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The Structure of Hegelian Self-Consciousness: A Guide for the Perplexed[1]

1 Prolegomena to Self-Consciousness

1.1 Introduction

My aim in this essay is to articulate a reading of the first division of the "Self-Consciousness" section of G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (¶¶ 166–177[2] [3]). On my reading, this part of the text raises a puzzle about the possibility of successful self-representation, and resolves the puzzle. Briefly, Hegel's worry is that for an entity like *consciousness*, as Hegel understands it in the *Phenomenology*, self-knowledge of its essential nature is difficult to come by. After all, its beliefs and other commitments can change dramatically whereas consciousness persists, so it is unclear what feature of itself can be essential to it. Furthermore, it seems to distinguish itself as a subject or as a relation from the objects it represents by the very act of representing them. As a result, self-consciousness cannot discover properties that are essential to itself, nor can it identify itself with anything else of which it has knowledge. Hegel's discussion of the puzzle involves a digression into a conceptual structure that Hegel calls "life," and includes the introduction of the notion

[1] The reading I offer here, and my understanding of its place in the structure of the *Phenomenology* and in Hegel's philosophy generally, was unfortunately not developed against the pressure of the traditional secondary literature. Instead, however, I had the considerable benefit of extended discussions with Robert Brandom, Jason Carnell, Daniel Addison, Ulf Hlobil, Kelson Law, Preston Stovall, Raja Rosenhagen, Jon Buttaci and William Eck.

[2] References to Hegel are to the paragraph numbers of the English edition (introduced by A.V. Miller and as preserved by Terry Pinkard).

[3] To render Hegel's text in English I will be relying on Terry Pinkard's forthcoming translation, with liberal modifications by myself. As Pinkard himself discusses in his "Notes" (forthcoming), Hegel's terminological idiom is terribly dense, and translators have rightly sacrificed passage-by-passage clarity in English in order to make Hegel's deployment of this idiom relatively transparent. However, since I am only excerpting Hegel and not preparing a general translation of his work, I have the luxury of interpreting his idiom more flexibly than a translator. I will try to be clear when I am taking liberties in rendering Hegel's special terminology, using brackets containing German words. Brackets containing English words indicate my efforts to fill in content where it is implicit in German, or where Hegel has used pronouns obscurely.

of personal individuality into consciousness' conceptual repertoire. In the Hegelian solution to the puzzle, self-knowledge is possible when self-consciousness is of one's individual life history, and includes the representation of oneself as a self-conscious subject. The puzzle is of significant methodological interest for Hegel's project, since the self-conscious development (or education) of consciousness is the central narrative of the *Phenomenology*.

The project of articulating this reading is more ambitious than it may at first sound. Consequently, and unfortunately, I will not undertake a detailed exposition of the second or third divisions of Chapter IV, or the critical evaluation of Hegel's views and arguments. However, readers familiar with the traditional interpretation of this portion of the *Phenomenology* will notice that my reading is a "heterodox" one, in that I do not take the conclusion of the first division of Chapter IV (nor the second division, which includes Hegel's discussion of lordship and servitude) to be about interpersonal relations. While I doubt that this is the most controversial claim I propound, I will take some special care to defend this aspect of my reading. To that end, I will also discuss the second division of the chapter briefly in order to make it clear what it is that I think Hegel is up to there, and how it relates to the puzzle I find in the first division.

My discussion of the *Phenomenology* is structured by two secondary goals beyond the articulation of my reading of Chapter IV. First, in order to motivate my reading as a close reading of Hegel's text, the sequence of my exposition will parallel the sequence of Hegel's, and I will be at pains not just to formulate my reading but to exhibit his text, since it is the standard by which readings are measured. However, I also hope to make my interpretation and discussion accessible to a contemporary reader who might otherwise find Hegel's text itself rather hard going. So I will try to articulate my reading in language that stands at some distance from Hegel's, or else to elucidate Hegel's idiom. This goal has the extra benefit that the weaknesses and errors of my interpretation might appear more clearly to critical readers. However, since Hegel's idiom reflects his peculiar conceptual repertoire and is crucial to the content of his discussion, I will adopt his way of speaking over the course of the paper. My hope is that if I balance these opposing considerations successfully, my discussion will enable a reader to see what I see in the details Hegel's text without "duplicating its obscurities."[4] My redescription will of course not capture all the features that close readers find in Hegel's language, but I hope that it will nevertheless illuminate what I take to be the structure of Hegel's discussion, and that my inevitable mistakes will be productive of fruitful criticism.

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[4] McDowell 2009, p. 154; in this matter my expository strategy differs from McDowell's. This is not an idle aspiration of mine; as a new reader approaching Hegel, I did not find McDowell's exposition very enlightening. After having independently developed much of the detail of my reading, however, I came to recognize many of its features in McDowell's exposition. One of my hopes for this essay is that in spite of its tedium, it proves to be accessible for others in the way that McDowell's essay was not (at first) for me.

As I read the *Phenomenology*, it has a peculiar structure that complicates any attempt to discuss a part of it in isolation. Some features of the book's architectonic must be understood in order to fruitfully read any part of it, and the interest of individual sections is bound up in their relations to each other. Therefore, in order to satisfy my second ancillary goal of making my discussion relatively accessible to readers relatively unfamiliar with Hegel, I will undertake a significant digression on some features of the method and structure of the *Phenomenology* before turning toward the topic of self-consciousness.

1.2 The Narrative of the *Phenomenology*

The *Phenomenology* is a distinctive (and in some ways quite literary) philosophical text, and in my understanding there are some idiosyncratic guidelines for reading it fruitfully. The *Phenomenology* can be read as a somewhat austere narrative about the progress of a protagonist consciousness as its understanding of itself and the world develops from the immediate awareness of sensory certainty toward absolute knowing. Hegel writes that "the series of its shapes which consciousness runs through on this path is the detailed history of the *Bildung*[5] of consciousness toward the standpoint of science" (78), and Richard Eldridge (synthesizing Hyppolite and Kojève) describes the *Phenomenology* as a "*Bildungsroman* of Spirit in history."[6] It is not straightforwardly clear, however, how to characterize consciousness itself. Our understanding of consciousness (like consciousness' understanding of itself) develops and is refined over the course of the *Phenomenology*'s narrative. And it is not only consciousness' conditions of individuation and so on that are refined over the course of the book, but our best guesses of what sort of thing consciousness corresponds to outside the context of Hegel's discussion—at different times, consciousness may appear to be the experience of a sentient creature, the mind of a rational individual, the norms of a community, the laws of the natural world, or perhaps several of these things at different points in the investigation. Hegel certainly personifies consciousness (it is, after all, the protagonist of the book), but Hegel has a penchant for liberal literary personification. Just in the first two divisions of Chapter IV, Hegel personifies consciousness, self-consciousness, desire, life, lordship, and servitude,

[5] Readers familiar with the German literary tradition will know that the English rendering of *Bildung* is not straightforward. Pinkard renders it descriptively here as "cultural maturation," whereas Miller opts for the more traditional "education" or "culture" (at 199). Elsewhere, Pinkard and Miller render *Bilden* as "formative activity" (Miller 196, Pinkard 196), "culturally formative activity" (Pinkard 196), and "culturally educative activity" (Pinkard 199).

[6] Eldridge 1997, p. 48.

describing each at times as possessed of its own commitments and perspective. So this habit of his should not by itself be taken as evidence that consciousness is identifiable with a person or persons.[7]

However, there are some things that can be said about consciousness as it is to be understood at the beginning of Chapter IV of the *Phenomenology*. First of all, consciousness is described as the subject of *experience*; that is, it is what is said to learn from experience (*Erfahrung machen*). Second, although consciousness may not be identifiable with an individual or with an individual mind, it is somehow identifiable with or at least closely related to[8] a set of *commitments*—to substantive judgments, inferential transitions, and the concepts that feature in them, construed by their subject as good. A difference in the set of these commitments is not sufficient to distinguish one consciousness from another—it could not be, since the *Phenomenology* is the story of the *development* of consciousness and its commitments—but differences in commitments distinguish the serial stages or "shapes" (*Gestalten*) of consciousness as Hegel's narrative progresses. Thus, for example, Chapters I–III can be said to track consciousness' relation to the object of its knowledge (or to track *representation* generally) from one in which immediate empirical experience is taken to have a fundamental justificatory authority (in "Sensory Certainty")[9] toward a more mature preoccupation with inferential proprieties as such (in "Force and Understanding.").[10] The action of these first three chapters is not greatly concerned with the nature of commitments about consciousness itself (that is a primary topic of Chapter IV), but these chapters are concerned with the general commitments attributed to consciousness about how to undertake and abandon more concrete commitments about the objects of representation (especially judgments about the

[7] I add parenthetically that some readers might be tempted to argue that it is a reasonable *presumption* that lordship and servitude, self-consciousness and the other self-consciousness by which it is confronted, &c. represent distinct biological individuals, since Hegel does talk about them as if they were distinct individuals. I think that the freeness with which Hegel uses the device of personification creates an onus for such an interpreter. After all, it is rarely thought that "consciousness" and "self-consciousness" in the first division of Chapter IV refer to distinct biological individuals, so Hegel's attribution of distinct perspectives to figures in his discussion is not, alone, sufficient to indicate their relations to biological individuals.

[8] For those acquainted with Brandom's idiom, consciousness may be identifiable with its commitments (in general if not its particular commitments) in the *speculative* sense of identity (cf. Brandom, ms 3, pp. 15f.). Hegel criticizes the presupposition of a distinction between ourselves and our cognitions (Hegel 74).

[9] Cf. Brandom, ms 4, e.g. pp. 26–27.

[10] Cf. Brandom, ms 4, e.g. pp. 102–103.

world).[11] At any rate, we need not be hindered by vagueness about the nature of consciousness at various points in the text, since it is possible to read the beginning of Chapter IV as concerning conditions of successful self-representation in general.[12]

Interpretation of Hegel's exposition is further complicated by his penchant for free indirect discourse. That is, he will frequently articulate a stage in the development of consciousness in an idiom that is peculiar to his exposition or to consciousness *at that stage* in the narrative, and which idiom may be rejected as problematic later in Hegel's exposition.[13] Because of the fundamental nature of Hegel's project (and his anti-positivist convictions), he cannot not start out with the categories and commitments with which he will end up. His project includes the discovery and justification of those categories through the investigation itself, both over the course of the book and over the course of individual chapters and sections. So Hegel's exposition at any point in the narrative is bound to the commitments appropriate to that period in the development of consciousness. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that the order of exposition in the *Phenomenology* corresponds closely to either a phylogenetic or ontogenetic time course; Hegel is a modern narrator who has the freedom to choose the order of his exposition as he sees fit for the sake of his narrative.[14]

It is particularly critical in reading the *Phenomenology* to observe what I will call *perspectival* distinctions in Hegel's exposition. First, there are those concepts and inferences that Hegel and his readers should be committed to at the present stage of the

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[11] Perhaps Brandom would say: logical and speculative commitments about concrete commitments (cf. ms 1, e.g. pp. 3–5).

[12] If later chapters of the *Phenomenology* further delimit our understanding of what sorts of things Hegel's protagonist could be, it may be that his arguments in earlier chapters have broader application than his arguments in later chapters. Indeed, the pursuit of such a strategy could be an explanation for Hegel's unusual expository style. Or alternatively, it could be that Hegel tempts us early in the book to interpret "consciousness" generously. E.g., as anything we normally think of as capable of representation. And as the narrative progresses, he argues that the class of such things turns out to be much more limited than we might have at first supposed: not merely things that can reliably respond differentially to aspects of their environments, but things that can revise their own inferential commitments, that can represent their own commitments, that can be responsible for actions as well as judgments, that live in linguistic and social communities, and so on.

