavery – practically real. In and through the fight, in other words, recognition makes an irreducibly new beginning. Suspicions regarding vicious circularity are removed, but at the cost – see section III, below – of raising questions about how the events of the struggle may be seen.

Why (a reader of these notes may ask) does it matter whether the *Phenomenology's* 'life-and-death struggle' can be seen as an account of recognition's beginning? In referring to beginning, what set of issues are brought into play? Two answers – one specific in its focus and one more general – to such questions suggest themselves. First, *Phenomenology* ch. IV opens with a discussion of *desiring* self-consciousness and proceeds (at *PS* 178) to a discussion of *recognizing and recognized* self-consciousness: the 'first' (*PS* 185) form of recognition which is considered is the one-sided and unequal recognition between Master and Slave, and my proposal that (for Hegel) recognition comes into being through 'life-and-death struggle' serves to explain how the transition from *desire* to *recognition* comes about. More precisely, it explains how the transition comes about not merely conceptually (as a change of topic in a complex text) but phenomenologically (through experience's own prompting). It offers an explanation that is neither arbitrary nor question-begging. Second, issues concerning recognition's origination – issues which, I suggest, the *Phenomenology's* Master-Slave section attempts to resolve – are important because they relate to central questions in political theory: how do normative relations between human beings come into being? How (in effect) does society begin? In the history of thought, answers – or attempted answers – to such questions tend either to be gradualist or based on the notion of a founding compact or contract or reciprocal promise. But an invocation of gradual change may be question-begging. And an invocation of compacting or contracting or promising is apt to presuppose the social relatedness (the recognition) whose possibility it was supposed to show.<sup>7</sup> The *Phenomenology's* Master-Slave section, as interpreted in the present notes, offers a non-vicious answer to the question that social contract theory asks.

## II

Comment on the Master-Slave section's place in Hegel's discussion may be broadened. Of what overall picture – we may enquire – is the *Phenomenology's* life-and-death struggle and dialectic of Master and Slave a part? The present section

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<sup>7</sup> The point regarding vicious circularity, or presupposing what one is supposed to show, is pressed against social contract theory by – for example – Anthony Cooper (Third Earl of Shaftesbury) in his *Characteristicks* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 2001), Vol. I, p. 69.

stands back from the Master-Slave section and suggests features of the picture which the *Phenomenology* paints.

I have proposed that, according to Hegel, the *Phenomenology's* life-and-death struggle brings about a transition from *self-consciousness at the level of desire* to *self-consciousness at the level of recognition*. Through the events of the struggle, self-consciousness becomes aware that it exists not simply and solely through desire but through recognition.<sup>8</sup> This proposal can be taken a stage further. For Hegel, the life-and-death struggle described in the Master-Slave section signifies not merely the transition from desire to recognition but – I suggest – the beginning of history itself.

The themes of the transition from desire to recognition and of the beginning of history are related because, for the Hegel of the *Phenomenology*, human history is the story of recognition. History begins when recognition comes on the scene and ends when – after a “work” or travail which lasts thousands of years – it subsists in fully adequate and self-consistent terms. In chapter VI of the *Phenomenology*, which traces European history from the early days of the Ancient Greek *polis* to the French Revolution, Hegel explores landmarks in what such a “work” might mean. In what follows, I confine my comments to explaining why (for Hegel) the “work” of history is arduous and how a distinction between *inadequate and inconsistent* and *adequate and self-consistent* recognition may be understood.

In order to give even an outline account of the *Phenomenology's* conception of history, a term that is no-less-important to Hegel than recognition must be introduced. This term is freedom – which for Hegel means active self-determination.<sup>9</sup> In what may be termed the “practical” chapters of the *Phenomenology*,<sup>10</sup> Hegel's conviction is that freedom (understood as self-determination) and recognition exist in and through one another. Neither freedom nor recognition exists fully or in its own terms unless the other exists in a full and adequate way. Only when both freedom and recognition converge does freedom (on the one side) and recognition (on the other) count as uncontradicted – or “non-alienated”.

