

THE TRANSITION FROM ‘DESIRE’ TO ‘RECOGNITION’ IN HEGEL’S *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

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In the fourth chapter of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which deals with ‘self-consciousness’, Hegel gives two categories especial prominence: ‘desire [*Begierde*]’ and ‘recognition [*Anerkennung*]’. My aim here is to explore Hegel’s transition from the one category to the other. More specifically, my aim is to explore paragraph 175 of the *Phenomenology* where a line of thought leading from the *category of desire* to the *category of recognition* is traced. The importance of the paragraph has been acknowledged – directly or indirectly – by a range of commentators (e.g. Kojeve 1969 p 5; Hyppolite 1974 pp 162-3; Williams 1992 p 146; Harris 1997, 1, pp 331-2; Stern 2002 pp 73-4). Here, I attempt to unpack issues and difficulties that arise when *PS* 175 is examined in a (relatively) detailed way.

Hegel’s discussion in *PS* 175 falls into two distinct sections, the latter taking as its starting-point the conclusion that the former has reached. In the first section of the paragraph, Hegel notes limitations that he sees as intrinsic to the idea of desire. These limitations having been indicated, the latter section presents an argument that carries a reader towards territory where (as *PS* 178 makes explicit) issues concerning ‘recognition’ are in play. This argument is my main focus of attention in the present paper. After some preliminary comments, which supply background, I give an account of Hegel’s points regarding desire and its limitations. Then I comment on the puzzling and complex argument through which Hegel introduces the theme of recognition. I maintain that Hegel’s argument turns on his understanding of the *experience of being desired*, and that the notion of a *desire for*

recognition – emphasised by Kojève – leaves the challenge of Hegel’s discussion unclear.

1. *Background*

Some general comment on terms is necessary, in order to establish a framework for discussion.

By ‘self-consciousness’ – so I suggest – Hegel does not mean *consciousness of consciousness* but something closer to *human individuality*. ‘A self-consciousness’ (e.g. *PS* 177) is, in his usage, an individual human being. Chapter 4 of the *Phenomenology* starts by exploring self-consciousness insofar as it is ‘*desire* in general’ (*PS* 167). Then it goes on to consider self-consciousness insofar as it is *recognitive* (*PS* 178-84). For the purposes of the present discussion, extensive comment on Hegel’s term *desire* is unnecessary. A desiring ‘subject’, according to Hegel, views itself as confronting a desired ‘object’: satisfaction is obtained, when the object is made to serve the subject’s wants or needs. Satisfaction may be such that it ‘destroys the independent object’ (*PS* 174) – as when food is consumed. Hegel’s term *recognition* may, likewise, be commented upon in a sketchy manner. What is important to grasp is that ‘recognition’ is linked to the notion of intersubjective action – or *interaction*, for short – and that self-consciousness (or human individuality) exists in an interactive way. In the course of interaction, self-consciousnesses *recognize* one another in this or that fashion, and their identity as individuals depends on how they are *recognized*, or *acknowledged*, or *seen*. Self-consciousness, says Hegel ‘exists only in being recognized’ (*PS* 178): one implication of his statement is that individual identity is *at issue without remainder* in interaction’s play. Hegelian ‘recognition’ is not merely *cognitive* but *constitutive*, in the sense that a process of interaction impinges on who and what we are.

In the light of these comments on Hegel’s usage, some more general observations can be made. One is that, whereas the conceptual world of desire is “monological”, recognition goes forward in “dialogical” terms. The notion of desire suggests the model of a solitary subject confronting a solitary object. In contrast, the notion of recognition presupposes a world where ‘human plurality’ (Arendt 1958 p 175) obtains. A further observation is that the conceptual world of desire imposes limits on freedom (for reasons that will become apparent presently). The conceptual world of recognition

is, by contrast, one where freedom reigns. General observations of this sort raise (to be sure) numerous questions, but I include them here to indicate the conceptual context in which my discussion takes place.

2. *Desire's limitations (first section of PS 175)*

In the opening paragraphs of *Phenomenology* chapter 4, Hegel examines the notion of desire. Having introduced the idea of desire in general terms (PS 167), he discusses the *desired object* and the *desiring subject* in turn (PS 168-72, 173-4). He then (at the start of PS 175) notes limitations that he takes to be intrinsic to the idea of desire *per se*. Taking his account of desire's limitations as his point of departure, he proceeds (in the latter half of PS 175) to set out the argument that mainly concerns us. Here, I comment on Hegel's account of the limits that are (in his view) intrinsic to what desire may achieve.

Limits to what desire may achieve become evident, according to Hegel, when the relation between *desire* and *freedom* is considered. Hegel argues that desired objects count as obstacles to freedom in virtue of the 'independence' that they possess. Why the 'independence' of desired objects should count as obstacles to freedom need not be explored in detail here. Roughly, Hegel thinks of *freedom* as *self-determination*, and he considers that a *dependent* being is a being that fails to determine itself in a consistent way. Such a being may, indeed, determine itself but only in a contradictory or "alienated" way. *Desiring* being remains dependent on its object, insofar as the desired object counts as 'independent'. To the extent that the desired object retains its 'independence', freedom (in the sense of full self-determination) remains beyond desiring being's reach.