[13] For a relatively clear example, consider e.g. ¶ 191 in which Hegel claims first that the lord achieves recognition, and less than a page later that this recognition is not genuine.

[14] Brandom, for example, argues (ms 4, pp. 16–18) that the ordering of Chapters I–III ("Consciousness"), Chapter IV ("Self-Consciousness") and Chapter V ("Reason") has no particular metaphysical significance. There are, he claims, *expository* reasons for Hegel to want to e.g. follow "Consciousness" with "Self-Consciousness" (ms 5), but these do not reflect a logical or temporal ordering of the developments described within each of these sections.

investigation: what exists "*for us*" (*für uns*).[15] But the protagonist of the story is not we; rather, it is consciousness as it develops toward absolute knowing, and consciousness is associated with its own concepts and commitments which sometimes diverge from ours. For example, "consciousness" is in the action for us by the second paragraph of the first chapter (91), and indeed is present in the introduction, but consciousness is not explicitly aware of (or at least is not concerned with) itself as such until paragraph 163 at the end of Chapter III. Similarly, Hegel equips *us*—the investigators: himself and his readers—with his method of "experience" in the introduction, before consciousness as such has even begun its journey, whereas important aspects of that method are not explicit for consciousness until the end of Chapter III. So there is a fundamental perspectival distinction in the *Phenomenology* between what there is *for us* on the one hand, and on the other hand the concepts and commitments with which consciousness is working, what there is "*for consciousness*" (*für Bewußtsein*). Hegel's exposition throughout the *Phenomenology* concerns the development of the theoretical equipment and substantive commitments of both these perspectives. Since the developmental courses of these two perspectives are interrelated but not identical, Hegel must at times be explicit to us about what is merely implicit for consciousness.

1.3 Consciousness and the Method of Experience

Despite its narrative conceits, the *Phenomenology* is ultimately a work of philosophy, not intellectual fiction. The development of consciousness is propelled not merely by Hegel's whims, but by a distinctive dialectic methodology—sometimes called the method of experience (*Erfahrung*), or *Aufheben*[16]—that Hegel outlines in the introduction.[17] It would be too much of a digression to aim for a satisfying critical discussion of the method here. Nevertheless, it will be useful before turning toward the action of Chapter IV to briefly review the form according which consciousness progresses the

[15] It may seem pedantic to produce the German for such expressions as this, but I mean to emphasize that accurate and idiomatic translation of expressions like *für uns* and *an sich*, which have a subtle technical and idiomatic life in Hegel's text, is vexed and imperfect (cf. Pinkard "Notes"). For many of Hegel's technical expressions, including these, the allusion to Hegel's German expression is more relevant to his exposition than the English rendering.

[16] Since Hegel's technical use of the word *aufheben* and its morphological variants differs dramatically from the use of the word in ordinary German, I am inclined to render it in German throughout this essay. The translation of the term by the stilted English expression "to sublate" is not really more illuminating (Cf. Pinkard "Notes" pp. iv–vi), but it is more haughty. I have provided an appendix for those readers who want help decoding German inflections, and when the German expression is too cumbersome for an English sentence I have opted to render it as "to supersede," accompanied by a note.

[17] Cf. esp. ¶¶ 81–89.

Phenomenology's plot. The method of experience is supposed to be an *immanent* method whereby consciousness can refine its commitments without presupposing a potentially problematic *a priori* standard against which individual commitments are judged. In order to describe the movements that are instances of the method, Hegel makes another perspectival distinction. What exists either from the perspective of consciousness or the perspective of our investigation may at any point be distinguished from how things "really are"—in Hegel's cant: how things are *in themselves* or how something is *in itself* (*an sich*). Hegel refers to the latter aspect of an object as its *truth* (*Wahrheit*) (¶ 82). Truth in Hegel is often opposed to *certainty* (*Gewißheit*), the subjective feeling that consciousness has that a content is true, but that may not be fully endorsed by consciousness.[18] Hegel also sometimes uses the expressions *concept* (*Begriff*)[19] and *object* (*Gegenstand*) to denote the way things appear to consciousness and the way things are in themselves, respectively. The recognition of this divergence—how things are *in themselves* from how things are either *for consciousness* or *for us*—is the fulcrum of the method of experience.

However, consciousness can only learn from this divergence when it recognizes the divergence, i.e. when the purported "truth" of an object is something that exists for consciousness. So the crux of this method is the recognition of material incompatibility between commitments. It is worth noting that it is probably infelicitous to describe the method as something like the application of a formal rule like the law of non-contradiction. By Hegel's lights, the method of experience is propelled not by the application of a formal rule to consciousness' commitments, but simply by the proper application of distinct (though, from a suitably sophisticated perspective, formally similar) material rules of inference, the commitment to which is necessary for mastery of the concepts they concern. On this understanding, Hegel's method is driven not by the application of a formal rule, which might be construed as an independent standard or a necessary commitment of consciousness, but purely by mastery of the concepts that consciousness happens to possess. The standards by which consciousness' particular commitments are to be judged are always themselves commitments of consciousness.[20] Hegel has an interest in processes that are self-propelled in this way, and following Hlobil[21] I will refer to such self-

[18] It is perhaps confusing that Hegel uses terms like "knowledge," "truth" and "certainty" in ways that are not necessarily factive. There are some potential motivation for this policy, however. Hegel sees the project of the *Phenomenology* as concerning the elaboration of what he calls "phenomenal knowledge" (76, 77), or perhaps the policy can be seen as a reflection of Hegel's penchant for free indirect discourse.

[19] I will tend to use the expression "concept" on this small-scale, either as a figure for a representation, as opposed to the object, or in a sense recognizable to contemporary analytic philosophers. I will avoid using the expression "concept" in the large-scale Hegelian sense of the singular thing that is perfected in Absolute Knowing.

[20] Cf. Hegel 84: "Thus, in what consciousness declares inside itself to be the *in-itself* or the *true*, we have the standard that consciousness itself establishes to measure its knowledge."

[21] Hlobil ms.

propulsion as expressions of "inner necessity." As I understand Hegel in Chapter IV, the property of self-sufficiency (*Selbstständigkeit*) is the property of being driven by inner rather than outer necessity, i.e. the property of changing according to endogenous rather than exogenous standards. It is a distinctive feature of Hegel's method—and as I mentioned earlier, a part of what can make his writing so difficult to follow—that in the case of consciousness these standards are continually evolving. As consciousness gains experience, the standards to which it holds itself continue to develop. Through experience, consciousness comes to view its prior commitments not as the truth, but merely as what appeared to it to have been the truth: "It is thereby to consciousness that that thing—what previously to consciousness was the *in-itself*—is not in itself, or that it was merely *in-itself* ***for consciousness***" (85).

In practice, the method operates as consciousness accumulates commitments. When confronted with new commitments that conflict with its existing commitments, conscious must give something up. The skeptic worries that inconsistency by itself offers no solution, but Hegel observes that in the course of actually accumulating commitments there is usually a specific way for consciousness to resolve conflict; the new commitment is not the bare negation of the old, but comes with other relevant and independently-motivated commitments. As a result, the negation of the old commitment "is thereby itself a *determinate* one, and has a *content*" (79). Consciousness does not merely learn that certain of its old commitments are false, but comes to understand them as ways that things, as they are in themselves, appeared to consciousness. That is, recalcitrant experience is to be understood "as *determinate* negation, so a new form therefore immediately arises, and in the negation the transition is made whereby the progression through the entire series of shapes unfolds of its own accord" (ibid). So as consciousness accumulates commitments, through observation or reflection or whatever means, it sometimes happens upon new commitments that are inconsistent with existing ones. In response, consciousness must resolve the tension between these commitments by adopting new commitments that make sense of what it knows, including *that* it mistakenly held the earlier commitments. In this process, consciousness is said to have learned from or gained experience, and its old commitments are said to be *aufgehoben*, or reimagined as mere appearances of things in themselves. "This *dialectical* movement—which consciousness performs on itself as well as on its knowledge and its object—*insofar as, to consciousness, the new, true object arises* out of this movement, is genuinely what is called experience" (86).[22]

[22] This reading of Hegel's introduction owes much to Brandom. Cf. ms 3, esp. pp. 44–72.

1.4 The Transition to Self-Consciousness

Hegel deploys exciting verbiage—*desire*, *life*, the *life and death struggle*—to describe the structure of self-consciousness, and some readers understand these expressions literally. On my reading, however, these terms have a more abstract relevance to the main work of Chapter IV.[23] In order to motivate my more mundane interpretation[24] of the content of the chapter, I shall follow the progression of ideas in the text rather closely. Before turning toward Chapter IV on "Self-Consciousness," then, I will briefly review how Hegel's sets the scene for his discussion.[25] The "Consciousness" section of the *Phenomenology* (Chapters I–III) ends with the discovery by consciousness of something that Hegel articulated in the introduction: that the standard or "truth" according to which consciousness accepts or rejects its own commitments is itself a commitment of consciousness. Consciousness discovers that in order to successfully represent, it must attend to its own commitments about inference; it must come to represent its own representations, and furthermore it must acquire commitments about the propriety of transitions between its commitments.[26]

> Consciousness of an other, of an object in general, is indeed itself necessarily *self-consciousness*, reflectedness into oneself, consciousness of one's own self in one's otherness. The *necessary progression* of the previous shapes of consciousness, to whom their truth was a thing, an other than themselves, reveals just this: that not only is consciousness of things possible only for a self-consciousness, but this [self-consciousness] alone is the truth of those shapes. (164)

The shapes that consciousness took in Chapters I–III treated the "truth" of objects, their progressively better representations as consciousness gained experience, as something independent of consciousness. However, at this point Hegel turns toward the consequences of the insight that each successive standard by which consciousness judges the

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[23] Brandom gives an interesting reading of Chapter IV based on more or less literal readings of these terms (Brandom ms 6), but I do not take it to be counter to the spirit of Brandom's reading of the *Phenomenology* as a whole to read these terms figuratively, as he understands other passages as allegorical or figurative.

[24] That is, on my interpretation the content of the chapter is more mundane, and Hegel's prose is more flowery.

[25] As noted earlier, although Brandom sees no metaphysical or chronological significance to the transition between Chapter III and IV (ms 4, pp. 16–18), he does take there to be important expository reasons for making the transition as Hegel does (ms 5). I am not defending an alternative view on the rationale for following "Consciousness" with "Self-Consciousness" here; I am only mining the last remarks of Chapter III for clues about how to focus my discussion of Chapter IV.

[26] Consciousness' representations of objects turn out to "*be*" representations of consciousness itself, as Hegel puts it, in what Brandom calls the "speculative" sense of identity (cf. Brandom 3, ms pp. 15f.). This is a *very* quick gloss the conclusion of Chapter III (cf. Brandom ms 4).

goodness of its commitments is itself a commitment of consciousness. In particular, he is presently concerned with the fact that in order to successfully avail itself of this method, consciousness must be capable of criticizing and altering its own commitments.

However, consciousness' ability to manipulate its own commitments is not yet its knowledge that it is doing so, or how. Hegel cautions, concerning the conclusion of the "Consciousness" section, that

> this truth is on hand only for us, not yet for consciousness. Self-consciousness has first come to be for itself, but not yet as unity with consciousness in general. (164)

That is, the self-consciousness which is necessary for representation of the world has made its appearance for consciousness—consciousness has noticed it—but consciousness does not yet know much about the nature of self-consciousness, or its relation to the previous shapes of consciousness. And it has not yet been made perfectly clear to us, either, how self-consciousness works. Hegel claims in the final sentence of Chapter III that "it also turns out that the cognition of *what consciousness knows when it knows itself* requires even further intricacy, the elaboration of which is to follow" (165). The discussion of what self-knowledge consists in and how it relates to what has come before is the main topic of the first two divisions of Chapter IV. Consciousness' understanding of the role of self-consciousness in its own development through experience will also be a prominent topic, but our understanding of the structure of self-knowledge will advance more than that of consciousness.