How should we picture a convergence of freedom and recognition? In what human condition does uncontradicted (or “non-alienated”) freedom and uncontradicted (or “non-alienated”) recognition subsist? Hegel's answer is that freedom and recognition flourish together when and only when mutual recognition (*PS* 184, 640, 644, 653-4, 670) obtains.<sup>11</sup> Only recognition which is mutual counts as adequate and self-consistent. Non-mutual recognition is, by contrast, recognition which exists in an estranged or impaired or distorted fashion: it is recognition which *exists as other than*

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8 Through life-and-death struggle, that is, self-consciousness transcends the limits of rational choice theory. The limits of what may be understood through instrumental reason (or what Horkheimer terms 'subjective' reason) are surpassed. See M. Horkheimer *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Seabury Press 1974).

9 I take it that self-determination is what Hegel has in mind when he describes the 'absolute' as 'essentially a *result*' (*PS* 20). How can absolute (and thereby free) being be a *result*, unless it determines itself?

10 Chs. IV and VI.

11 See, similarly, Hegel's declarations about the nature of humanity in *PS* 69. Also the famous passage on an 'I that is We and We that is I' in *PS* 177.

*it is* or, stated differently, is self-contradictory. If recognition exists in a contradictory manner then, it follows from what has been said, contradiction (or “alienation”) afflicts freedom as well.

The above comments indicate, schematically, how *inadequate and inconsistent* recognition and *adequate and self-consistent* recognition may be distinguished. They provide, a perspective in which the *Phenomenology's* conception of history may be viewed. Hegel (we may say) sees history as a sequence of inadequate and contradictory forms of recognition. As this sequence proceeds, contradictions *to* recognition and *in* recognition become explicit, and in doing so give rise to patterns of recognition which are contradictory in their turn. History is the *movement of contradiction* (or of *contradictions* in the plural), *that which is contradicted* being recognition – and freedom, to which recognition is linked. The sequence of alienated forms of recognition which makes up the course of history reaches its end, and history as a narrative is completed, when when uncontradicted or non-alienated recognition – that is, mutual recognition – comes into existence. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel writes in the conviction that mutual recognition exists in his own French Revolutionary days.<sup>12</sup>

The above comments make it evident why history as seen by the *Phenomenology* is an arduous “work”. History as portrayed by Hegel resembles not an assured pathway to mutual recognition but a labyrinth of doubt and distraction – a 'way of despair', in the *Phenomenology's* eloquent phrase (*PS* 78). I have suggested that, according to the *Phenomenology*, mutual recognition exists. Stated differently, history has ended. This is not, I propose, because a providential and teleologically-grounded plan has been fulfilled. No such plan receives a mention in the text of the *Phenomenology*. If mutual recognition has been brought into existence, it is through persistence and happenstance and in the face of formidable odds.

So far, in the present section, my comments on the *Phenomenology* have had a general character. Before closing, I take a step towards more detailed considerations by indicating two ways in which, in the course of Hegelian history, contradictions to recognition have obtained. Stated differently, I indicate two historically significant modes of contradictory recognition. The first of these modes has already been mentioned in passing: recognition is contradicted when, instead of being mutual, it is one-sided and unequal. As has been seen, the paradigm instance of one-sided and unequal recognition (*PS* 191) is the relation between Master and Slave. The second mode is introduced when, in ch. VI, Hegel refers to 'spiritual masses [*geistige*

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<sup>12</sup> This statement raises, of course, a range of fresh topics. I make no attempt to discuss such topics here. This said, I am on one score anxious not to be misunderstood. Amongst commentators, it has become increasingly fashionable to see not merely Hegel's *Phenomenology* (of 1807) but his *Philosophy of Right* (of 1821) as a work grounded on the notion of recognition: see, for example, R.R. Williams *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1997), Part Two; R. B. Pippin 'What Is the Question for which Hegel's Theory of Recognition is the Answer?' *European Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 8, No. 2 (2000) p. 155; A. Honneth *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom: Hegel's Social Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2010) esp. pp. 50-2. My own contrary view is that Hegel's earlier and later views are discontinuous. The present notes attempt to highlight features of the *Phenomenology* alone and leave Hegel's later writings to one side.