Hegel's discussion in the first half of PS 175 concentrates on the deep-seated and, indeed, irremovable nature of the 'independence' that (in his view) desired objects possess. A desired object (he considers) retains its 'independence' even in cases where gratification has been attained: 'in this satisfaction', he says, 'experience' makes self-consciousness 'aware that the object has its own independence' (PS 175). The object retains its 'independence' even in cases where – as in the example of food – satisfaction destroys the object (see PS 174). A desired object remains 'independent' in such circumstances, for the straightforward reason that hunger (for example) may be satisfied only when *food* is available. Hegel

stresses the continuing ‘independence’ of the desired object for much the same reason as Freud stipulates a *reality principle*: whether or not desire is satisfied, and whatever form satisfaction may take, what is ‘agreeable’ may *or may not* coincide with what is ‘real’ (Freud 1984 p 37). A further twist that Hegel gives to this line of thought is that, in at any rate some cases of desire, satisfaction ‘produces the [desired] object again, and the desire as well’ (PS 175). For example: one *eats* only to *become hungry*, and to *eat* again. In such cases, desire and satisfaction have a cyclical character and the desiring subject’s continuing dependence on the desired object is plain.

What follows from Hegel’s reflections on the ‘independence’ of the desired object? Their implications are dramatic: they tell us that, if we (as human individuals) were merely *desiring* beings, an uncontradicted or non-alienated freedom would be forever beyond our reach. Even if all our desires were satisfied – even if we lived in a Land of Cokayne – we would not determine ourselves in a full and free way. Most frequently, arguments against the idea of a Land of Cokayne have turned on questions of practicability. Hegel’s argument is different. A Land of Cokayne may or may not be practicable but, for reasons that are intrinsic to the nature of desire, it is not yet a land of freedom.

3. *From desire to recognition (second section of PS 175)*

Hegel’s reflections on the desired object’s ‘independence’ appear to have lead self-consciousness to an impasse, at any rate so far as the attainment of non-alienated freedom is concerned. Can this impasse be removed? Can we find a line of argument that – leading beyond what Stern terms ‘the difficulty faced by desire’ (Stern 2002 p 73) – indicates how freedom may exist, in a way that does not contradict or undermine itself? Hegel’s argument in the latter half of PS 175 suggests a way in which this may be the case. To this argument I now turn.

In the latter half of his paragraph, Hegel takes as his conceptual base-line the problems that he has identified concerning the ‘independence of the [desired] object’ (PS 175). On account of these problems, he explains, self-consciousness

can achieve satisfaction only when the
object itself effects the negation within

itself; and it must carry out this negation of itself in itself, for it is *in itself* the negative, and must be *for* the other what it is (loc. cit.).

Self-consciousness can, in Hegel's view, avoid difficulties concerning the desired object's 'independence': it can do so *when*, and *only when*, it encounters an 'object' that 'is, in its own self, negation' (loc. cit.). *How* an encounter with such an 'object' may circumvent these difficulties, and *what sort* of 'negation' may be involved, are – we may concede – issues that may strike a reader as obscure. I shall return to them later in my discussion. Here, I turn directly to the argument's conclusion. In the final line of *PS* 175, Hegel states that '*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*' (loc. cit.). The emphasis in this remark is Hegel's own. Its significance is that, by introducing the idea of desire for '*another self-consciousness*', the line of thought that Hegel is following has reached the terrain of intersubjective and "dialogical" existence where recognition obtains.

Although we have not yet attempted to reconstruct *PS* 175 in step-by-step detail, a reader may be helped by a comment on the paragraph's position in the argument of the *Phenomenology* as a whole. In Hegel's complex discussion, *PS* 175 stands out because it carries a reader from "monological" issues concerning desire to "dialogical" issues concerning intersubjectivity (and thereby recognition). The transition from monological to dialogical issues represents, in Hegel's own word, a 'turning-point [*Wendungspunkt*]' (*PS* 177) in his book. As we have seen, Hegel concedes that desire (when taken on its own) falls short of freedom. The question that he raises in the remainder of the *Phenomenology* is whether recognition will succeed, where desire (on its own) has failed.

4. *Hegel's argument in PS 175 reconstructed*

A reader who has attempted to make detailed sense of *PS* 175 may respond differently to its two main sections. The paragraph's *first* section, on desire's limitations, may or may not strike a reader as convincing; but he or she is unlikely to experience serious difficulty in following what Hegel says. The paragraph's *second* section is, by contrast, likely to leave a reader – at any rate, a first-time reader – with an impression of confusion. A reader may

gather that Hegel invokes intersubjectivity, and that he does so because (in some fashion) intersubjectivity overcomes problems concerning the desired object. To quote Stern again, the ‘difficulty faced by desire’ is resolved when ‘the single self-conscious sees the world as containing *other* self-consciousnesses’ (Stern 2002 p 73). The presence of ‘*other* self-consciousnesses’ is relevant to problems concerning desire because, in their absence, a self-consciousness might ‘find itself’ – or achieve uncontradicted freedom – only by ‘negating the world’ (Stern 2002 p 74). A reader of the second part of *PS* 175 may sense something of this, but the steps which have lead Hegel to his conclusion that intersubjectivity is the answer – ‘*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*’ – are apt to remain mysterious and unclear.