The opening of Chapter IV emphasizes the contrast between the shape of knowledge for consciousness in the preceding sections, and the way that self-knowledge appears initially to consciousness at this point in its education, when it has come to a new understanding of its method—what we know as the method of experience.

> In the previous kinds of certainty, the truth to consciousness is something other than [consciousness] itself. However, the concept of this truth vanishes in the experience of it; the way the object immediately was *in itself*—sensory certainty's being, perception's concrete thing, the understanding's force—proves in fact not to be the way it is in truth. Rather, this *in-itself* turns out to be a way in which [the object] merely is for another; the concept of it is superseded [*hebt sich.... auf*] in the actual object, or the first immediate representation [is superseded] in experience, and certainty is lost in the truth. (166)

Again, Hegel observes that in his narrative up to now consciousness has always treated the way things are in themselves as something other than consciousness. When consciousness happened upon new commitments that troubled its prior commitments, it

gained experience and achieved a new set of commitments through the *Aufheben* of the old. However, consciousness does not yet understand the consequences of the insight that its new commitments are themselves commitments of consciousness, on a par with its old ones. The *aufgehoben* commitments of consciousness are never abandoned merely because they conflict with something like the truth or the object itself, construed as some sort of entity that is not itself the way something is *for someone* or indeed *for consciousness* itself. It is only the truth or the object *as commitments for consciousness* that drives the method of experience. For convenience, I will refer to this insight as the *immanence insight*.

Self-knowledge, however, has both a distinctive, new structure and a distinctive, new kind of object. Hegel writes, of self knowledge, that

> ...as of now something arises that did not come about in these previous relationships, namely a certainty which is equal to with its truth, for the certainty is itself its own object, and consciousness is itself the truth. There is indeed also an otherness there; but that is to say consciousness distinguishes something that is not likewise distinguished for it. (166)

The new object that arises, which poses its own peculiar difficulties in consciousness' and our understanding of consciousness, is consciousness itself. The consideration of reflexive representation differs from what came before in that consciousness is not merely the representation of an object, it is also simultaneously the object of representation:

> it is clear that the being-in-itself and the being-for-another are the same; for the *in-itself* is consciousness.... The 'I' is the content of the relation and the relating itself; it is itself opposed to an other, and likewise overlaps over this other, which for [the 'I'] is similarly only itself. (166)

This is why consciousness now encounters "a certainty which is equal to its truth"—when consciousness is its own object, the certainty of consciousness (the way consciousness appears to be for itself) is constitutive of its truth (the way consciousness is in itself). Although, with the immanence insight, consciousness learns something about the systematic possibility of its error, in self-consciousness it would seem to have also discovered a kind of representation that is immune to such possible errors. Since the content of self-consciousness is a certainty that is equal to its truth, i.e. a representation whose content is on a metaphysical par with the fact it purports to be about, consciousness has discovered not only Cartesian doubt but Cartesian certainty. So Hegel writes triumphantly that "Thus with self-consciousness we have now entered into the native realm of truth" (167).

However, these easy insights into self-consciousness are only good in fairly limited circumstances. Hegel's attention with regard to self-consciousness up to this point has been on a certain case:

> If we call *concept* the movement of knowledge, but call the *object* knowledge as still unity, or [knowledge] as I, then we see that not only for us, but for the knowledge itself, the object conforms to the concept. (166)

However, it turns out to be essential to this initial case of Cartesian self-consciousness that the object of this knowledge is "still" or motionless (*ruhige*). If we complicate the picture by taking into account the fact that consciousness' commitments can and do change, what can consciousness' knowledge of itself consist in? It may have knowledge of its own representations, but if they can change then this is *accidental* self-consciousness, and not knowledge of what consciousness or self-consciousness is *essentially*. To be clear, the worry is not that self-consciousness may be in error, but that consciousness itself may change. If consciousness changes but remains itself, then those fluid features that changed cannot have been essential to consciousness, since consciousness persisted while those features changed. Therefore, knowledge of those features cannot be knowledge of what consciousness or self-consciousness is essentially. I will call the knowledge of what one is essentially *genuine self-knowledge* or *genuine self-consciousness*. Hegel's task in Chapter IV is to outline the conditions under which genuine self-knowledge is possible, to discuss the nature of this form of knowledge, and to describe the early stages of consciousness' own understanding of the structure self-knowledge.

2 The Structure of Hegelian Self-Consciousness

2.1 Three Moments of Self-Consciousness[27]

The first division of the chapter (¶¶ 166–177) describes Hegel's puzzle about the possibility of self-knowledge, and the first major step of resolving that puzzle. Hegel claims that genuine self-consciousness can be achieved, and the puzzle dissolved, in a succession of three "moments," or related understandings that constitute an episode of the method of experience. In the first moment (¶ 167), consciousness has two objects. The first object contains the developments of the "Consciousness" section, which are rendered as objects

[27] The discussion of this division is my main concern in this paper. However, since there is also a significant amount of ancillary material, I have given this section its own subsidiary numbering scheme to make its structure more perspicuous. I do likewise for my discussion of the second division of the chapter.

for self-consciousness through the immanence insight. But the thorough application of the immanence insight limits the content of genuine self-consciousness to the tautology "I am I," which is its second object. This is because at this stage, self-consciousness understands itself only in opposition to its objects. This way of understanding self-representation, which is a main source of the puzzlement, is characterized by Hegel with the metaphor of "*desire*" (§ 2.2 below). In the second moment (¶¶ 169–173), self-consciousness examines the 'first object' from the previous moment (§ 2.3 below), and comes to understand the identity conditions for first-order consciousness on the model of the true concept of "*life*." The concept of *life* has its own three-moment structure, which is the topic of a significant digression by Hegel (§ 2.4 below). As a result of understanding this structure, however, self-consciousness comes to be seen as a "*genus* for itself" (§ 2.5 below). Finally in the third moment (¶¶ 174–177), self-consciousness can achieve an understanding that preserves the truth of these first two moments. In this third shape of self-consciousness, the problematic structure of desire can be overcome because of attributes of the *object* (not of the subject) of self-consciousness, as detailed in the discussion of the second moment. Genuine, contentful self-knowledge is made possible by representing the object of self-knowledge as itself having the structure of self-consciousness (§ 2.6 below). However, the solution achieved at the end of the first division gives rise to complications, in particular complications about how to understand the subject of self-consciousness as a self-sufficient source of the development of consciousness. The resolution of these further complications is deferred to the second major division of the chapter, which includes the famous Lord-Servant Dialectic (§§ 3.1–3.3 below).

2.2 The First Moment: Self-Consciousness as *Desire* (¶ 167)[28]

At the end of the "Consciousness" section, consciousness grasped the immanence insight and learned that it itself is the truth of its representations (what they are in-themselves). But what can consciousness know about its own nature? In light of the immanence insight, the shapes of knowledge described in the "Consciousness" section have all been *aufgehoben*. The truth of those shapes is preserved for us "no more as essence, but rather as moments of self-consciousness."[29] Since any of consciousness' commitments may

[28] All references under this heading are to Hegel 167 unless otherwise noted.

[29] Hegel's use of the expression "*Momente*" here is a nod to the fractal structure of the *Phenomenology*. There is a three-part structure that characterizes the movement from sensuous certainty to truth (perception) to force in "Consciousness," which is repeated within Chapter III as successive conceptions of force as characterized by the three super-sensible worlds. The structure is repeated again in the three moments of the development of self-consciousness and of life in Chapter IV. His claim that the shapes of

change, they are revealed to be *mere* representations. As self-consciousness, the protagonist of the *Phenomenology* cannot see its commitments as essential to itself, because whatever sort of thing consciousness is, it endures across changes in those representations. "Thus," Hegel writes, "the principal moment itself just seems to be lost, which is to say *simple self-sufficient endurance* for consciousness." Consciousness, construed initially as identifiable with its commitments, does not endure self-sufficiently because each of those commitments is mutable and consciousness survives their mutations.

The endurance of consciousness might be explained by the endurance of self-consciousness. However, at this point Hegel's protagonist understands little about self-consciousness except that it is the substance that endures changes in the commitments of consciousness through experience. Hegel writes that self-consciousness is "the reflection out of the being of the sensory and perceived world, and essentially the return out of *otherness*. It, as self-consciousness, is movement." If self-consciousness in its first form is what arises from the immanence insight, then we can understand self-consciousness here as the activity of inference ("movement") from a representation in consciousness to the awareness that its representations are fallible parts of consciousness, not parts of the world, what is other than consciousness. This movement can be characterized as an inference from *p* to something like *I represent that p*.[30] To be clear, Hegel describes self-consciousness not as the conclusion of such an inference, but as "movement," the activity of inferring. However, this conception of self-consciousness cannot produce genuine self-knowledge, either, for neither the conclusions of such inferring activity, nor the inferring activity itself, are essential to consciousness.

First, the products of this inferring activity cannot count as knowledge of what consciousness is essentially for the same reason that consciousness' first-order commitments could not constitute consciousness' essence. When consciousness' object is some entity apart from consciousness and its commitments, the immanence insight generates self-conscious awareness that consciousness' representation of the object is not the object

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consciousness are preserved as moments of self-consciousness is not only motivation for the account he gives in Chapter IV; it is foreshadowing of the structure of that account. This structure can also be applied to the lettered sections of the *Phenomenology* as a whole: "Consciousness" (A) being the full development of the certainty of consciousness' knowledge, "Self-Consciousness" (B) being the development of the truth of that knowledge, and "Reason," "Spirit," "Religion" and "Absolute Knowing" together (C) containing the detailed resolution of the tensions arising from the first two sections. This fractal structure should be understood as a reflection of the purported unity of Hegel's method.

[30] Or, in a more Kantian spirit, *I think that p*. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to think that Kant's doctrine concerning the formal unity of apperception, the relations between the apperceptive, empirical and noumenal selves, are targets for Hegel. However, an examination of the relations between Kant and Hegel is far beyond the scope of this paper.

itself, but something that does not endure independently of consciousness' activity of representing. Should consciousness' commitments change, those representations will change while consciousness itself endures. So consciousness' commitments cannot be essential to it. However, when the object of consciousness is its own representations, the commitments it comes by are *just more contents*[31] of consciousness. A thorough application of the immanence insight results in inferences not just from *p* to *I represent that p*, but from *I represent that p* to *I represent that I represent that p*, and so on. The content *I represent that p* goes from being an instance of self-consciousness to being a mere object of thought, which engenders its own self-conscious consequence. But once consciousness' commitments become objects of thought, they are treated just as other mutable commitments of consciousness. They are *others* to self-consciousness because they can change while consciousness endures. Contents of the special form *I represent that p* do not constitute genuine self-knowledge any more than contents of the more general form *p*.

Second, the activity of inferring by application of the immanence insight cannot constitute genuine self-knowledge. If consciousness' activity of inferring is construed as a commitment, e.g. to infer *I represent that p* from *p*, then it is also just more content, since an inferential commitment can change just as a substantive one can. Indeed, before grasping the immanence insight consciousness did not have this inferential commitment, but it was still consciousness. Furthermore, the knowledge of inferring activity itself, apart from consciousness' commitment to its inferential entitlement, cannot serve as genuine self-consciousness, either. Hegel writes that "since [self-consciousness] *only* distinguishes *itself as* itself from itself, the distinction is immediately *aufgehoben* to it as an other." That is, even if consciousness' activity of inferring is not reduced to a commitment, so long as it is taken as an object of thought then the activity will be the *object* rather than the subject of representation, and will therefore be something other than self-consciousness. In fact, anything that self-consciousness takes to be its object is *by that very taking* construed as an object of self-consciousness, and therefore is distinguished logically from self-consciousness as a subject and relation. As long as self-consciousness is logically distinct from its objects, its properties can be taken to differ from those of its objects; as a result the logical distinction enforced by the structure of representation precludes immediate self-knowledge of self-consciousness' essential nature. Thus self-consciousness as movement turns out to yield no content but "the motionless

[31] I take an evocative expression from Hurley (1998). Although her concern was the unity of consciousness and not the possibility of genuine self-consciousness, there are commonalities of structure between her argument and Hegel's.

tautology of 'I am I'." The conception of self-consciousness as *movement* ironically leads to a *motionless* account of self-knowledge, on which self-consciousness cannot acquire or develop any contentful self-knowledge beyond its knowledge of its self-identity. The only role for self-consciousness seems to be as some ineffable element that is left out of its conception of the rest of the world, even when it turns its attention toward its own representations, or its process of forming them.[32] If the immanence insight is a natural consequence of the method of experience (as it is according to the end of "Consciousness"), then although it gave self-consciousness the appearance of a Cartesian refuge from Cartesian doubt, it in fact seems to undermine the possibility of genuine self-knowledge for self-consciousness.