*Massen*] which he sees as analogous to the natural elements (or natural masses) of 'air, water, fire and earth' (PS 492). To what, in the context of Hegel's discussion, might the phrase 'spiritual masses' refer? My suggestion is that 'spiritual masses' are social institutions. Why might spiritual masses (thus understood) and natural masses be analogous? My suggestion is that social institutions have an inertia and quasi-natural weight in virtue of which alienation is implied. This latter suggestion may, I propose, be unpacked in non-metaphorical terms. Within a social institution, there is inscribed a set of role-definitions defining status – and, in a role-definition or specification of status, what Hegel terms *abstract universality* is entailed. An example helps to clarify what is meant, here, by abstraction: to characterise an individual as, say, a *student* or a *lecturer* is to employ a term that makes no mention of his or unique features and is designed, indeed, to cover a range of discrete individuals alike. Individuals who are defined as bearers of role-definitions – or, what is the same thing, individuals who are defined in “institutional” rather than “interactive” terms – are seen as divided into universal (or all-alike) and particular (or unique) aspects.<sup>13</sup> They are seen, thereby, in terms which deny the unitary self-determination which mutual recognition brings entails.

The two forms of contradictory recognition just outlined are viewed by Hegel as widespread in history and as deeply entrenched. They are, in the *Phenomenology's* historical discussion, closely interrelated. If the relation of Master to Slave is the paradigm instance of one-sided and unequal relation, “Mastery” and “Slavery” are themselves examples of social definitions or roles. Conversely, recognition (or misrecognition) which goes forward in terms of role-definitions may take an unequal and one-sided form. In history as understood by Hegel, the contradictory forms of recognition just distinguished shade over into one another; frequently, they present themselves as obverse and converse sides of the same social coin. The distinction is, however, of conceptual significance: if one or other dimension of misrecognition goes unacknowledged, the depth and challenge of the *Phenomenology's* discussion of contradiction is missed.

At the start of the present section, I asked: of what overall picture does the *Phenomenology's* life-and-death struggle and Master-Slave dialectic form a part? My answer is that the life-and-death struggle generates (in a non-circular manner) recognition which is one-sided and unequal (and to which, as we have seen, questions concerning the role-definitions of “Mastery” and “Slavery” are attached). Life-and-death struggle results in contradictory recognition and the “work” of moving, in theory and practice, from contradicted to uncontracted recognition takes millennia to accomplish. If a one-sentence summation of the *Phenomenology's* conception of history is wanted, it might run as follows: *Hegelian history, which opens with one-sided and unequal recognition and ends with mutual recognition, is the millennia-long work of transforming the former species of recognition into the latter. Between the recognition's 'first' form – viz., one-sided and unequal recognition – and mutual*

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13 On universality and particularity, see Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* paras. 163-4 (*The Logic of Hegel*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1892, pp. 291-5).

recognition, a long and complex series of contradictory forms of recognition intervene. Uncontradicted freedom and uncontradicted recognition come into their own, conjointly, when and only when mutual recognition is attained.

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To the present general and broadly-painted section, a note may be added. It is of a history-of-ideas rather than a substantive kind.

In Hegel's pre-*Phenomenology* writings during his Jena period, the motif of struggle associated with Mastery and Slavery appears in various places and with, seemingly, a range of different issues in mind.<sup>14</sup> A generalisation across such unfinished and, so to say, conceptually overdetermined material is risky but, if one were attempted, it might be that the passages concerned see life-and-death struggle as a blind alley, a *cul de sac*, a route which is to be avoided: the lesson which the passages teach is that an alternative must be found. In his Jena lectures of 1803-4 and 1805-6, Hegel takes – it is true – life-and-death struggle to embody 'contradiction':<sup>15</sup> but the chief connotation of *contradiction* in the passages concerned is *impasse*. There is little suggestion that life-and-death struggle is productive of a fresh dialectical step.

In the *Phenomenology's* discussion of life-and-death struggle, everything is different. There, struggle leads to one-sided recognition and one-sided-recognition is the first phase of history itself. Far from counting as a *cul de sac* which leads nowhere, the struggle is the beginning of a history that from the Ancient Greek *polis* to the French Revolutionary 'sunburst' (PS 11) which illumines Hegel's own work. Hegel's pre-*Phenomenology* passages on Master-Slave struggle do, indeed, touch on on the theme of social beginnings.<sup>16</sup> However, it is in the *Phenomenology* that a connection between beginnings and Master-Slave struggle is brought centre-stage.