I suggest that Hegel’s argument in the latter part of *PS* 175 may be reconstructed as follows:

- As we have seen, desired objects count (for Hegel) as obstacles to freedom. This is so, in virtue of the ‘independence’ that they possess.
- This is the case with desired objects in general, but (we may ask) is it true without exception? Is it true of *all* desired objects?
- In the latter half of *PS* 175, Hegel identifies a group of objects that count as exceptional in the required sense.
- The objects are ones which are not *destroyed*, or *negated*, by desire and its satisfaction. They are ones which, on the contrary, carry out their *own* negation within *themselves* (*PS* 175). They are objects that posit their own ‘otherness’ – or independence – as a ‘nothingness’ (*PS* 176).
- Can such objects be found?
- They can: *human individuals* (or, in Hegel’s terminology, *self-consciousnesses*) are objects of the requisite kind. Self-conscious being contains ‘absolute negation’ (*PS* 175), and as such is able to negate itself. Stating the same thought in different terms: human individuals may (unlike “natural” objects) *abnegate* – or *efface*, or *renounce* – their own independence. In Hegel’s view, a human being (a “self-consciousness”) may

be an object that ‘effects the negation [of its independence] within itself’ (PS 175).

- The conclusion of Hegel’s argument may be stated as follows: *if the object of desire is another human being, and if the desired human being abnegates him or herself*, then – on condition that both of these requirements are met – a desired object need not count as an obstacle to self-consciousness’s freedom.

- Hegel summarises this conclusion in his statement: ‘*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*’.

In proposing this stage-by-stage reconstruction of Hegel’s argument, my aim is not (I must emphasise) to resolve *difficulties of substance* or *difficulties of interpretation* at a stroke. It is to suggest a starting point from which a discussion of difficulties may begin.

Turning to such discussion, I note (in sections 5 and 6 of my paper) two seemingly knock-down objections to Hegel’s argument. Next, in sections 7 and 8, I consider ways in which Hegel’s argument might be said to prepare the ground for the idea of recognition.

5. *First objection: is Hegel’s argument obnoxious?*

A first difficulty with Hegel’s argument is one that may have occurred to a reader: Hegel’s argument, as summarised above, has a politically unpleasant ring. Hegel argues – or appears to argue – that problems with desire are avoided, on condition that desire’s object is *another human being* and on condition that the desired human being *abnegates* (or *renounces*) his or her independence. A reader may object that, even if problems concerning desire may be solved in this manner, the solution’s human cost is too high to pay. Hegel’s argument (as reconstructed above) appears to endorse the idea of a predatory or competitive *struggle* wherein self-consciousnesses seek freedom and independence at one another’s expense. Self-consciousnesses either prey on other *already submissive* self-consciousnesses, or attempt to force not-yet-submissive self-consciousnesses into a posture of abnegation. The envisaged struggle is likely to be an *endless* one because – as Hobbes observed in a not-dissimilar context – individuals are roughly equal in their

powers; and because each self-consciousness is playing for the same high stakes. If the conflict does have an end, this is only in the unlikely event that a single self-consciousness has succeeded in dominating (or deluding) all the others. An end to the struggle is as unacceptable as the struggle itself.

Later in my discussion, I suggest how an objection along these lines may be answered. I also comment (very briefly) on the relation between Hobbes and Hegel, an issue that my statement of the objection has raised.

6. *Second objection: does Hegel's argument fail?*

A second difficulty concerns not an implication of Hegel's argument but a lapse, or seeming weakness, in the argument itself. Measured against the claim that Hegel raises, does the argument of *PS 175* work?

Hegel's chief claim in *PS 175* is that, under certain circumstances, the 'independence' of the desired object does not contract the freedom of the desiring subject. The conditions that must be fulfilled, in order to secure this outcome, are (a) that desire is *desire for another self-consciousness* and (b) that desire meets with a self-negating (or self-abnegating) response. Harris (we may note in passing) refers to conditions (a) and (b) in his lengthy commentary on the *Phenomenology*: self-consciousness – he says – achieves satisfaction only from another self-consciousness, and 'if Desire is to be satisfied spontaneously... then the other self-consciousness must negate itself voluntarily' (Harris 1997, 1, p 332). For us, the question is whether *even if Hegel's conditions are fulfilled* the freedom of self-consciousness exists in an uncontradicted way. Is Hegel's chief claim in *PS 175* valid? At first sight, we may doubt whether this is the case.

Hegel's chief claim fails (so it may be objected) for the straightforward reason that, although self-abnegating objects may be *desired*, self-abnegating objects may not *exist*. If they do exist, they may not be *found*. A *desiring subject* remains dependent on a *desired object*, whether or not the object is one that (voluntarily or spontaneously) negates itself. Hegel's argument does not show that, if conditions (a) and (b) are fulfilled, the desiring subject avoids heteronomy. It shows that the desiring subject *depends on the desired object*, precisely so that conditions (a) and (b) might be met. In *PS 175*, Hegel refers to an object that 'effects the negation [of its independence] within itself'; but – we may object – such a reference has no

bearing whatsoever on questions concerning the desired object's 'independence'. What Stern terms the 'difficulty faced by desire' remains a difficulty. To express the same point in Freud's terminology, introduced earlier: a *reality principle* continues to operate whether or not the desired object is another self-consciousness, and whether or not the desired self-consciousness behaves in a submissive way. Hegel – in sum – argues as though *abnegation on the part of the desired object* ensures *independence on the part of the desiring subject*. However, he gives us no reason to endorse the assumption that he makes.

Must we conclude, from these comments, that Hegel's argument in *PS* 175 is straightforwardly mistaken? I return to this potentially damaging objection later.

7. Hegel's argument and intersubjectivity

A further difficulty with Hegel's argument is that its relation to the idea of recognition seems difficult to pin down. Hegel first refers to 'recognition' explicitly in *PS* 178, and – we have suggested – his argument in *PS* 175 prepares the way for recognition as the *Phenomenology's* next major theme. But how, precisely, does the argument that we have presented do this? Are there general concepts that point forward to the theme of recognition? Or is there a specific point in Hegel's argument where *recognition as an issue for self-consciousness* first appears?