Hegel proceeds to delineate the structure of this picture more precisely. Within what he will later identify as the first moment of self-consciousness, there are two moments (sub-moments) with distinct objects of representation: first-order consciousness, whose objects are the objects of consciousness, and self-consciousness, whose only object is its own unity with itself. In the first sub-moment, when consciousness' object is something other than self-consciousness, "self-consciousness exists as *consciousness*, and for it the whole breadth of the sensuous world is retained; but at the same time only as related to the second moment…" That is, the first moment is the one that preserves the developments of the "Consciousness" section alongside the immanence insight. So the objects that consciousness had in sensory certainty, perception, and so on are preserved, but viewed as commitments of consciousness itself. However, those objects are "labeled *for [self-consciousness]* with the *character of the negative*"; self-consciousness knows of itself only that it is something other than those commitments. The second sub-moment of self-consciousness is characterized as "the unity of self-consciousness with itself." Since the thorough application of the immanence insight leads consciousness to characterize all its representations, even of its own inferring activity, with the character of the negative—i.e. since it cannot identify itself with any of its commitments—the content of self-consciousness' knowledge is limited to its self-identity. So the second object of self-consciousness "initially is on hand only in opposition to the first."

Hegel hints at his resolution of this problematic picture of self-consciousness by suggesting, of self-consciousness' self-identity, that "this [unity] must become essential to [self-consciousness]; that is to say, self-consciousness is essentially [*überhaupt*]

[32] A contemporary reader might be reminded of the passages about the *metaphysical subject* in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (5.63 and subsidiary), which is understood as what is left over when a total examination of the world is complete. The similarity is not surprising—these remarks in Wittgenstein are meant as an elucidation of Wittgenstein's articulation of the immanence insight (*Tractatus*: 5.6: "*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world").

desire,"[33] and by saying of these two opposed moments that "self-consciousness exhibits itself therein: as the movement in which this opposition is *aufgehoben*, and in which the parity of itself with itself comes to be to [self-consciousness]." While these comments are supposed to foreshadow Hegel's eventual resolution of his puzzle, they are rather obscure at this point in Hegel's exposition. McDowell suggests helpfully that

> 'Desire *überhaupt'* functions as a figure for the general idea of negating otherness by appropriating or consuming, incorporating into oneself, what at first figures merely as other. That is, schematically, what self-consciousness has to do to the first moment in its doubled object.[34]

However, because self-consciousness is essentially a subject or a relation, and its activity of representing involves the construal of its objects *as objects*, self-consciousness repels all the objects toward which it turns. I would add to McDowell's suggestion that the use of *desire* as a figure is supposed to make vivid the frustration that self-consciousness faces at this point in its development. Self-consciousness wants content, and it is continually lusting after a suitable object—anything that can serve as the content of genuine self-knowledge—but is always frustrated because by the very taking of something as an object of representation, self-consciousness distinguishes itself from that object and fails to be genuine self-consciousness. Hegel's suggestion is that self-consciousness as *desire* will find its satisfaction when the opposition between the poles of its doubled object—the whole expanse of the sensory and perceived world on the one hand, and self-consciousness' unity with itself on the other—is *aufgehoben* in a third moment that incorporates the truth of the opposed poles. If there is an object that incorporates both poles of the doubled object described here, then self-consciousness could satisfy its *desire*.

2.3 Life as the Object of Desire (¶ 168)

Since it is not clear how to make progress in the consideration of the second pole of *desire*'s object, the unity of self-consciousness with itself, Hegel suggests that the way forward is to consider the first element of self-consciousness' doubled object. Hegel writes that "the object that for self-consciousness is the negative [i.e. the first object] has likewise for its part *for us* or *in itself* gone back into itself just as consciousness had," and therefore that this object has "become *life*" (168). In describing this transformation,

[33] My thanks to Raja Rosenhagen for the rendering of *Begierde überhaupt* as "essentially desire." Although "essentially" here bears a false resemblance to traditionally English renderings of German words like *wesentlich*, it is all things considered an improvement on Miller's "desire in general" and Pinkard's "desire itself."

[34] McDowell 155f.

Hegel picks up consciousness where he left it at the close of the "Consciousness" section. There, the Understanding took on a structure called *infinity* [*Unendlichkeit*], which Hegel describes as "the simple essence of *life*" (162), and as "absolute restlessness of pure self-movement" (163). Hegel repeatedly characterizes this structure with metaphors of simplicity, self-motion, peacefulness, self-opposition (i.e. electromagnetic repulsion) and self-parity (cf. ¶¶ 156–164), which metaphors he picks up again here to describe the first object of consciousness (cf. ¶¶ 168–169, 171). The unpacking of these metaphors is beyond the scope of my present discussion,[35] but their recurrence is sufficient to suggest that the object Hegel discusses in these paragraphs is indeed inherited from his earlier remarks. However, the observed consciousness, as *life*, is "self-sufficient" (*selbstständig*); it can continue to develop independently of the observing self-consciousness, and self-consciousness will experience this self-sufficient development, including the discerning of an observed self-consciousness that observes *life*. As a result, the *infinite* structure of consciousness is not on hand merely for us, but *for self-consciousness*. The self-sufficient nature of consciousness is presented here not simply, as in Chapter III, but as the first pole of self-consciousness' doubled object. As a result, the *infinite* structure of consciousness is on hand for self-consciousness. Just as consciousness' grasp of immanence insight resulted in the appearance of self-consciousness-as-*desire* for us, when self-consciousness experiences consciousness' grasp of the immanence insight, self-consciousness will appear *for self-consciousness*. Thus Hegel says of *life* that

> this concept *estranges* itself into the opposition of self-consciousness and life; the former is the unity *for which* the infinite unity of discernments is; the latter, however, *is* merely this unity itself, such that it is not likewise *for itself*. (168)

That is, while we have witnessed the estrangement of consciousness into two objects, *life* and self-consciousness, self-consciousness will witness the estrangement of that life into another *life* and another self-consciousness. We have a picture on which there is an *observed* consciousness that has the "*infinite*" structure of the Understanding, and an *observing* self-consciousness that aims to represent that structure but which is incapable of contentful representation of itself. However, since self-consciousness can now become aware of its own development as consciousness, it will be equipped with this picture as well.

[35] But see Brandom, who reads "Infinity" as Hegel's term for a certain kind of holistic structure of concepts (cf. Brandom ms 4, pp. 99, &c., ms 5, pp. 10ff.). I am inclined to follow him, but I don't think my reading of Chapter IV hangs on the details of Brandom's understanding of Hegelian infinity, so I will not be at pains to articulate Brandom here.

2.4 The Three Moments of *Life* (¶¶ 169–172)

The concept of *life* as it is used here, like the concept of *desire*, functions not literally but figuratively. The concept has a peculiar structure that Hegel wishes to exploit in order to solve his puzzle about self-consciousness. This structure of *life* is not unrelated to living things, but it is also not merely the notion of biological entities and its relevance to Chapter IV is its structure rather than its characteristic denotation. In a way, his discussion of *life* in these remarks is a foreshadowing of what he will discuss in much more detail and clarity in Chapter V,[36] where he will articulate the special structure of *life* in the context of biological organisms. In this discussion, however, I will focus on an interpretation of the concept of *life* that concerns its application to consciousness in particular. The common property of *life* and of the Understanding that Hegel needs in this section is *fluxion* (*Flüssigkeit*), or the dynamic quality of the Understanding—in the case of consciousness, the dynamic quality of its commitments. Since Hegel's method of experience is supposed to be immanent, i.e. it is supposed to involve no absolute external standard, any and all of consciousness' commitments are potentially subject to radical revision or *Aufhebung*.[37] Fluxion, then, is "*Aufheben* of discernments" (169), the activity of revising and discarding of old ways of conceiving and articulating consciousness' commitments.

The fact of *life's* fluxion gives rise to some potential puzzles of its own. In classical Aristotelian metaphysics, change is undergone by some substance that endures through it, as a fruit undergoes ripening or a bird undergoes molting. However, a substance cannot survive changes in its essential properties—a fruit that undergoes changes in its fruity nature ceases to be, so the changes must be borne by some substance (like a 'physical substance') other than the fruit.[38] In the case of the flux of consciousness' commitments it is not apparent what substance it is that undergoes and survives the changes wrought by experience; fluxion "cannot *aufheben* distinctions if they do not have endurance [*Bestehen*]" (169). Hegel suggests that "This very fluxion is… the *endurance*, or their *substance*, in which they are thus as distinguished items and parts *being-for-themselves*"

[36] Specifically in V.A.a, the "observation of nature" subdivision of the "Observing Reason" division of the chapter. For a discussion of the concept of *life* in Hegel that is focused on its role in Chapter V instead of Chapter IV, see Hlobil, who discusses the relations between the Hegelian notions of *life* and *the concept* (in the sense relevant to Absolute Knowing) in terms of three moments.

[37] The negative connotations of *Flüssigkeit* as involving instability are reinforced by the fact that it appears for the first time here (169), not in Hegel's earlier discussion of the Understanding in Chapter III.

[38] Thanks to Jon Buttaci and Kelson Law for discussions on Aristotle's metaphysics. Of course, any expository errors here are mine. For some further discussion of Aristotelian themes in the Hegelian concept of *life*, see Hlobil ms.

(169); "that very fluxion is the substance of the self-sufficient shapes" (170). That is, part of what is distinctive about *life* is that the fluxion itself somehow constitutes the enduring substance that undergoes the changes incurred by the application of the method of experience.

