

In the Spirit of Hegel

A Study of G.W.F. Hegel's
Phenomenology of Spirit

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Chapter Eight

Self-Consciousness: Desire, Dependency, and Freedom (chapter 4)

Strictly speaking, you have no consciousness of things, but only consciousness of consciousness of things.

Consciousness connects with reality in action; I possess reality and comprehend it, because it lies within my own being, it is native to myself.
—Fichte, *Vocation of Man*

“With Self-Consciousness,” Hegel informs us, “we have entered the native realm of truth” (167). In fact we have entered the realm of Fichte’s philosophy and, more importantly, we have entered the realm of the most famous part of the *Phenomenology*, the realm of the “Master and Slave” (*Lordship and Bondage*, *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*). These few pages have inspired no less brilliant admirers than Karl Marx and Jean-Paul Sartre¹ and it is with visible relief that most commentators launch into the first section of the *Phenomenology* with which they can feel fully confident. Suddenly, we think that we know what we’re talking about: two people (ostensibly men, though they are called “self-

1. Marx’s debt to Hegel, of course, is now widely recognized, due to the pro-Hegelian sympathies of the Marxists of the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse in particular (*Reason and Revolution*). Although Marx talks about the *Philosophy of Right* at much greater length, his admiration was directed much more to the *PG*, the Master-Slave parable in particular. See, e.g., David McClellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). Jean-Paul Sartre used the Hegelian parable to begin his long and somewhat paranoid discussion of “Being-for-Others” in *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956). Although Sartre’s analysis is usually interpreted as a psychological study, it is just as much and even more an ontology of selfhood, a terrifying study of the vicissitudes of romantic love, sex, hatred, masochism, sadism, and indifference, without a hint of sentimentality. In Sartre’s formulation, the essence of all interpersonal relations is “conflict”—the attempt of each person to assert himself or herself as “absolute freedom” and turn the other into an “object” which is no longer a threat to that freedom.

consciousness") meet for the first time and immediately begin to fight for "recognition" (*Anerkennen*). One wins, one loses. And then, ironically, the loser emerges the winner. It is simple, straightforward, striking, prophetic—unlike the tedious interplay of "forces" we suffered through only a few pages before (in chapter 3) and unlike the abstruse warblings about "desire" that immediately precede it, by way of an introduction.² Thus Findlay gladly declares it "more lucid and illuminating" than all that has come before and, in tacit contrast, he calls it "deservedly admired."³ Alexandre Kojève goes one step further and simply weaves the whole story of the *Phenomenology* around it, beginning with "desire" and all but pretending that the first three chapters of the book do not even exist.⁴

The Master-Slave parable (as I shall refer to it) is, of course, of immense importance to the *Phenomenology* and to Hegel's philosophy in general. It appears, in virtually the same form, in every one of his works on "Spirit," including his Jena lectures of the same period⁵ and the "Philosophy of Spirit" of the later *Encyclopaedia*. In one sense, there is no problem of interpretation here—unlike some of the earlier chapters; at least we are certain about what Hegel is talking about—some primitive confrontation of two primordial persons. The question is: How does this fit in with the rest of the book and Hegel's philosophy? What is it supposed to mean in terms of the over-all "dialectic," and why—its intrinsic fascination aside—should it occur in the *Phenomenology*, and occur at this particular point (rather than in the chapter on "Spirit," to which it would seem more akin)? Indeed, even the most conscientious commentators tend to treat the celebrated section as a major break in the text, the sudden and totally unexplained appearance of the "social" dimension of human experience which just as suddenly disappears into a discussion of the philosophy of the stoics.⁶

On the one hand, I would agree with Kojève that the *Phenomenology* could have begun with the section on "desire"⁷ (just as it could have

2. Richard Norman, for example, simply dismisses the entire section on "desire" in his *Hegel's Phenomenology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977) and calls it "extremely unrewarding," "unintelligible," concluding "I shall say little about it" (p. 47); Ivan Soll, *Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics*, p. 10ff.

3. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 93.

4. Alexandre Kojève, *An Introduction to Reading Hegel*, trans. J.H. Nichols, ed. Alan Bloom (New York, 1969).

5. In the lectures, however, the emphasis is on the *social* origins of relationships.

6. For example, Soll, pp. 9, 14f.; Findlay, *Hegel*; Hyppolite, pp. 162ff.

7. The enthusiastic over-emphasis on the importance of "desire" in Kojève's interpretation I attribute to a peculiar French fashion, to which Kojève himself mightily contributed: it includes Sartre, of course, and, today, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault, for whom the word has become the fetish that "freedom" was in the post-war, more Cartesian days. See, for example, Lacan's excursions into Hegel in his *Ecrits* (Seminar lectures, 1970).

begun with primitive family life in "Spirit" or the elementary forms of religious experience in chapter 7). The *Phenomenology* is a panorama with a number of potential starting points, and primitive desire is certainly one of them. But, on the other hand, the point is that Hegel did *not* so begin. In our reading, the transition from the Kantian forms of "understanding" to "desire" and "Master and Slave" has to be accounted for, not ignored or denied. But there is a straightforward progression here which can be understood in a word, and the word is—*Fichte*.

Anyone who has read Fichte will recognize him here; the pragmatic turn is his; the Master-Slave parable itself is (most immediately) from Fichte; the notion of "Self-Certainty" is pure Fichte; and the whole idea of self-consciousness and conflict as "the native realm of truth" is from Fichte. Of course, this is not all that it is, but neither should one treat the Master-Slave parable out of context, cutting it off entirely from the rest of the book.

Perhaps the first point to make about the place of the parable in the *Phenomenology* is that it is not, in any way, about the "social" dimension of human experience.⁸ It is, Hegel tells us, the first appearance of "Spirit," the first conception of interpersonal unity (177), but the participants in the parable do not know this. In the philosophical parlance that utterly dominated the philosophical context of both Fichte and Hegel, the initial confrontation of two more-or-less "independent" persons in "the state of nature" is emphatically *pre-social*, *before* the formation of society. In fact, in Hobbes, in Rousseau, and in Fichte, it is this pre-social confrontation, whether nasty, brutish and short as in Hobbes, or compassionately "indifferent" as in Rousseau, that prefigures the formation of society through some mythical agreement or contract. The master-slave parable is Hegel's contribution to that lively and popular debate, but it is not, therefore, the first appearance of the "social." Indeed, it should strike any reader who thinks so as quite odd that, instead of moving straight on to "Spirit" and the nature of society as such, Hegel should spend another one and a half chapters, 150 pages and nearly 250 paragraphs before doing so.

The second preliminary point to make is that the Master-Slave parable is not, as Marx and Sartre later reinterpret it, about "freedom." The title of the section, in fact, is "Independence and Dependence"; "Freedom" does not appear until the following section (on "Stoicism, Skepticism and Unhappy Consciousness"). Freedom is a concept that emerges *from* the master-slave confrontation; it is not its object; the

8. This view is taken for granted, in a few cases argued, by Findlay, Marcuse, Kojève, Hyppolite, and Soll, to name but a few.

slave does not long for his freedom, and the end of the story is not, though it might warm our liberal hearts, the “liberation” of the slave.