In Hegel's argument, as summarised above, a general concept that points forward to recognition can readily be found. The concept concerned is *intersubjectivity*. Hegel (it may be suggested) pictures intersubjectivity as a stepping stone, or conceptual half-way-house, between the categories of 'desire' and 'recognition'. Although he nowhere explicitly employs the term *intersubjectivity*, he values the line of thought followed in *PS* 175 because it brings the idea of intersubjectivity into view. Such an answer to our questions is attractive, because recognition involves intersubjective existence and because the idea of intersubjectivity is emphasised – in substance, if not in name – by Hegel himself. We may see how this is so.

When Hegel states at the end of *PS* 175 that '*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*', his meaning is that self-consciousnesses – in the plural – exist in an intersubjective way. His

meaning is that, through intersubjectivity, self-consciousnesses count as *desired objects* and *desiring subjects* at the same time. Kojève's description of desire for '*another self-consciousness*' as desire for 'another Desire' (Kojève 1969 p 7) neatly brings out the intersubjectivity, or reciprocity, that Hegel has in mind.

In the *Phenomenology's* next paragraph but one, Hegel emphasises the idea of intersubjectivity still more forcefully. 'A self-consciousness [he tells us] exists *for a self-consciousness*. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness' (PS 177). His meaning is that a self-consciousness exists for *another* self-consciousness: it exists in an intersubjective sense. Self-consciousness comes into its own, he explains, when an 'I that is we and We that is I' is attained (loc. cit.). Williams, who quotes from PS 177, stresses the centrality of what he terms the 'interhuman' in Hegel's thinking; for Hegel, he concludes, the self 'discovers itself only through the recognition of others' (Williams 1992 pp 73, 89-90, 146). Hegel's formulations in PS 177 underline the significance of intersubjectivity – or interhumanity – in the transition from desire to recognition.

This said, it may be asked whether we do full justice to Hegel's argument when we single out the general idea of intersubjectivity as its key theme. Hegel does indeed draw attention to the idea of intersubjectivity in PS 175 (and in PS 177), but – as we have seen – he does so in the course of an argument that refers to a number of specific issues. Rather than presenting intersubjectivity merely as a general idea, he asks his readers to consider *desire for another self-consciousness* and the *abnegation* (or *self-abnegation*) with which such desire may be met. Why should he do this? Does he regard *desire for another self-consciousness* and *abnegation* as illustrations of intersubjectivity-in general? Such a suggestion seems to get the balance of Hegel's argument wrong, not least because it remains silent on the contentious nature (see section 5) of the "illustrations" that Hegel provides. What does Hegel intend, when he refers to (specifically) *desire for another self-consciousness* and *abnegation*? Why *these* illustrations? One possibility is that, when he refers to *desire for another self-consciousness* and *abnegation*, Hegel is attempting to identify a process through which recognition comes into being.

8. Hegel's argument and desire for recognition

A possibility of this latter kind is explored in the opening pages of Kojeve's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. As a run-up to his discussion of the *Phenomenology's* vivid "Master-and-Slave" section (PS 185-96), Kojeve offers an account of how the transition from 'desire' to 'recognition' takes place. Hegel's "Master-and-Slave" section – which describes a 'life-and-death struggle', followed by submission and a form of recognition that is 'one-sided and unequal' (PS 187, 191) – is not our present concern. However, the issues addressed by Kojeve are interrelated.

We have noted that Kojeve construes *desire for another self-consciousness* as *desire for another desire*. Our next step in following his line of thought is to observe that, in his view, *desire for another self-consciousness* (or *desire for another desire*) either *is*, or *involves*, 'desire "for recognition"' (Kojeve 1969 p 7). In Kojeve's view, the expressions *desire for another self-consciousness* and *desire for recognition* refer to the same thing. Above, we have asked whether there is a specific point in Hegel's argument where recognition becomes an issue for self-consciousness. If *desire for another self-consciousness* is *desire for recognition*, Hegel's first mention of *desire for another self-consciousness* is the point in his argument where the issue of recognition appears.

In regard to Kojeve's interpretation of the *Phenomenology's* section on Master and Slave, two points may be noted. One is that the life-and-death struggle, to which Hegel refers, is seen by Kojeve as an account of how human history – a history of recognitive formations – makes its beginning. In and through the fight that results in Mastery and Slavery, recognition *becomes an issue for self-consciousness*; and (through the submission of one self-consciousness to another) the first *recognitive relation* appears. This relation counts as a recognitive relation, however one-sided – and thereby contradictory – the recognition may be. In Kojeve's view, such recognition is the first step in a history that leads to the equal and unconstrained recognition of Hegel's own French Revolutionary day.

Kojeve's linking of the Master-Slave section to the theme of historical beginning – or of 'origin' (Kojeve 1969 pp 7, 43) – is one which in broad terms I endorse (although I do not explore arguments for and against this interpretation here). My second point is more specific, and more critical of Kojeve's claims. On Kojeve's reading, the underlying motive of the life-and-death struggle discussed by Hegel is *desire for recognition*. The struggle itself is described by Kojeve as a fight 'for "recognition"' and 'for pure

prestige' (Kojève 1969 p 7; see pp 11-2, 41). We may ask whether this description of Hegel's life-and-death struggle is textually justified (*PS* 186-7). More seriously, we may note that such a description threatens to betray Hegel into difficulties of a substantive kind. If the life-and-death struggle is a struggle *for recognition*, then recognition is an *issue for self-consciousness* before the struggle takes place. Strictly speaking, it cannot be *the struggle* that first brings the issue of recognition to light. If *desire for recognition* is made the key to the Master-and-Slave section, then one of two consequences follows. Either Hegel's grasp on the question of recognition's origins is weakened, or the Master-Slave dialectic presupposes what is supposed to be its result.