There are a few moving parts to this story. First, the substance that undergoes fluxion is continually re-partitioned by repeated application of the method of experience into "self-sufficient items" (170) that are *for themselves*. Since these items are the things that are refashioned in the process of fluxion, and since they have perspectives (i.e. they are for themselves), we can think of them as something like time-slices of consciousness,[39] construed as identifiable with its commitments. Consciousness construed synchronically at a time should be self-sufficient with respect to consciousness at a different time-index, and should be associated with a perspective constituted by its proper representations. The second major component of this story concerns consciousness construed diachronically: the substance that undergoes change from one self-sufficient synchronic consciousness to another is somehow the fluxion itself. Hegel will discuss two ways of cashing out this suggestion, one flawed and one successful, that constitute the second and third moments in the true concept of *life*. At a first pass (the first way of understanding the suggestion), one might understand this suggestion to be that the *method of experience*, which is the principle of this fluxion, turns out to be the essence of consciousness. The method is the principle of consciousness' inner necessity, and its fundamental relation to consciousness survives each change it incites in consciousness. So, on the story being considered, fluxion is the root both of consciousness' "estrangement into self-sufficient shapes" at different points of development, and of consciousness' survival of any particular change in its shape. The apprehension of this dual significance of fluxion is essential to the conceptual structure of Hegel's *life*. However, this proposal is not quite be satisfactory. Though Hegel does not raise these considerations in motivating his dismissal of the second moment, one can see that if consciousness is identified with the method then it would be impossible to distinguish distinct consciousnesses, i.e. the consciousnesses of distinct individuals. As long as our commitments change according to the same method, we would all be the same consciousness. The conception of conscious-

[39] I say "something like" because this construal relies on the potentially problematic assumption that the method of experience unfolds in time rather than in some more peculiar logical dimension, and it has already been suggested that the development of conscious in the *Phenomenology*, guided by the method of experience, should not be seen as temporally ordered. This tension can be relieved by recognizing that something recognizable as the method of experience can function both *in time* for the consciousness of a particular creature, and *out of time* as the guiding principle of the *Phenomenology*'s protagonist. For the latter consciousness, we should *not* understand these "distinguished items" as *temporal* segments, but as segments on the relevant logical dimension against which we project the *Bildung* of consciousness, and which functions "something like" time does for the former consciousness.

ness-qua-*life* as essentially a synchronic shape and the opposing conception of it as essentially the bare principle of its own diachronic transformation will turn out to be two poles that will be *aufgehoben* in a third moment that incorporates the truth of both conceptions. And since there are structural parallels between consciousness as a self-sufficient shape and self-consciousness as a simple endurance, and between consciousness as the principle of its change and self-consciousness as movement, the resolution of these moments of *life* provides a clue as to how self-consciousness can overcome the problem of acquiring genuine self-knowledge.

As in the first step of his discussion, Hegel follows this provocative treatment (¶¶ 169–170) with a more analytic recap (¶ 171). Here the concept of *life* is clearly articulated in three moments. The two points above, which exhibit the dual significance of fluxion, constitute the first two moments of *life*, and the third moment resolves this dual significance. The first moment of *life* is described by Hegel as "the *endurance of* the *self-sufficient* shapes" (171). Since these "shapes" are distinguished from each other as consciousness or *life* develops, we can think of them as the serial stages of a *life* or a consciousness, and in the case of consciousness we can think of them as the states of consciousness' commitments, those things that are changed by the application of the method of experience. The first moment of consciousness-as-*life*, then, is a conception of consciousness on which it is identified according to the particular shape of its commitments. However, Hegel has already argued that such a conception of consciousness is troubled because it was this *endurance* for consciousness that was lost in the first moment of self-consciousness.[40] It is also clear that this conception of the conditions of identity for consciousness fails to take into account consciousness' development through experience, and indeed Hegel says that this first moment involves the suppression of consciousness' activity of discerning (*Unterscheiden*). In particular, what must be suppressed is "to not be in-itself, and to have no endurance" (171). That is, what is suppressed is the immanence insight, that consciousness' shape is the certainty or concept of its representations rather than the truth or object of its representations, and that these certainties continually change. If consciousness' activity of discerning is countenanced, and consciousness is conceived as dynamic, the changes in consciousness' commitments threatens this conception of consciousness, which must be purely synchronic.

The identity of consciousness over time, and across changes in its commitments, can be preserved if consciousness is identified not according to the commitments that change, but according to the process by which they are changed. Thus the second moment of *life* is a conception on which it is essentially the process or the principle of transition between the stages of the first moment. On this conception, Hegel writes, "life, through its

[40] Recall from above: "It thus seems that… the principal moment itself is to be lost, which is to say *simple self-sufficient endurance* for consciousness" (167).

motionless elaboration of itself into various shapes, becomes the movement of those shapes, or becomes life as *process*" (171). Hegel calls *life*'s development "motionless" here because, in contrast to the first moment in which consciousness or living things were objects at a time, *life* in the second moment is identified according to its development, conceived as something extended in time but immutable. The use of the metaphor of motionlessness also recalls the "motionless tautology of 'I am I'" that set the problem of self-knowledge for consciousness. In the second moment, Hegel writes, "the simple, universal fluxion is the *in-itself*, and the distinction of shapes is *the other*." That is, the essential property for consciousness-as-*life*, conceived according to the second moment, is the principle that drives its change over time (i.e. the method of experience). The particular shapes that consciousness takes at a stage in its development are thus accidental to consciousness.

Hegel's use of the term *other* here is suggestive of how to apply this discussion of *life* to self-consciousness, since the problem for self-consciousness as *desire* is precisely how it can have knowledge of itself when it always construes the objects of knowledge as other than itself. Recall that *life* is the structure of the first pole of the object of self-consciousness-as-*desire*, so each moment of *life* can be seen as an object of self-consciousness. In the first moment of consciousness-as-*life*, the shape of *life* is essential to it, and self-consciousness represented those shapes as other than itself (than self-consciousness). In the second moment of *life*, consciousness identifies itself with the process of its change over time rather than as its particular commitments. In that moment, self-consciousness takes the fluxion of consciousness as its object, and identifies the fluxion as other than itself. Thus Hegel writes that "this fluxion is itself, by way of this discernment [Unterschied], *the other*; for it is now *for the discernment*, which is in and for itself" (171). This is, more or less, where we left self-consciousness. The problem with *life* as an abstract principle of change, and with self-consciousness as an empty tautology, is that they do not take into account any of the particular shapes that they mediate. The method of experience, as a principle of change, incorporates none of the synchronic shapes of *life*, and the motionless tautology incorporates nothing of contents of consciousness' sensations, perceptions, or understanding. Ironically, the attempt to preserve individuality across diachronic changes eradicates any individuality from the essence of *life* or of self-consciousness. This attempt must be unstable, since the transition from the first moment to the second in both cases involved the *Aufhebung* of individual characteristics by fluxion, and this transition would violate the Aristotelian principle that fluxion cannot *aufheben* distinctions unless they have endurance. There must be a third conception that permits both the enduring distinction between shapes, as well as their unity.

Hegel describes the third moment of *life* as a conception of "life as *living things*" (171). That is, the essence of *life* is established not through a particular shape at a time, nor the

abstract pattern by which the shapes change, but by the particular history of an *individual* as it changes over time.

> The process of life… is just as much a shaping as it is an *Aufheben* of the shape, and… the shaping is just as much an *Aufheben* as it is a classification… This whole cycle constitutes life—not the immediate continuity and unadulteratedness of its essence that was initially described, nor the enduring shape and discrete thing being for itself, nor the pure process of all this, nor again the simple collection of these moments, but rather the developing, and development-dissolving whole that in this movement simply sustains itself. (171)

This is a conception of *life* that takes into account both the particularity of consciousness at a time, with all its particular, incidental commitments, and the universal principle by which consciousness evolves. It accounts for the role of fluxion both in destroying the particular shape of consciousness at a time and in guiding the evolution of those shapes over time. "The fluctuating element is itself merely the *abstraction* of essence, or it is only *actual* as shape" (171). So the living thing, and in particular the living consciousness, can be understood as a shape (the first moment) that changes and develops itself and survives through time, as long as those changes are reflections of a principle (the second moment) of inner necessity. As a result, living things are identified not according to their synchronic shapes or their general principles of change, but their specific developmental histories.[41] In this way, the third moment incorporates both the particularity of the first moment and the generality of the second. But this conception also has an unexpected result; Hegel writes that "this division of undifferentiated fluxion is the very positing of personal individuality [*Individualität*]" (171).[42] The division of the abstract principle guiding change into particular histories of change gives us (or rather, gives self-consciousness) the conceptual resources to understand the notion of *personal individuality*.

[41] Though he does not tie it so closely to the text, Brandom's notion of a "history" as the nature of an essentially self-conscious creature captures the distinctive essence proper to concepts with the structure of *life* (Brandom ms 6, pp. 2–3).

[42] The appearance of individuality represents one of the first uses of the word (*Individualität*) in the *Phenomenology*. The notion of individuality appears fleetingly in the "Consciousness" section (¶¶ 110, 158, 159), although plausibly always in articulating what is for us, and not yet what there is for consciousness. Pinkard uses the English word and its cognates freely throughout the "Consciousness" section, but they translate *Einzelnheit* and its cognates in German. Miller translates these more carefully as "singularity," &c.

2.5 The Second Moment: Self-Consciousness as *Genus* (¶¶ 172–173)

The true concept of *life* is the concept of living things, which in application to consciousness requires not just the "*immediate* unity" of consciousness' commitments at a time, nor the apprehension of the method by which consciousness transforms itself, but the synthesis of these two objects into a conception of consciousness as the "*universal* unity" of a history of commitments that change through time according to the method (172). Interestingly, the living thing that transforms over time according to a principle does not exist for itself *as a living thing*. That is, as *life*—as a historical process of self-developing—it does not necessarily represent its own universal unity. This must be true, because consciousness did not represent itself this way early in its development. "Rather," writes Hegel, "life points toward an other than itself, in particular to the consciousness for which it is as this unity, or as genus" (172). The notion of "*genus*" [*Gattung*] introduced here is that of a "simple universal for which there are no distinctions" (174), a kind that includes the shapes of different stages in a developmental history. The *genus* that grounds the unity of a living thing must be *for a consciousness*, since it might not be for the life itself, and the *genus* for the life whose development we have been witnessing now is for Hegel's protagonist consciousness.

In fact, this *genus* is not only for consciousness as mere consciousness, but for consciousness as self-consciousness, which Hegel characterizes as "this other life for which the *genus* is as such and which for itself is genus" (173). That is, self-consciousness is that which both has the structure of *life*, and which functions as *genus* for itself. Hegel unfortunately does not dilate on this important claim, but we can see why it might be true. Self-consciousness comes, as we have, to understand the developmental history of consciousness as a unity because it understands consciousness as *life*, as a living thing (¶ 171). However, it also understands that the shapes of consciousness are in truth moments of self-consciousness (¶ 167). Thus self-consciousness is a capacious form of consciousness whose history reflects the history of what consciousness is in itself, and involves the representation of that history as a unity. Thus self-consciousness is both *life*, and *genus* for itself (¶ 173).

There are two important distinctions we should make about this self-consciousness-as-*genus*. First, self-consciousness here is characterized as an "other life" in addition to the life that we have been following. Plausibly, we can think of self-consciousness as having a history related to but distinguishable from the history of the life that gives rise to it, just as in the *Phenomenology* there is the development of consciousness as we follow it, and then there is the development of consciousness' own consciousness of itself, i.e. there is the perspectival distinction that allows Hegel to qualify some statements as true about consciousness *for us*, and others as true *for consciousness*. Second, the self-consciousness that functions as *genus* for itself (SC_{Genus}) is not necessarily the re-identification of self-

consciousness-as-*desire* (*SC_{Desire}*) from the first moment (¶ 167). Rather, SC_{Genus} has arisen on its own from self-sufficient *life* in a manner parallel to the process by which SC_{Desire} arose from consciousness due to the immanence insight. Since the concept of *life* that we have observed was the object of SC_{Desire}, we can now expect SC_{Desire} to be capable of making the perspectival distinctions of Hegel's exposition—from our perspective, between what is true *in itself for* (according to) *SC_{Desire}*, and what is true *for SC_{Genus} for* (according to) *SC_{Desire}*. Since SC_{Desire} witnessed the self-development of the life that was its object (*L*), and its estrangement into L and SC_{Genus}, SC_{Desire} has been able to distinguish between the history of L, and the history of its related self-consciousness, SC_{Genus}. There are therefore three figures here: (1) SC_{Desire}, self-consciousness as *desire*, (2) L, *life* as the object of *desire*, and (3) SC_{Genus}, self-consciousness as the *other life* that functions as *genus* for itself. These three figures will recur, in more rarefied form, in the Lord-Servant Dialectic as the lord, consciousness as a thing, and the servant, respectively. Put more simply, we may for the moment[43] think of SC_{Desire} as a *subject* self-consciousness that represents SC_{Genus}, an *object* self-consciousness. SC_{Genus}, having arisen from the life that is the object of SC_{Desire}, exists *for SC_{Desire}*. And in order to understand the structure of self-consciousness, we must distinguish SC_{Genus} and SC_{Desire} logically. However, SC_{Desire} and SC_{Genus} are identical *in themselves*, and their unity is, recalling Hegel's foreshadowing in ¶ 167, what must become essential to self-consciousness in order for genuine self-knowledge to be possible.