On the basis of such reflections, an objection to Hegel's line of thought may be answered. The objection that I have in mind is one of a general and, so to say, "non-specialist" kind. Why (it may be asked) should Hegel dwell upon a *struggle* which leads to *Mastery and Slavery*? Why not theorise in terms where notions of agreement and co-operation a central place? My suggestion that (in the *Phenomenology*) Master-Slave struggle *begins history* provides an answer to such questions. For Hegel, life-and-death struggle and the one-sided recognition of Mastery and Slavery are, precisely, the beginning rather than the ending of development. They are what, over thousands of years of history, humanity struggles to overcome. Insofar as contradictory contradictory recognition (of whatever kind) is still present, we drag the

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14 See G.W.F Hegel *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York 1979) pp. 125, 136-9, 235-40; L. Rauch *Hegel and the Human Spirit: A translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6) with commentary* (Detroit: Wayne University Press 1983) pp. 110-8.

15 *System* p. 239; Rauch p. 112.

16 See, in this connection, Hegel's references to a 'state of nature' at Rauch pp. 110-1.



weight of this beginning behind us. Only in the light of mutual recognition does the normative landscape become clear.

### III

The third section of the present notes resumes a detailed or close-up focus on the *Phenomenology's* Master-Slave scenario. More specifically, the section asks how what I have termed an “all-important” moment in the scenario is to be envisaged.

The moment is that when, in course of life-and-death struggle, one self-consciousness experiences 'absolute fear' – and submits, thus bringing the one-sided and unequal relation of Master and Slave into existence. The larger significance of the moment is that recognition *per se* is brought into existence – to be sure, recognition in a contradicted and “alienated” form. And the beginning of recognition is the beginning of history: once one-sided and unequal recognition comes into being, the “work” of transforming alienated recognition into mutual recognition gets under way.

The significance of the moment is, let us agree, considerable. But, in the flurry of events involving the victor's murderous gaze and the vanquished self-consciousness's 'absolute fear', what exactly has taken place? What has happened, which allows the Slave-to-be to submit and history (as a history of recognition) to begin?

In terms of the history of philosophy, if there is something innovative in my interpretation of the *Phenomenology's* Master-Slave section it lies in the circumstance that it turns to the existential notion of a gaze or 'look [*regard*]'<sup>17</sup> – as distinct from the Kojevian notion of desire that is 'anthropogenetic'<sup>18</sup> – for an account of recognition's beginning.<sup>19</sup> Turning from *seeing* (in a desiring fashion) to *being seen* (in a murderous fashion), my suggested interpretation avoids the aura of quasi-aristocratic heroics which, tinged by absurdity, clings to a desire-for-recognition reading. The line of argument which I ascribe to Hegel is attractive not least because it avoids both absurdity and vicious circularity.<sup>20</sup> On its own, however, an answer

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17 J.-P. Sartre *Being and Nothingness* (London: Methuen 1957) Part Three, ch. 1, section IV (pp. 252-302).

18 See, for example, Kojève *Introduction* p. 6.

19 Does my invocation of a gaze or look involve a return to Fichte's notion of a 'summons [*Aufforderung*]' (J.G. Fichte *Foundations of Natural Right*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 31)? My answer is that this is not the case. Fichte's notion of a 'summons' presupposes the idea of recognition (with the consequence that his conception of recognition as kick-started through a 'summons' is viciously circular). The gaze or look which I ascribe to Hegel's Master-to-be presupposes solely desire for the other's death.

20 Hegel's comments on the quasi-aristocratic (but, in the early nineteenth century still fashionable) practice of duelling are interesting in this connection. His argument is that, because he describes a life-and-death struggle that is pre-recognitive (or takes place 'in the natural state'), no approval of duelling is implied in what he says (see *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* para. 432: *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1971, p. 172). Seen in terms of my suggested interpretation, Hegel is drawing a distinction between life-and-death struggle which does not presuppose recognition (but, on the contrary, brings recognition into existence) and duelling which

couched in terms of the history of philosophy is insufficient. To address the questions just raised, we must ask how, phenomenologically, the gaze is received.