Similar problems arise if (following Kojève) we construe *desire for another self-consciousness* as *desire for recognition*. If desire for another self-consciousness *is* desire for recognition, or *involves* desire for recognition, the notion of recognition is either *defined in terms of desire* or left unexplained. Recognition may, indeed, be *something that is desired*. However, if we are to get clear on the nature of such desire, we need to have a clear picture of 'recognition' (rather than attempting to unfold 'recognition' from the category of desire *per se*). Kojève's weakness, in his discussion of the Master-Slave struggle and in his account of *desire for another self-consciousness*, is that he introduces the idea of recognition prematurely. He runs the risk of presupposing the recognition whose origin he aims to make clear.

9. *From desire to recognition? From recognition to desire?*

In sections 7 and 8 of my discussion, I explored ways in which Hegel's argument might be said to prepare the ground for the idea of recognition. First, I commented on the suggestion that *intersubjectivity* is an idea which holds 'desire' and 'recognition' together. (I responded to the suggestion by noting that, although Hegel does emphasise intersubjectivity, his argument is more specific in its nature.) Next, I commented on Kojève's suggestion that *desire for recognition* is the key to the argument which Hegel presents. (I responded by noting that, if *desire for recognition* is the key to the *origin of recognition*, Hegel's argument threatens to become circular.) Where does all of this leave us? Can Hegel's argument be interpreted, in a way that makes its relation to the idea of recognition clear? Can this be done whilst, at the same time, avoiding what appear to be knock-down objections?

In the remainder of my paper, I suggest an interpretation that allows Hegel's argument to be defended. My first step is to clear the conceptual ground, and this I do by contrasting two fashions in which the idea of a *transition* from 'desire' to 'recognition' might be seen. The contrast that I draw is, I note, purely conceptual and "ideal-typical".

The contrasting views that I refer to are rooted in distinctive conceptions of how 'desire' and 'recognition' are related. On the one hand, questions about 'recognition' may be seen as *reducible* to questions about 'desire': the category of 'recognition' may be seen as *intelligible in terms of* desire-based action. A transition *from* 'desire' *to* 'recognition' may be pictured as a demonstration that problems of recognition admit of resolution when recast in desire's terms. On the other hand, questions about 'recognition' may be seen as irreducible, and as possessing their own specificity and authenticity. Attempts to understand recognition in terms of desire may be seen as entailing distortion or evasion. According to this latter conception of the desire/recognition relation, a transition *from* 'desire' *to* 'recognition' is a demonstration that there are issues which (on its own) the notion of desire is powerless to reach.

Which view of the transition from 'desire' to 'recognition' is Hegel's? In 1959, J. N. Findlay remarked that Hegelian 'dialectical movement' from one category to another is 'not inference, but deepening of what has gone before' (Findlay 1963 p 225). Most present-day commentators on Hegel would agree with Findlay that, just as it is not 'inference', so also it is not (merely) conceptual reduction. Hegelian transitions do not resolve new topics into already-established categories, but introduce fresh categories that deepen understanding of the topics concerned. If this is so, our task becomes that of discovering how, in *PS* 175, the ground is prepared for 'recognition' as an irreducibly new term.

Are there theorists who (although they may not see themselves as Hegelians) regard desire and recognition in one or other of the ways just distinguished? A contrast between approaches in twentieth and twenty-first century social and political theory may, perhaps, be mapped on to the contrast that I have drawn. The mapping is the more convincing if we note that Hegel's comments on 'work' in the *Phenomenology* (*PS* 194-6) touch on the idea of *instrumentality*. Hegel portrays 'work' as action which aims to satisfy desire but where, however, desire is 'held in check' (*PS* 195). Work

is ‘formative activity [*Bilden*]’ (PS 196) that is disciplined – through fear of the Master – into accepting technical and instrumental controls.

A widespread belief in twentieth and twenty-first century political theory is that terms such as *justice* and *obligation* and *authority* may be analysed into considerations of individual preference and rational choice. The term “rational”, in this connection, refers to the *instrumental* rationality of desire-based action. From the standpoint of the present discussion, such theory echoes the conviction that *recognition is reducible to desire*. Rightly or wrongly, the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* sets his face against reductionism of this kind. As we saw earlier (in section 2, above), the theme of *freedom* is – in Hegel’s view – a casualty if theory goes forward solely in desire-based terms.

In twentieth and twenty-first century theory, a less widespread (but no less insistent) belief is that *recognition is irreducible*. The view that *recognition is irreducible*, and has its own specificity, is echoed in – for example – Habermas’s distinction between *interaction* (linked to a viewpoint of *intersubjective communication*) and *instrumental action* (linked to a viewpoint of *technical control*) (Habermas 1974 p 8). It is echoed in the polemic of “Frankfurt School” critical theory against the hegemony of instrumental or ‘subjective’ reason (Horkheimer 1974 pp 3-5). To give a further instance, it is echoed in Arendt’s view that issues concerning ‘action’ – or *interaction* – are irreducible to issues concerning ‘work’ or ‘labour’ (Arendt 1958 pp 99, 136, 175-9). Habermas and Horkheimer and Arendt supply, in effect, alternative vocabularies in which Hegel’s view of the desire/recognition relation might be expressed.