2.6 The Third Moment: Living Self-Consciousness (¶¶ 174–177)

Since SC_{Genus} falls out of L in a manner parallel to SC_{Desire}'s falling out of consciousness with the immanence insight, it encounters the same puzzles that we encountered with SCD at the beginning of the chapter. Since its history is distinct from the history of L, it at first has only the "pure I" or "simple I" for its content (¶¶ 173, 174). And also like SC_{Desire} it at first is certain of itself only by its *Aufheben* of others, e.g. L (¶ 174). That is, it is movement that arises from representations in L, but distinguishes itself from any possible object or inferential movement in L.

> Self-consciousness can therefore, through its negative relation to [the object], not *aufheben* it; therefore [the object] instead regenerates again for [self-consciousness], as does the *desire*. (175)

[43] That is, for the second moment. In the third moment, this subject/object structure will be insufficient to distinguish the two self-consciousnesses.

Like SC_{Desire}, SC_{Genus} has the problematic structure of *desire* and is subject to the puzzle of genuine self-knowledge. However, we are not back where we started. Hegel at this point suggests a way that self-consciousness can overcome the structure of *desire*:

> On account of the self-sufficiency of the object, [self-consciousness] thus can only attain satisfaction by means of [the self-sufficiency] itself carrying out the negation in [the object], for it is *in itself* the negative, and must be for the other what it is. (175)

That is, *desire* can be overcome if the object of *desire* is the source of the distinction between self-consciousness and its object. The problems pertaining to *desire* arise when self-consciousness distinguishes itself from an object. That is, when the object is "marked with the character of the negative" according to what is, to use Hlobil's idiom,[44] "outer necessity" from the perspective of the object. Hegel said earlier (¶ 167) that self-consciousness as *desire* had a doubled object, or an object with two poles, and *desire* can be satisfied when the unity of the poles comes to be essential to self-consciousness. Here, Hegel says that this can be accomplished if the first object, consciousness as *life*, rather than self-consciousness-as-*desire*, posits the distinction between self-consciousness and its object. And that is exactly what has happened in the development of *life* as an object of self-consciousness—consciousness' object divided itself, based on its own inner necessity, into *life* and self-consciousness as *genus*.

> This universal, self-sufficient nature..., in which the negation is as absolute, is the genus as such, or is as *self-consciousness*. *Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*. (175)

Desire is overcome, and self-consciousness' need for a suitable object is satisfied, only when self-consciousness' object is also something with the structure of self-consciousness. Despite all of the complex and subtle movements Hegel has described to get here, this is not a shocking claim. Genuine self-consciousness, knowledge of what self-consciousness is essentially, is possible only when the object of consciousness itself has the structure of self-consciousness. And this is possible if the self-conscious subject is aware of its own development as a *living thing*, an entity whose individual history is essential to it, and that history includes the advent of the subject's own self-consciousness as an object of the subject's thought. In that way, the self-consciousness of the subject can come to be an object of thought for that subject.

Once again (in ¶ 176), Hegel analytically recapitulates the movement he has just described. The puzzle of genuine self-consciousness arises and is resolved in three

[44] Hlobil ms, and described in § 1.3, above.

moments. In the first, the only object of self-consciousness is the "pure I." In the second moment, the structure of *desire* prevents the enrichment of self-consciousness because self-consciousness distinguishes itself from its objects by the very act of taking something as an object of representation. *Desire* can only be satisfied by "the very reflection of self-consciousness into itself." In the third moment, self-consciousness realizes that the truth of the second moment

> is likewise the doubled reflection, the doubling of self-consciousness. There is an object for consciousness that in itself posits its otherness or its discernment as a null thing, and is therein self-sufficient. (176)

In the third moment the object of self-consciousness, which began this dialectic movement as *life*, distinguishes itself from self-consciousness-as-*genus*, and as a result self-consciousness is doubled. It represents itself *as self-consciousness*, and desire is satisfied because its object does not distinguish itself from the subject of representation. "It is a *self-consciousness for a self-consciousness*. Only thereby is it in fact; for only therein does the unity of itself in its otherness become for it" (177). As a result of this last movement, Hegel describes self-consciousness—successful self-consciousness—as "a living self-consciousness" (176). The trick to overcoming the puzzle that troubled Hegel at the beginning of the chapter is that for self-consciousness, "the *I* that is the object of its concept is in fact not an *object*" (177). Rather, "because a self-consciousness is the object, it is just as much I as object" (177). That is, the object that overcomes the problems of *desire* is represented as a subject of representation as well as an object of representation, because of the self-sufficient nature of the self-consciousness' object.

A common Anglophone reading of this moment in the chapter understands the "other self-consciousness" as a distinct biological individual, and takes Hegel to be claiming that genuine self-consciousness is possible only in communities of mutually recognitive individuals.[45] I understand the plausibility of this reading, especially when the end of the first division of the chapter (c. ¶¶ 175–177) is read in isolation. However, read as a continuation of Hegel's discussion up to that point, I do not see clearly either where consciousness is firmly tied to the perspective of an individual mind (and if it is, why its perspective is so distinct from those of self-consciousness and of life), or where a second individual comes into play for Hegel. For simplicity, I will call the traditional reading "interpersonal" and my reading "intrapersonal," although it is not clear on my view what relation is supposed to hold between the personified figures of Hegel's discussion and persons as we understand them (i.e. individual human persons). I hope that by giving the close reading I have, describing the action in the text in detail as I read it, I have

[45] Brandom (ms 6), for example.

motivated my reading. It seems to me that Hegel begins the chapter with a puzzle about the possibility of contentful self-knowledge, where the main obstacle is the structure that Hegel calls *desire* by which self-consciousness distinguishes itself logically from its potential objects. The solution involved consciousness' coming to understand its own intellectual history *as its own history*, and its representation of the advent of self-consciousness in its own case. By representing itself as an object that is capable of self-knowledge (in the shape of an other life represents its own life as *genus*, and that that is *genus* for itself), it comes to have an object that estranges itself into an observing self-consciousness and an observed developmental history, and can identify itself with the observing self-consciousness. On the other hand, there are surely plausible readings that differ significantly from mine in their interpretation of the remarks leading up to the end of the first division. At the very least, I mean to have shown that there is a defensible, detailed reading of the chapter on which it has intrapersonal subject matter.

One strong textual objection to the intrapersonal reading capitalizes on Hegel's comment, upon describing the completion of the third moment of self-consciousness, that "Hereby is the concept *of spirit* already on hand for us" (177). The thought is that since *spirit* is primarily a social phenomenon, the invocation of *spirit* reinforces the interpersonal reading of the structure of self-consciousness. McDowell, who like me reads Chapter IV intrapersonally, makes several observations in defense against this objection. On McDowell's reading, Hegel first of all uses *spirit* here as a label for the object that "is just as much I as object," and second, "locates 'I that is we and we that is I' in 'what still lies ahead for consciousness,' 'the experience of what spirit is'."[46] I would add that Hegel plausibly means that in describing the structure of self-consciousness, we have the resources necessary to understand the structure of *spirit*. That is, spirit may be on hand for us only insofar as *life* was, when the concept of *life* was mined for its characteristic structure but not applied to biological creatures as such. As we understand self-consciousness now, it (1) has the structure of *life*, which is to say that it is a self-developing and self-changing entity whose unity is preserved through a *genus* that incorporates the stages in the development of an individual living thing as members. In addition, self-consciousness (2) is *genus* for itself, and (3) represents its object as identical to itself. Perhaps by claiming that *spirit* is already on hand for *us*, Hegel means that spirit has the structure of *life*, is its own *genus*, and represents its development self-consciously. Notably, Hegel does not claim that *spirit* is on hand yet for consciousness. In rejecting this objection, however, I wish to explicitly distance myself from the claim that self-consciousness and self-knowledge will turn out *not* to be essentially social for Hegel. What I claim is that Hegel does not wheel in explicitly social machinery at *this* point in his exposition, in Chapter IV. As I will indicate in the next section, there are unresolved

[46] McDowell, pp. 160–161

puzzles left over from this solution to Hegel's puzzle, and their resolution later in the *Phenomenology* will involve the social constitution of identity. The defense of a reading according to which self-knowledge is, in the end, essentially social does not require that Chapter IV defend an interpersonal doctrine.

3 A Heterodox Reading of Lordship and Servitude

3.1 Self-Sufficiency and the Mirror Duel

There is another objection to the intrapersonal reading of the first division of Chapter IV that is more difficult to deflect. It is traditional[47] to read the second division of Chapter IV (IV.A), which includes the Lord-Servant Dialectic, as a discussion of interpersonal relations. However, in defending the foregoing intrapersonal reading I set myself up for an intrapersonal reading of IV.A. Since Hegel's references to doubled self-consciousness in the former division do not indicate distinct self-consciousnesses, there is no obvious motivation to introduce distinct self-consciousnesses for the first time into the latter division. In order to defend my reading from casual dismissal, I will say something about the structure of IV.A as I read it. I will not discuss the second division with the same level of detail as I did the first division, but I hope to provide enough interpretive material that an interested reader can, with some effort, see IV.A and the Lord-Servant Dialectic developments of the discussion discussed above. The idea is not to defend a detailed reading of IV.A, but to make clear that there is plenty to be said about IV.A that is consonant with my reading of the first division, and to elucidate some of the relations between IV.A and the structures of *life* and *desire* that figured in the first division.

Hegel ended the first division of the chapter by describing the solution to a puzzle—self-consciousness is possible only when the object of self-consciousness is itself a self-consciousness, both in itself and for self-consciousness. However, consideration of this solution gives rise to a new puzzle. Hegel begins IV.A by describing this second puzzle, which concerns what Hegel calls *recognition* (178), and which will occupy him for the remainder of the chapter. Recognition is, at a first pass, a kind of distinctive relation that holds between two self-consciousnesses that are logically distinguished (e.g. as subject

[47] One might even say "orthodox."

and object) but are identical in themselves (¶¶ 178, 185).[48] Plausibly, recognition involves something like mutual awareness between logically-distinguished self-consciousnesses, where each represents the other as a self-sufficient self-consciousness and as in itself identical to the first self-consciousness (¶ 186, 191). The puzzle that troubles Hegel now, as he puts it, is that although self-consciousness has overcome the frustration of its *desire* by representing its object as a self-consciousness, it has not yet fully succeeded in the *Aufhebung* of its object's otherness; that is, it has not yet come to terms with what is involved in representing an object as *identical to itself*. In fact, the solution of the first division is revealed to be rather feeble. The deeper mystery, even in the first division, was that the structure of subjects and objects in the representation relation is problematic in the case of self-representation. This structure gave rise to the *desire* that drove the first puzzle, and it gives rise to the puzzles of IV.A about the logic of self-sufficiency and symmetric self-representation.

Hegel describes the situation dramatically and allegorically: "There is, for self-consciousness, another self-consciousness" (179). We may understand the "other" self-consciousness to be the represented self-consciousness, the self-sufficient object that finally satisfied desire. Hegel sets the problem of the division more precisely in two steps, each with two senses because self-consciousness and its object are identical. First, self-consciousness has "lost itself" all over again[49] because its essential self-knowledge is knowledge of an object other than itself. But since self-consciousness is identical to the other, this means that it therefore cannot see the other as its essence. So self-consciousness has *aufgehoben* (i.e. represented, distinguished itself from) this other self-consciousness, and it now must *aufheben* the *otherness* of the self-consciousness in order to come to grips with its identity with its object. Second, however—and this sets up the central drama of the division—self-consciousness takes itself *to need to aufheben* the other in order to regain its representation of itself as a bearer of essential traits. Since it is identical to the other, this amounts to the claim that it must *aufheben* itself. (¶¶ 179, 180).