Let us return to the situation which, I have suggested, Hegel asks us to imagine. The self-consciousness who will become Master raises what is intended as a death-blow and, at the same time, transfixes the Slave-to-be with a look – a look in which *nothing other than the death of the Slave-to-be* is to be seen.<sup>21</sup> How, in this situation, may we picture the visual field of the Slave-to-be? Most of this field is filled by third-person or, so to say, experientially neutral objects: such objects make up the perceptual *ground* against which there stands out the *figure* of the victorious self-consciousness's eyes.<sup>22</sup> The eyes stand out as a focused-upon *figure* because this sector of the vanquished self-consciousness's visual field, and this alone, has more than a third-person significance: it, and it alone, addresses the Slave-to-be in a first-person sense. And the topic of the eyes' address is, for the Slave-to-be, momentous in its import: nothing less than the Slave-to-be's death<sup>23</sup> forms part of what he or she sees. The response on the part of the Slave-to-be is no less dramatic: what is triggered by an experience of death, the 'absolute master' (*PS* 194 and 593), is – as we have seen – absolute fear. To absolute fear we now turn.

In the *Phenomenology's* Master-Slave section, Hegel is careful to distinguish instrumental or, so to say, prudence-inducing fear on the one side from absolute fear on the other:<sup>24</sup> 'this consciousness [the consciousness of the vanquished Slave-to-be] has been been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or in odd moments, but its whole being [*ganzes Wesen*] has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death... In that experience, it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being...' (*PS* 194). For Hegel, this experience (which the Slave-to-be undergoes but which the Master-to-be lacks) is educative and leads on to further dialectical developments. What lessons may fear teach? In the case of *instrumental* fear, an answer to this question is straightforward: such fear stimulates a process of trial and error. In the case of *absolute* fear, an answer is less certain but a suggestion may be hazarded: such fear teaches self-awareness.

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presupposes consciousness of what recognition is.

- 21 Although convenient in the present circumstances, there is a sense in which the terms “Slave-to-be” and “Master-to-be” are misleading. They may wrongly suggest that a Slave or a Master has, prior to recognition, a naturally “slavish” or “masterful” identity. Kojève correctly emphasises that no such essentialism is to be found in Hegel: 'For nothing *pre-disposes* the future Master to Mastery, just as nothing *pre-disposes* the future Slave to Slavery; each can (freely) *create* himself as Master or Slave... Now, the *free* act is by definition “undeducible” (*Introduction* p. 43). My reference, in the paragraphs introducing these notes, to a self-consciousness who 'slips and tumbles' attempts to take Kojève's point on board: which self-consciousness counts as “Slave-to-be” and which as “Master-to-be” is a product of fortuitous circumstances.
- 22 For discussion of *figure* and *ground*, see W. Kohler *Gestalt Psychology* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation 1947).
- 23 A reader of these notes may ask: is it the *death* or, merely, the *intended death* which forms part of the vanquished self-consciousness's visual field? If (following Sartre *et al.*) an intention is seen as ek-statically reaching out ahead of itself towards its object, the difference is immaterial.
- 24 Hobbes's *Leviathan*, we may say in passing, does not sufficiently distinguish between instrumental and absolute fear: a generalised notion of *fear of violent death* does duty for both. Oddly, Strauss's study of Hobbes – referred to in note 2, above – does not pick up on the distinction.

We may now put together the two halves – murderous intent and absolute fear – of the picture which, I have suggested, Hegel presents. When the 'unmanned', or absolutely fearful, Slave-to-be gazes into the victor's eyes, he or she experiences a moment of self-awareness that encompasses his or her 'whole being'. Stated differently, the Slave-to-be learns what he or she is. The self-awareness concerned does not, we may note, come from a turn to introspection. On the contrary, it arises from acknowledging what the victor's eyes contain.

It is at this point in reconstructing the detail of the *Phenomenology's* argument that we appreciate why *death* and *mortal intent* play so prominent a part in Hegel's discussion. Because the intent imagined by Hegel is murderous, and because nothing short of death is at issue, whatever it is that counts as the vanquished self-consciousness's being or essence (*Wesen*) is thrown into relief.

How should this *throwing into relief* be pictured? It may, I suggest, be viewed in two fashions – here labelled (i) and (ii). Hegel's remaining argument on life-and-death struggle unfolds differently, depending on whether (i) or (ii) is selected. In both cases, however, the outcome is the same.