The third point is that we should not expect Hegel to give us more than the parable is designed to exemplify. If indeed it were, as Kojève and others have read it, a study in the dynamics of social relations or a psychological study of domination and submission, then we could quite rightly criticize Hegel for giving us so little by way of detail.⁹ Thus commentators have debated with one another—Why does the master not kill the slave? And why does the slave choose servitude to death? Why do they have to fight to the death at all? And what is it about the slave’s condition (his fear of the master, his fear of death, his relationship to his work) that renders him ultimately independent?¹⁰ Indeed, these are fascinating questions, but they are for the most part inessential to the point of the parable, which is *the formation of self-consciousness*. The precise details of interpersonal confrontation are not important to Hegel’s purpose, any more than the precise nature of the “forces” in “Force and the Understanding” (ch. 3) were essential to Hegel’s analysis of scientific explanation (*à la* Newton). It didn’t really matter whether he was discussing gravity or electromagnetism or chemical bonding to make his point, and the exact sociodynamics of interpersonal relations are not required for Hegel to make his point here either—that self-consciousness becomes determinate only through interaction with another self-consciousness. (Hegel explicitly makes this connection in ¶ 184). For the brutal details, I cannot recommend anything better than Sartre’s brilliant dialectic on “Being-for-Others” in *Being and Nothingness*, Part III. But for an understanding of the *Phenomenology* it is far more important to look back and ahead, to the earlier sections of the book and Fichte’s philosophy and to the study of Stoicism etc. that follow.

The Master-Slave parable is not a condensed epic about the importance of work and the inevitable mastery of the working class. It is not a distilled and overly abstract psychological study of servitude and oppression. It is in brief an ontological theory about the nature of “selfhood” in which the whole history of philosophy, and in particular the Cartesian-Leibnizian vision of the fully formed individual ego is summarily rejected. Surely that is enough to do in less than nine pages.

9. Soll, for example, makes this lament, attacking Findlay’s attempts to provide the arguments for Hegel (Soll, p. 16ff). He rightly criticizes Findlay for his “overly epistemological” interpretation, insisting instead on the “plainly practical character” of the section, despite the epistemological idiom of Hegel’s discussion (pp. 9–10, 16).

10. For example, Kaufmann, p. 153; Findlay, p. 96, Josiah Royce, p. 177, Soll, p. 18ff.

*Self-Certainty and the History of the Self—as Monad,
as Cogito, as Everything*

There is no way of explaining how a monad can be altered or changed in its inner being by any other created thing, since there is no possibility of transposition within it . . . The Monads have no windows through which anything can come in or go out. —Leibniz, *Monadology*

I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it. —Descartes, *Meditation II*

I am indeed conscious of myself as an independent being; . . . I have immediate knowledge of myself alone. —Fichte, *Vocation of Man*

Himself as everything! How does Mrs. Fichte put up with it?
—H. Heine

To understand the “sudden” appearance of another person in the *Phenomenology*, it is first of all necessary to look back with fascination and dismay at the whole history of modern philosophy, from Descartes and Locke to Kant, in which other people, other self-consciousnesses, are silently absent. Indeed it is the assumption—not even pondered sufficiently to be called a pre-supposition—that what is “immediately” known to us are our *individual selves as knowers*. For Descartes it is the *Cogito*—“I think, therefore I am”; for Kant it is the “transcendental unity of apperception”—the “possibility of the ‘I think’ accompanying all of my representations.” In John Locke’s varied deliberations concerning self-identity in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* the possibility that the “self” is essentially a social creation rather than a feature of personal experience is not even considered, and in Hume’s denial of the existence of a self, the idea that he might be looking for it in the wrong place—namely, in his own consciousness—never even occurs to him:

There are some philosophers who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our self; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence, and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity . . . Unluckily, all of these positive assertions are contrary to that very experience which is pleaded for them . . .

I can never catch myself at any time without a perception, and I can never observe anything but the perception, . . .¹¹

The most spectacular assertion of this view of the isolated, individ-

11. *Treatise on Human Nature*, Selby-Bigge, ed., iv, i.