This is all somewhat dark. As I see it, the implicit worry that makes this situation pressing concerns *self-sufficiency*, or determination by inner necessity. Recall that self-consciousness was described as a form of *life*, and that *life* essentially involves self-sufficient self-developing and self-shaping. The free self-development of *life* is supposed to be propelled by self-consciousness' own commitments, just as the method of

[48] Actually, on my reading, recognition is not necessarily intrapersonal in the traditional sense. Since consciousness cannot necessarily be identified with the perspective of a biological organism, recognition is a relation that can hold, for example, between members of a community in relation to *spirit*-as-self-consciousness. Nevertheless, the distinguished self-consciousnesses that are the relata of the *recognition* relation must, on my reading, be identical *in themselves*.

[49] "es hat sich selbst verloren" (179). Compare ¶ 167, the description of the first puzzle, where the "principal moment" of "simple, self-sufficient endurance for consciousness" was lost [*verlorengegangen*].

experience is. If both the subject and object self-consciousnesses are supposed to have this structure, however, then these very commitments create a paradox for consciousness. The subject self-consciousness' development cannot be self-propelled if it is driven by the commitments of the object self-consciousness, and likewise vice versa. "the other is also a self-consciousness; what arises is an individual (*Individuum*) against an individual… *self-sufficient* shapes [embedded] in the *being* of *life*"(186). That is, what we have here are two self-consciousnesses that distinguish themselves from each other, and that appear to themselves and to each other as individuals with their own inner necessity, but which arise from the existence of the same individual *life*, and which therefore are in themselves identical. Of course, because the subject and object self-consciousnesses are in themselves identical, this does not seem like it should be a recalcitrant problem; each commitment of one self-consciousness is *ipso facto* a commitment of the other. However, because of the logical distinction between subject and object there is still an obstacle to *genuine self-knowledge*. From the perspective of self-consciousness as a subject, self-consciousness seems to discover its commitments and its activity of development by observing an other instead of by reasoning and deciding, so its development seems to be determined by that object rather than by itself. However, the other also has the structure of self-consciousness, and from its perspective it is also a subject, and is faced with the same problematic situation. So even if self-consciousness can successfully represent its *mere identity* with its object, there are unresolved tensions between this identity and the details of what self-consciousness understands to be its essence. In particular, it is not clear how self-consciousness is to represent its own free self-development as that process is *in itself*. The problems of *desire* are now replaced by the problems of what I will call the "*mirror duel*"—the logical distinction between subject and object is an obstacle to the self-sufficiency of self-consciousness, and the real identity of subject and object self-consciousnesses seems to preclude any means of overcoming it.

To make the mirror duel more vivid, we might imagine, fancifully, a creature regarding its own reflection in a mirror. This creature fears that its autonomy is threatened by its reflected self, since any activity of the creature is instantaneously and *ipso facto* reproduced by the reflected creature. The mirror duel comes about when each creature—logically (or visually) distinguished from the other, but in itself identical—tries to race against the other in order to establish itself as the true source of self-sufficient activity, and establish the other as the mere reflection. This is exactly what Hegel goes on to describe. A selection of representative passages:

> But this movement of self-consciousness in relation to another self-consciousness was represented in this way, as the *activity of one*; but this activity of the one itself has the double significance of being just as much *its activity* as *the activity of another*; for the other is likewise self-sufficient. (182)

> The first [self-consciousness] does not have the object before itself as [the object] initially is for desire, but rather [it has] [an object] for itself self-sufficiently, and because of this [the self-consciousness] can therefore do nothing for itself if [the object] does not do in itself what it does to it. (182)

> The movement is therefore plainly the doubled [movement] of both self-consciousnesses. Each sees *the other* do the same as *it* does; each does itself what it demands of the other; and therefore also only does what it does insofar as the other does the same; unilateral activity would be futile; because what shall occur can only come about by means of both. (182)

> The activity is therefore not only double-sensed in that it is an activity just as much *toward itself* as *toward the other*, but also in that it is inseparably just as much *the activity of the one* as *of the other*. (183)

In these passages, a single self-consciousness, dramatized as doubly personified because of the logical distinction between subject and object, faces a quandary about self-sufficiency. Insofar as self-consciousness understands itself to have the structure of *life*, and therefore to be essentially driven by its own commitments, it wants to see itself as the source of its own activity. However, when it represents its own activity, that activity is represented as the action of a distinguished other, of self-consciousness-as-object. We could read these passages as describing the interaction of two organisms, but for reasons mentioned above—that it is not clear that we should yet have identified consciousness with the perspective of an organism, and that I do not see where in the narrative Hegel introduces a second organism—I am doubtful. Furthermore, the weird symmetry of the two self-consciousnesses in these passages is better explained if they are identical in themselves. It is not clear why two distinct consciousnesses should necessarily be such than any action by one is likewise an *identical* action by the other. Nevertheless, my own suspicion is that Hegel's language is vague and general enough, perhaps intentionally so, to describe formally similar logical situations at varying levels of generality, including interpersonal cases. What I mean most strongly to indicate here is that while these passages may not speak clearly against the interpersonal reading, they do not speak against the intrapersonal reading that I defend.

For reasons of space, I cannot discuss Hegel's account of recognition with the same degree of textual detail with which I discussed genuine self-knowledge, but I would like to comment briefly on selected aspects of two important passages in IV.A: the life and death struggle, and the Lord-Servant Dialectic. I will not attempt to describe the action of these passages in a way that illuminates all the motivations and conclusions that seem

to concern Hegel; what I want is just a general feel for the plot, and for the ways that *life* and *desire*, as they were understood in the first division, figure essentially in that plot.

3.2 The Life and Death Struggle

Hegel claimed at the beginning of IV.A (¶ 180) that the two self-consciousnesses must each attempt to *aufheben* the other, and that these attempts could not succeed because of the mirroring of their activities; since the two self-consciousnesses are identical in themselves, any advantage on the part of one would *ipso facto* be its own disadvantage. Hegel's attribution to self-consciousness of intentions and desires can be read as manifestations of the pressure on it to preserve its commitments. A tension arises for self-consciousness because it takes itself, as self-consciousness, to be a form of *life* and *genus* for itself, and therefore it takes itself to be a self-sufficient source of its own development. However, since the self-sufficient movement or action of self-consciousness is always and equally the self-sufficient movement or action of the other, its self-conscious object, it cannot preserve that conception of self-consciousness. Since it is under pressure to restore its self-conception as a self-sufficient being, Hegel suggests, the mirror duel inevitably becomes a life and death struggle (¶¶ 186 –187).

In Hegel's narrative, self-consciousness tries to resolve the tension by construing itself as "pure being-for-itself" (186), which involves construing itself "as the pure negation of its objective mode" (187). In other words, self-consciousness' strategy for resolving its problems is to construe itself as a pure subject, an entity that is *for itself* in every way, and which is in no way an object, a thing that is *for others*. Hegel writes here that when self-consciousness first arose, it was as "*self-sufficient* shapes embedded in the *being* of *life*—for the being object here has been determined to be life" (186). This should sound familiar—in the second movement of self consciousness, described in the above (§ 2.5), self-consciousness first arose as an object of representation from the self-sufficient development of *life*. Now, Hegel suggests that self-consciousness wants to overcome its objective aspect, and therefore its essential connection to *life*. Of course, Hegel takes advantage of the most dramatic way to describe the overcoming of *life*: to seek independence from life is to seek *death*. Hegel clarifies that

> just as life—self-sufficiency without absolute negativity—is the *natural* location of consciousness, so is [death] the *natural* negation of consciousness—negation without self-sufficiency, which thus lingers without the putative significance of recognition. (188)

This is somewhat dense. Hegel now characterizes *natural* or "*mere*" *life* as something that develops self-sufficiently, but that lacks "absolute negativity," or the quality of

having no particular commitment or feature that is essential.[50] This is life without fluxion, the life that is the source of consciousness in the natural world. *Death*, curiously, is the negation not of life, but of consciousness. Furthermore, as it figures here, *death* involves "negation without self-sufficiency," or negation that does not come about through the operation of the dying self-consciousness' own inner necessity. This pair of concepts is exactly what self-consciousness needs in order to articulate its strategy of becoming an absolute subject. Self-consciousness-qua-subject, in trying to establish its own "pure being for itself," must be free of all aspects of itself that are for others, including itself construed as an object. So it aims at its own destruction—what from its point of view would be the exogenous negation of itself qua object, or the death of the object consciousness—in order to overcome mere life and attain self-sufficiency *with* absolute negativity. This is what Hegel describes:

> And it is only through the risking of life that [it is proved that] freedom [is the essence], that it is proved that for self-consciousness the essence is not *being*, is not in the *immediate* way it emerges, is not its embeddedness in the expanse of life—but rather that there is nothing on hand in it that could not be a vanishing moment for it, that it is only pure being-for-itself. (187)

Self-consciousness "risks life," construes itself as indifferent to and therefore independent of the mere *life* from which it first appeared, and comes to view itself as having no essential qualities over which it does not have control. If it can do this, it can come to view itself as a pure subject.

3.3 The Lord-Servant Dialectic

As I said, I am leaving aside many details—how precisely, outside the context of Hegel's metaphor, consciousness aims for *death*, and how the risking of *life* can go wrong (¶ 188), and so on. Let us simply suppose for the moment that self-consciousness succeeds in distilling its subjective aspects out from its objective aspects. Again, I am only discussing the Lord-Servant Dialectic for its general plot, and to elucidate the role that *life* and *desire* play in it. After the *life* and *death* struggle, self-consciousness is estranged into two distinct shapes: a self-sufficient "lord" consciousness that is essentially *for itself*, and non-self-sufficient "servant" consciousness that is essentially *for another*, like *life* is (¶ 189).

[50] The expression *absolute Negativität* reappears at ¶ 191, where the context supports this interpretation.

Both the lord and the servant, at a first pass, exist as self-consciousness.[51] That is, the lord is self-consciousness-qua-subject, and the servant is self-consciousness-qua-object.[52] Each of these figures has its own perspective, experience, and commitments. However, there are really three key figures in this passage: the lord and the servant, of course, but also what Hegel calls the thing (*Ding*) as such, which he characterizes as the object of *desire* (¶ 190), and which stands for the *mere life* that was repudiated in the life and death struggle.[53] The lord is purely subjective consciousness, and the thing is purely objective being. The servant, as the objective aspect of consciousness, is mixed; it is both something *for which* there are objects, and something that is an object *for* the lord.

Although the thing is, as it figures presently, a pure object, the object of *desire* is still self-sufficient (¶¶ 168, 190). In the case of *desire*, the self-sufficiency of this object made it inapt to be an object of self-consciousness. However, purely subjective self-consciousness in the shape of the lord has pretentions to overcome the problems of self-consciousness-as-*desire*:

> Where desire did not succeed, [the lord] does succeed in dealing with [the thing], and in being satisfied in his consumption of it. Desire did not achieve this because of the self-sufficiency of the thing; but the lord, who interposed the servant between it and himself, thereby only merges himself with the non-self-sufficiency of the thing, and consumes it purely; and he leaves the aspect of its self-sufficiency to the servant, who works it. (190)

Self-consciousness-as-desire could not successfully take this *life* as an object because it is self-sufficient; it is driven by an inner necessity that is not the necessity of self-consciousness' own commitments. However, the lord can use his relation to the servant to overcome the problems that troubled *desire*. Since the lord is essentially for himself, he takes

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[51] This must be the case, since the lord is a candidate for achieving a form of recognition, though a flawed one (¶ 191), and because the servant is the truth of the lord (¶ 192–193). The servant is explicitly characterized as self-consciousness (¶ 194ff.). The lord may turn out not to be self-consciousness, but that is not yet clear at the moment where the lord and servant first appear.