Where does this mapping of Hegel on to twentieth and twenty-first century approaches leave Kojève? Kojève’s interpretation (discussed above) gives the notion of *desire* a central place: his account takes *desire for recognition* to be the key that unlocks the intelligibility of *recognition* itself. However, Kojève does not consider that *recognition is reducible to desire*; and still less does he emphasise that desire is to be seen in instrumental terms. He describes desire for recognition not as instrumental, but as ‘anthropogenetic’ (Kojève 1969 pp 6-7, 40) – meaning that it brings into existence a range of irreducibly new human and cognitive themes. This said, a reader remains (as we saw in section 8) uncertain about how, precisely, the theme of recognition makes its appearance in Kojève’s account. What Kojève says risks presupposing the theme of recognition

whose origin it was supposed to show. Here, we may suggest that Kojève finds the origin of recognition mysterious because he asks *desire* to make intelligible the *recognition* that he himself wishes to see in irreducible terms.

At the end of section 5, above, I promised (brief) comment on the relation between Hobbesian and Hegelian political theory. In the 1930s, we may note, ‘M. Alexandre Kojevenikoff’ – Kojève – and Leo Strauss planned to ‘undertake a detailed investigation of the relation between Hegel and Hobbes’ (Strauss 1963 p 58). Although Strauss and Kojève corresponded on the topic ‘at length’ (Roth 1988 p 103; see Strauss 2000), the book did not appear. A central issue in the intended comparison appears to have been ‘fear’ – more specifically, ‘fear of violent death’ – as a theme that Hobbes and the Hegel of the Master-Slave dialectic share (Strauss 1963 p 57; see *PS* 194, 196). Here, we may suggest that Hobbes and Hegel respond to the common theme of fear in different fashions, and that behind this difference lies contrasting estimations of the ‘desire’ and ‘recognition’ which are the present paper’s main concern. For Hobbes, an experience of fear leads to *desire* that is calculated instrumentally. For Hegel, an experience of fear (in the course of the ‘life-and-death struggle’ mentioned earlier) leads to submission: in turn, submission – submission of the Slave to the Master – leads on to recognition. Hobbes sees *desire* as the key to political authority (and issues of “recognition”), whereas Hegel sees *recognition* as the larger context in which questions of desire may be viewed. Hobbes – we may say, at the risk of enormous oversimplification – believes that *recognition is reducible to desire* whereas Hegel acknowledges recognition’s specificity.

10. *How Hegel’s argument may be interpreted: preliminary points*

Given all that we have said in the present paper, can Hegel’s argument be rescued? I suggest that it can. Hegel’s argument can be interpreted as an argument that introduces ‘recognition’ as an irreducibly new category. Seemingly knock-down objections can be answered, reliance on the overly general idea of intersubjectivity can be avoided and Kojève’s treacherous notion of *desire for recognition* can be set to one side. The interpretation that I propose is not (to be sure) one that Hegel sets out in detail, but it is one that remains faithful to what we have taken *PS* 175 to say.

A reader’s view of the argument that I ascribe to Hegel will depend on his or her conception of the sort of argument that is appropriate in this case.

The argument that I ascribe to Hegel is *phenomenological*, meaning by this that it focuses on a *practical situation*; more specifically, it focuses on *experience* that is involved if the situation obtains. I suggest (although I do not argue the point here) that this meaning of the term *phenomenological* corresponds to Hegel's own.

Hegel's argument (as summarised in section 4) turns on the fulfilment of two conditions. The conditions are (a) that *the object of desire is another human being* and (b) that *the desired human being abnegates him or herself*. The *practical situation* that Hegel's argument envisages is, I suggest, one where conditions (a) and (b) are met. Stated differently, Hegel's argument starts to appear defensible if conditions (a) and (b) are approached in human and experiential, rather than in abstractly conceptual, terms.

Before approaching Hegel's conditions in this fashion, I offer two preliminary observations. One is that Kojève, whose approach we have discussed, likewise views conditions (a) and (b) as pivotal to Hegel's meaning. He emphasises condition (a) when, as we have seen, he equates *desire for another self-consciousness* with *desire for recognition*. He alludes to condition (b) when he comments that, in the life-and-death struggle leading to Mastery and Slavery, 'one of the adversaries *gives in* to the other and submits to him' (Kojève 1969 p 41). Kojève rightly thinks of the *act of submission* as an *act of self-abnegation*. My strategy in what follows is to prise apart the notions of *desire for another self-consciousness* and *desire for recognition*. Not the *desire for another self-consciousness* but the *response to such desire* is, I suggest, the point at which an account of recognition might begin. Having commented on the notion of *response to desire for another desire*, I suggest how Hegel's conception of *abnegation* (or *submission*) may be seen.

My second point concerns a phrase in Harris's account of the *Phenomenology*. According to Harris, desire is satisfied 'spontaneously' only on condition that it is not 'transformed into the self-assertive *demand for recognition*' (Harris 1997, 1, p 332). This phrase appears helpful, in tracing Hegel's line of thought, but I have concluded that it is ambiguous. Why might desire for another self-consciousness have undergone the transformation to which Harris refers? Does Harris mean that desiring – that is, desirous – self-consciousness is aware that it might demand recognition, but (for whatever reason) refrains from demanding it in his case? If so, the category of recognition is presupposed as an issue that is already in play for

desiring self-consciousness. Does Harris mean that desiring self-consciousness is incapable of demanding recognition because the issue of recognition has not yet arisen? In this case, once again, the conceptual transition *from* ‘desire’ to ‘recognition’ remains unexplained. Harris’s reference to ‘recognition’ in the passage concerned is a red herring, and we are left with the desire-based scenario (discussed in section 6) where the desired object remains an obstacle however “spontaneous” the abnegation may be.