(i) The Slave-to-be may be pictured as comparing *the world in which he or she exists* with *the world in which he or she is non-existent* – having looked into the victor's eyes, he or she knows both of these things – and, subtracting the former from the latter, arriving at a conception of himself/herself. The line of argument which then unfolds depends on two circumstances. One is that the Slave-to-be who has performed the act of subtraction is aware of him or herself not merely in part but *in toto*: the awareness concerned is an awareness of his or her 'whole being'. The other is that, as the present notes have indicated, Hegel thinks of self-consciousness not merely as *desiring* being but as being who *recognizes* (and *is recognized*).<sup>25</sup> Taking these circumstances together, the Slave-to-be comes to awareness of his or her cognitive abilities.

(ii) The Slave-to-be may be pictured as becoming aware that he or she is mortal. He or she comes to this awareness by reading, from the other's eyes, what the victorious self-consciousness intends. Now comes the crucial step in this second line of argument: one's own mortality is something that we learn from another person. For a self-consciousness which saw itself in purely solipsistic or monological terms, the proposition "Death only happens to other people!" could never (for evident reasons) be disconfirmed. We learn about our mortality because others tell us about it and, in so doing, introduce us into a dialogical and cognitive world. Just such a learning-experience is, in effect, made available by the death-intending Master-to-be to the self-consciousness who will become Slave. Although the Master-to-be has no thought of dispensing education, cognitive existence is something which the Slave-to-be learns.

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<sup>25</sup> 'Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being recognized [*es ist nur als ein Anerkanntes*]' (PS 178).

Whether the first or the second line of thought is followed, in other words, the Slave-to-be is in a position to halt combat by calling “I submit!” He or she is in a position to employ *words* and, thence, to offer recognition. In the nature of the case, the recognition can only be one-sided and unequal – as section II has stressed. With the cry of submission uttered by the Slave-to-be, history – a history of recognition's alienation – comes into being.

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Does my attempted reconstruction of what I have termed the “all-important” moment in the Master-Slave scenario carry conviction? Have I succeeded in presenting the victorious self-consciousness's gaze and the vanquished self-consciousness's fear in terms where awareness of cognitive capacities is the result? However this may be, a reader sympathetic to my comments may feel that a further question must be addressed.

If valid, my comments explain why the self-consciousness-who-will-become-Slave is able to offer recognition (thereby launching one-sided and unequal recognition on its historical course). But why, it may be asked, is the self-consciousness-who-will-become-Master able to accept this offer? The question is difficult to answer because, when the offer is made, the Master-to-be exists at the level of desire – and recognition is, for him or her, an unknown idea or term. When the self-consciousness-who-becomes-Slave utters the words “I submit!”, how can the self-consciousness-who-becomes-Master understand what is said?

For the offer of recognition to be intelligible, it must be an offer which itself *educates* its recipient about recognition. Is this possible? I propose that, in the situation envisaged by Hegel, there is a sense in which this is the case. The Master-to-be may understand the offer of (one-sided) recognition made by the Slave-to-be because *what the cry of recognition promises is merely that the Master-to-be's desires will in every case be fulfilled*. What is promised to the Master and what is desired by the Master are one and the same.<sup>26</sup> The self-consciousness who becomes Slave makes, in effect, the one offer to which the desiring Master may respond. History opens with an offer – the one and only offer – which the victorious self-consciousness is unable to refuse.

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26 See *PS* 190, on the significance (for the Master) of the Slave's labour.

The present notes do not argue for a specific interpretation of Hegel but suggest how such an interpretation may be followed through. Their aim is to trace, in outline, a pattern of thought. Attempting to meet this aim involves confronting issues which the pattern makes crucial – and it is in this spirit that questions raised in section III are addressed.

On one score, the notes have an undeniable implication. It is sometimes maintained<sup>27</sup> that a reading of Hegel which takes the *Phenomenology's* Master-Slave section as its starting point is tied to an antagonistic – and thereby, in terms employed here, a contradicted or alienated – conception of recognition. The chief lesson of my notes is that such a claim is mistaken. Sections I and II show how exploration of themes in the Master-Slave section can be unfolded into a Hegelianism where mutual recognition takes central place.

1 September 2012

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<sup>27</sup> Say, by Williams in his *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* pp. 10-3, 366-80. In effect, Williams sees a Kojeveian approach as endorsing Sartre's view (in his *Being and Nothingness* p. 364) that 'Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others'.