[52] We can probably recognize in the lord and the servant Kant's apperceptive and empirical selves. This is, of course, what McDowell suggests (p. 163), though it is worth noting that no pair of figures that I have discussed up to this point has been a good candidate for such an identification, with the *brief* exception (maybe) of self-consciousness-as-desire and self-consciousness-as-genus, only during the transition between the second and third moments of self-consciousness in the first division (§ 2.5, above).

[53] This is plausible because "*life*" is repeatedly characterized as the object of *desire* (¶¶ 175, 177), because the thing is an object for which the lord has disdain and from which the servant could not demonstrate independence in the life and death struggle (¶ 190), and because like mere life (cf. ¶ 188) the thing is essentially self-sufficient but distinct from consciousness (¶ 189, 190).

as his object only those aspects of the thing that are not self-sufficient, i.e. those aspects of mere *life* that are not self-propelled, that are determined by the lord's (rather than life's) inner necessity. Unlike *desire*, then, the lord can successfully represent even self-sufficient objects because he has a servant who is essentially for another, and who takes as his object those aspects of the thing that are self-sufficient. When self-consciousness is divided in this way, it appears to be able to identify itself selectively with some aspects of life and not others. It can identify aspects of its life that are not driven by its own inner necessity, e.g. recalcitrant experience, with servile consciousness.[54] Because the servile consciousness interacts with recalcitrant elements of natural *life*, it is said to *work* on the thing, its life.

However, this strategy of lordship does not succeed. The lordship-consciousness turns out not to have the structure of self-consciousness. As an absolute subject the lord does not identify with any object it represents, and therefore does not have the necessary structure of self-consciousness outlined at the end of the first division (¶ 191–193). Even the satisfaction that the lord claimed to have in life "is itself only a vanishing, for it lacks the *objective* aspect or *endurance*" (195). Self-consciousness as lordship, because it is independent from life, does not have the features that belonged to *life* in the first division (see § 2.4 above); it cannot endure and cannot develop. The servile self-consciousness, on the other hand, does have the structure of self-consciousness. Ironically, in losing the struggle against the lord, it loses its certainty of itself as self-consciousness, and therefore experiences "absolute becoming-fluid of all endurance" and gains the "absolute negativity" that the lord wanted in the life and death struggle (¶ 194). Furthermore, it is a crucial feature of the servile consciousness, in virtue of which it is successful and self-sufficient self-consciousness, that it *works*. Negativity is achieved piecemeal because the servile consciousness "works away" its natural existence (194), and "through work it comes to itself" (195).

> ...work is desire that is *delayed*, vanishing that is *suspended*, that is, [work] *educates* [*bildet*]. The negative relation to the object becomes its *form*, and becomes something that *stays*, because the object has self-sufficiency even for the one who works. (195)

So Hegel claims that it is through an enduring relation to a self-sufficient object that self-sufficient self-consciousness is possible. Just as genuine self-knowledge required that consciousness' development as life be for self-consciousness, the self-sufficiency of self-consciousness requires prolonged interaction with self-sufficient life. *Work*, engagement

[54] So the story I am telling here is consistent in spirit with Brandom's reading of Hegel on mastery, on which mastery serves as a flawed model for self-consciousness in which self-consciousness is a pure "taker" whose takings are constitutively true (Brandom ms 6).

with an independently self-sufficient object, is not an activity that annihilates genuine self-consciousness; it is the home of self-consciousness, because self-consciousness' prolonged activity of *shaping* life is what holds *desire* at bay. On this picture we can see servile self-consciousness, qua worker, as a self-sufficient source of the development of life.

Although the lord is not genuine self-consciousness, he is still a crucial element of the servant's being self-consciousness. The lord functions "as the concept of self-consciousness" (190).

> What the servant does is actually the activity of the lord; the latter is only the being-for-itself, the essence; it is the pure negative power for which the thing is nothing, and thus the pure essential activity in this relationship. (191)

The lord's negative relation to the servant and to life prevents the lord from being self-consciousness, but it enables the servant to be self-consciousness. In losing the mirror duel and succumbing to fear in the life and death struggle, servile self-consciousness was characterized by lordly consciousness with the character of the negative. However, that negative character is now seen to be the source of servile self-consciousness' self-sufficiency and its power over life. The lord figures as a regulative ideal, a principle of change, that is a normative guide to the work of the servant. Hegel puns that "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (195), and describes the *Bilden*, the formative activity, of the servant as the result of an interplay between "fear" and "servitude" (¶ 196). It is the *disparity* between what the lord takes itself to be and what servile self-consciousness takes life to be that gives the servant the opportunity to exercise his self-sufficiency with respect to life. And disparity in the other direction, between recalcitrant commitments and the lord's self-conception, that propels the method of experience and the *Bilden* of consciousness. So the servile self-consciousness is revealed to be the truth of the inner necessity that drives the method of the *Phenomenology*. The servant makes possible the education of consciousness through the process of experience, and consciousness' intellectual development as the self-development of an individual personal history.

With these elements of Hegel's account in place, Hegel claims that "for us a new shape of self-consciousness has come to be; a consciousness that is *infinity* to itself, or pure movement of consciousness that *thinks*, or free self-consciousness," what is essentially "*thinking* self-consciousness" (197). In the third and final division of Chapter IV, Hegel gives an account of the development of this thinking self-consciousness through three major moments, termed "stoicism," "skepticism" and "unhappy consciousness," that represent the progression of thinking self-consciousness from its origin in servitude toward understanding its own nature. Like at the end of the "Consciousness" section, however, the end of "Self-Consciousness" does not quite equip consciousness with the resources to understand itself fully. Consciousness has come to a point where, as it is *in*

itself, it has achieved a sort of harmony with its environment. However, as consciousness is *for itself* it is still "impoverished" (¶ 230). If, as I have claimed, concerns about self-sufficiency form the core motivation for the second and third divisions, we can see why the transition to the "Reason" section is motivated. The most glaring gap in Hegel's account of consciousness so far is the detailed treatment of theoretical and practical reason, and an understanding of these topics will be crucial to filling in the picture of self-consciousness that we have been shown in Chapter IV.

Obviously there is much more to be said about lordship and servitude, but I hope I have discussed IV.A in enough detail to show that it does not speak against my reading of the first division of Chapter IV. Indeed the reading I defended of the roles of *life* and *desire* in the first division carries over into the plot of IV.A.

4 Conclusion

My principal aim in this paper has been to clearly articulate, and to begin to motivate, a very specific reading of the first division of Chapter IV of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. On my reading, the main plot of that division concerns a puzzle about the possibility of knowledge about what one is essentially. Hegel describes the progression of consciousness into the puzzle and out of it again in a sequence of three moments. In the first moment, the immanence insight provides consciousness with its first self-consciousness, but consciousness' genuine self-knowledge is limited to knowledge of its self-identity, and of the distinction between itself and all the shapes of knowledge it has seen before. In the second moment, self-consciousness comes to understand itself as a form of *life* that is *genus* for itself. In the final moment, self-consciousness identifies itself with the self-consciousness that arose from life, and attains self-knowledge by situating itself in the context of its other knowledge, and in representing itself as a subject of its own knowledge. Along the way, Hegel identifies a problematic representation structure he calls *desire*, describes a special structure of self-sufficient, dynamic concepts that he calls *life*, and derives the concept of *personal individuality*. I also defended my reading against a worry that if I am right about the first division of Chapter IV, no sense can be made of IV.A. I gave a sketch of the plot of that division, and outlined the general shape of an intrapersonal reading of the Lord-Servant Dialectic on which the most significant accomplishment of servile self-consciousness is the achievement of an equipoise between the fearsome negative ideal dramatized by the lord and the recalcitrant, self-sufficient objectivity of *life*. Servile self-consciousness, in mediating between these elements, is poised to be the truth of self-sufficient self-consciousness, and to be a mechanism in the *Bilden* of consciousness that is the plot of the *Phenomenology*.

The first two divisions of Chapter IV together make a tidy plot arc. The first division begins with a puzzle about how self-consciousness could know anything about itself essentially, given that the commitments of consciousness are continually changing and transforming. The fluxion, or absolute negativity of consciousness created a recalcitrant problem because no commitment was immutable. However, at the end of IV.A we have an account on which the dynamic quality of consciousness is essential to self-consciousness and its self-sufficiency with respect to the developmental course of its life. The self-consciousness that is interposed between the lord and *life* overcomes the problematic structure of *desire*, and dissolves the puzzles about self-sufficiency that gave rise to the mirror duel. What emerges is a new picture of the protagonist of the *Phenomenology* as a free, thinking self-consciousness.

The spirit of my reading is, to be sure, not entirely new or unprecedented. My reading of Chapter IV is similar to McDowell's in many details, and my investigation here might be understood as an attempt to begin making good certain of the schematic suggestions McDowell outlines in his essay. However, my reading includes significant elements that are not present in McDowell's reading. These include the elaboration of the role of the concept of *life* in the first division of the chapter, its relation to *personal individuality*, and the role it plays in the second division and the main lesson of the lord-servant dialectic. While I could be said to be batting for McDowell's reading of Chapter IV, the details of my discussion should reveal that such a reading as I propose here need not be at odds with the spirit of Brandom's reading of the *Phenomenology* as a whole. My understanding of Hegel is deeply influenced by Brandom, and though my reading of Chapter IV differs dramatically from his, I take my reading to be consonant with Brandom's understanding of major Hegelian themes and claims. My reading even has significant elements in common with his reading of Chapter IV—particularly the significance of histories and their role in the nature of essentially self-conscious essences. And as I concede readily, the Lord-Servant Dialectic can be read abstractly enough to provide the structure that Brandom illustrates with the metaphors of "mastery" and "slavery" throughout the remainder of the *Phenomenology*.

In fact, my reading of Chapter IV preserves a strong narrative unity in the Hegel's philosophical *Bildungsroman*. I have gestured at the expository rationale for the transitions between the "Consciousness," "Self-Consciousness" and "Reason" sections of the text, and linked the developments of Chapter IV with Hegel's own description of his dialectic method. The methodology is not the only part of Hegel's introduction that foreshadows the plot of Chapter IV. There he also says that

> What is limited to a natural *life* is not on its own capable of going beyond its immediate existence; but it is driven out of itself by something other than itself, and this being-torn-out-of-itself is its death. However, consciousness is for its own self its *concept*, and

> as a result also immediately its surpassing the limited thing and, since this limited thing is its own, beyond its own self. (80)

Before consciousness' narrative began, then, Hegel had told us that consciousness differs importantly from *mere life* or *natural life* in that it "is for its own self its concept," i.e. is self-conscious, and this feature of consciousness allows it to overcome its past commitments and even a process that Hegel calls "*death*." In this passage we can come to understand a part of what initially made Hegel's *consciousness* difficult to characterize. It is the sort of thing that seems to survive the alteration of any of its properties, and the result is not that it stops being a thing of the kind "consciousness," but that it develops and educates itself.

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Appendix: Grammatical Note

I chose to preserve the German word *aufheben* due to my distaste for the English expression "to sublate" that is sometimes employed to make transparent Hegel's deployment of his special idiom. However, unlike the German expressions employed throughout the text, the English expression does have the advantage of bearing English inflections, and therefore displaying its grammatical function for readers who are unfamiliar with German grammar. It is not my goal to make my exposition more opaque or obscure than necessary, so I have provided a small table translating German expressions into their inflected English equivalents, using the verb "to supersede" to bear English inflections.

Aufhebung	supersession/being superseded
Aufheben	superseding/the activity of superseding
aufheben	to supersede/superseding
hebt... auf	supersedes
aufgehoben	superseded (perfect participle)

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