11. *How Hegel’s argument may be interpreted: the situation that is envisaged*

When Hegel states (in the concluding sentence of *PS* 175) that self-consciousness ‘*achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*’, one thing which is meant is that, in a field of intersubjectivity, self-consciousnesses count both as *desiring subjects* and as *desired objects*. The practical situation that his sentence envisages is one where the experiences both of *desiring* and of *being desired* are in play. In real life, these experiences may be intermeshed, sometimes confusingly, but here I bracket off such confusion and focus on a situation where the relation of *desiring subject* to *desired object* is one-way.

What is it like to be desired? A first response to this question may be to ask what sort of desire is involved. The general assumption in our discussion is that the desire is *desire for another self-consciousness* but, this being understood, can we be more specific at this stage? Is the desire that concerns us *any* desire – desire *simpliciter* – or is it, for example, desire for recognition? My reply is that the desire to which my question refers is *any* desire. It is desire that may *or may not* involve desire for recognition.

My claim is that *any* desire for another self-consciousness – *all* desire for another self-consciousness – provokes a common outcome. Stated differently, it elicits a common response. It does so regardless of the desire’s content, and whether or not the outcome or response is intended. I make no attempt to explain why the outcome or response takes place. Instead, arguing phenomenologically, I contend that human reality would be unimaginably different if the response were not universal.

The common response that all *desire for another self-consciousness* provokes or elicits is that it *raises issues of recognition*. In response to desire for another self-consciousness, recognition comes into being; and this is the case *whether or not* recognition formed part of desire's initial purpose or aim. To state this point still more explicitly: there is *no need* (according to the argument that I am presenting) for *desire for another self-consciousness* to be *desire for recognition*. Desire for another self-consciousness is, to be sure a 'catalyst' (Kojève 1969 p 47) for recognition. However, it is a catalyst that is effective *quite regardless* of whether 'desire for "recognition"' is in play. By shifting the focus of discussion from the *experience of desiring* to the *experience of being desired*, we avoid conceptual circularity and meet the question of recognition's origin head on.

On what basis may we claim that desire provokes or elicits a response involving recognition? As a starting point for discussion, we may note that the experience of *being desired* and the experience of *being questioned* have a similar structure. In both cases, self-consciousness is placed on the spot and must respond in this or that way. The experience of *being desired* has, irreducibly, a "question-and-answer" aspect that may be lacking where the experience of *desiring* is concerned. An experience of *desiring* need involve only a monological self-perception; it need see itself as addressing only issues of an instrumental – or, in Horkheimer's term, 'subjective' – kind. By contrast, an experience of *being desired* has (owing to its "question-and-answer" structure) a dialogical dimension. From the experience of *being desired*, although not from the experience of *desiring*, issues concerning recognition may take their rise.

Such a view of the *experience of being desired* calls for further comment, and only the core idea of the view that I ascribe to Hegel may be underlined here. If experiences of *desire* and experiences of *being desired* lend themselves to monological and dialogical forms of interpretation respectively, this is in the last instance because of the different forms of object – the different kinds of "other" – that they confront. Whereas *desiring* self-consciousness confronts an object (an "other") that may or may not display intention, a *desired* self-consciousness confronts an "other" that is, indeed, intentional and is so in an unmistakable way. The intention is unmistakable, because the intention that a *desired* object reads in the eyes of the self-consciousness who desires is an intention directed towards ("in the first person") the desired self-consciousness itself. An unpacking of these (admittedly somewhat telegraphic) comments would draw us into detailed

discussion of the Master-Slave section (PS 186-96) where, I suggest, Hegel comments in vivid terms on how the experiences of *desire* and *being desired* relate. Such a discussion is the task of a separate paper.

The above-outlined view of the *experience of being desired* gains plausibility – we may concede – only if two more general points are added. I note these points briefly here. One is that, in the world which we experience, desire for another self-consciousness may ignore or “short circuit” dialogical considerations. We may agree that this is true, but we may add that *from the standpoint of desired self-consciousness* the question-and-answer structure of experience never quite disappears. Desire must be *responded to* in this or that set of terms. My second observation is that the recognition which arises from an experience of being desired may be recognition that is (in Hegel’s expression) ‘one-sided and unequal’. Once again this is true, but a situation where ‘one-sided and unequal’ recognition obtains remains a situation where recognition is in play.

12. *How Hegel’s argument may be interpreted: why abnegation?*

I have suggested (in section 11) that Hegel’s argument comes to life if a situation where *self-consciousness responds to desire* is envisaged. What I have called the “question-and-answer” structure of the *experience of being desired* prepares the way for the idea of recognition. In the light of this suggestion, how may Hegel’s emphasis on *abnegation* (or *submission*) be seen?

In general terms, Hegel’s reference to a self-consciousness that ‘effects the negation [of its independence] within itself’ (PS 175) underlines the importance of *being desired* – rather than merely *desiring* – in the argument that he presents. However, not all response to desire involves abnegation and a reader may ask what role the idea of abnegation plays.

I have suggested that, in Hegel’s view, recognition comes into play in response to desire. This being so, two points regarding *abnegation* (or *submission*) may be made. One is that a response of abnegation is a response that involves recognition (albeit recognition of a ‘one-sided and unequal’ kind). The other is that abnegation is, for Hegel, the *very first* form that an act of recognition takes. Bearing these points in mind, Hegel’s reference to abnegation (or recognition) starts to become intelligible. Hegel, when he

refers to abnegation, is thinking of the following practical situation. A self-consciousness desires another self-consciousness. The *desiring* self-consciousness has no conception of recognition (because it is only through the *experience of being desired* that a conception of recognition is reached). The *desired* self-consciousness does have a conception of recognition but – precisely because *the desiring self-consciousness lacks a conception of recognition* – has no alternative but to recognise the desiring other in a one-sided or self-abnegating way. The desiring other is open only monologically intelligible proposals. A cry of “I submit!” is all that a self-consciousness motivated not *by recognition* but *by desire* can hear.

There is an (intended) irony in these comments on the idea of abnegation. What I have said resembles Kojève’s account of the life-and-death struggle wherein ‘one of the adversaries *gives in* to the other and submits to him’ (Kojève 1969 p 41). However, Kojève’s account depends on the idea of desire for recognition. My own comments depend on the idea that *desiring* (as distinct from *desired*) self-consciousness lacks understanding of what recognition means.

13. *How Hegel’s argument may be interpreted: objections overturned*

A greater degree of agreement with Kojève is possible when (standing back from the question of *why self-consciousness should choose abnegation*) we ask how Hegel’s notion of abnegation is to be understood. For Kojève, as in the present discussion, *abnegation* (or *submission*) has a cognitive dimension. As we have seen, the notion of *desire for recognition* (favoured by Kojève) is insufficient to cut recognition free from desire’s categories. Kojève wishes to portray recognition as irreducible – hence his reference to desire that is ‘anthropogenetic’ – but conceptual lift-off never quite takes place. Our own alternative scenario, where self-consciousness does not *desire recognition* but provokes (unintentionally) a cognitive response, is one that allows the irreducibility of recognition to be acknowledged (see section 9, above). It stipulates a sequence of events where (to start with) recognition is not an issue but where (as a result of what has happened) the issue of recognition has been raised. However, this (crucial) difference between Kojève’s and our own account having been acknowledged, we may turn to further claims that *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* makes.

For Kojève, history comes into being through struggle that culminates in an act of *abnegation* or *submission* (Kojève 1969 p 43). Abnegation or submission founds a recognition that is one-sided and unequal. Human history is the lengthy “work” of social change (and self-change) that transforms recognition that is one-sided into recognition that is mutual. When this process of transformation is completed, and *uncontradicted freedom* and *uncontradicted recognition* exist in and through one another, the narrative of human history has itself reached its end (see Kojève 1969 p 32). I suggest that this conceptual framework highlights important features in the picture that *Phenomenology of Spirit* presents. The Master-and-Slave section may indeed be seen as Hegel’s account of history’s beginning. History itself – the two thousand years that link the ancient *polis* (PS 444-76) to the French Revolution of Hegel’s day (PS 582-95) – is indeed, for Hegel, a history of patterns of recognition. Free and mutual recognition – an ‘I’ that is “We” – is indeed, for Hegel, the stake for which the historical game is played. Here, I glance forward in the *Phenomenology* and underscore the theme of recognition not merely to acknowledge Kojève’s far-sightedness. It is to indicate how much turns on construing the idea of *abnegation* not in a merely desire-based, but in a recognitive way. Recognition, we have seen in section 9, is for Hegel an irreducible category. If this is so, and if *abnegation launches a history of recognition*, the terms of Hegel’s argument change once mention of abnegation has been made.

A sense of this change suggests how objections to Hegel’s argument (see sections 5 and 6) might be answered. If the argument of PS 175 is seen as, from start to finish, an argument *couched in terms of desire*, the “Hobbesian” spectres of endless battle and competitiveness can never fully be exorcised. Hegel’s reference to abnegation (which refuses to be wholly resolved into general concerns regarding “intersubjectivity”) casts a troubling and dispiriting pall. If, however, mention of abnegation prises us away from desire and directs us towards a history of recognition, the conceptual prospect before us is (if arduous) bright. Desire-based battle is no longer an endless prospect. Beyond desire, there lies a *history of recognition*, and history is the “work” of transforming recognition from a one-sided into a mutual form. Hegel’s argument acknowledges obnoxious beginnings, which may cling to us; but these beginnings are not all.

If the argument of PS 175 is seen as (from start to finish) an argument *couched in terms of desire*, the objection that we have linked to Freud’s notion of a *reality principle* likewise acquires an unanswerable force. To

employ Hegel's own terminology: the independence of the desired object contradicts (and delimits) freedom *whether or not* the desired object abnegates itself in a spontaneous way. Only if abnegation is seen in terms of recognition, and recognition is seen as – for its part – approaching the question of freedom in a distinctive fashion, can self-consciousness escape from the difficulties that the first half of *PS* 175 has outlined. If desire *alone* is considered, or if *recognition is seen as reducible to desire*, self-consciousness remains dependent on a reality which may *or may not* go self-consciousness's way. If – on the other hand – the focus of argument shifts from desire to recognition, and if *recognition is seen as irreducible*, new (conceptual and practical) possibilities start to open. Recognition, in Hegel's meaning of the term, has a force that is *constitutive* (see section 1). Recognized individuals retain their 'independence' (*PS* 177) in and through relations amongst individuals themselves.

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