ual, largely perceptual self could be found in Germany. A century before Hegel, Leibniz had developed his theory of *monads*, each of them totally self-contained, literally the whole world within itself programmed ("in pre-established harmony") by God. There is some indication, perhaps, that Leibniz's theory is not intended to be a theory of *self-identity* at all,¹² but the image deeply affected every German philosopher following him. Consciousness was a self-enclosed realm. On reflection, consciousness became self-consciousness and, upon transcendental reflection (as in Kant) it came to see itself as not only the recipient but the *source* of the world it perceived. It is in this Leibnizian-Kantian light that we must understand the apparent arrogance of Fichte's statements; "I am wholly my own creation" and "whatever has an existence for me has it through myself."¹³ This is not pathological egomania¹⁴; it is the philosophical tradition. The "I" is everything. And it is worth noting that in every one of these philosophical giants, in Germany from Leibniz to Fichte, in England from Locke to Russell, in France from Descartes to Sartre, the self ("for itself") is the beginning of philosophy; the existence of other people is hardly even mentioned, that is, until they suddenly start doing ethics (as in Kant's second *Critique*) or until other people are presented as a *problem* (as in John Stuart Mill's "problem of other minds" or in Jean-Paul Sartre's "Reef of Solipsism"). Even in Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, the existence of other selves plays a minimal role, and then late in the game.¹⁵

This is the philosophical background against which the appearance of two people instead of just one in the Master-Slave parable must be understood. It is not the unwarranted appearance of the "social"; it is not the intrusion of another person into the fully formed world of self-consciousness.¹⁶ It is Hegel's bold demonstration of the radical view that, without interpersonal interaction and the mutual demand for what he calls "recognition," there is no "self" and no "self-consciousness." There is no self-enclosed monad; there is no possibility of a *Cogito ergo sum*. Hume is right in his insistence that he can find

12. See, e.g., Ruth Saw, *Leibniz* (London: Penguin, 1954).

13. Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, pp. 103, 108.

14. For example, George Santayana's amusing but wholly undependable *The Ego in German Philosophy*; on Hegel: "he must pretend that his egoism was not egotism, but identity with the absolute" (p. 91).

15. In Part III, "The Foundation of Knowledge of the Practical" (pp. 218–87), the "not-self" is usually impersonal and only rarely given the status of another self. Indeed, considering the highly *moral* nature of the work, the absence of almost all mention of relations to others is no less than shocking.

16. Soll: "in the social sphere, but in an anti-social way" (p. 17). And George Armstrong Kelly, "Notes on Hegel's 'Lordship and Bondage,'" in MacIntyre, *Hegel*, esp. pp. 196–97.

no immediate self in his consciousness (though Hegel does not discuss him on this topic, even in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*).¹⁷ And knowledge is not, as in virtually every other modern philosopher, a relation between me (as “knower”) and the world (as “known”). If one reads Hegel’s *Phenomenology* not as history (in which case the whole section on “Self-Consciousness” is absurdly misplaced) but as a conceptual series of forms and theories, the function of which is to give us a comprehensive picture of human experience, then the Master-Slave section is intended as a corrective to the view that we have so far (both in the *Phenomenology* and in the history of philosophy) assumed to be obviously true: that the self is essentially a cognitive self known through (or in or “behind”) experience and that it is essentially an individual self, a concrete particular that is recognized through immediate intuition.

In our Chapter 7, we looked in some detail—as much as is sanctioned by the text—at Hegel’s Fichtean pragmatic move; knowledge is not, Hegel argues, exclusively a matter of “theory.” It is also practical, not only in its consequences but in its sources and its parameters. Indeed, in Fichte, the pragmatic turn itself becomes total: “If my knowledge revealed to me nothing but knowledge, I would be defrauded of my whole life.”¹⁸ For Fichte too, the self is not a particular, determinate entity. Indeed he argues that individual selves, along with the “not-self,” are created by the self which is, itself, indeterminate. But for Fichte along with the whole tradition since Descartes, the self itself is an immediate object of knowledge, indeed, the ultimate object of knowledge, “certain of itself” in the sense that it could not possibly be questioned.¹⁹

In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel spells out the cryptic references of “Self-Certainty” in chapter 4. Descartes and Fichte are treated in much the same way: “Descartes begins, just as Fichte did later on, with the ‘I’ as indubitably certain; I know that something is presented in me.”²⁰ In fact, Descartes is rendered more sympathetically, perhaps, than he ought to be. The *Cogito* of the *Meditations* seems obviously enough to be an individual ego (if something less than a whole person). But in the *Lectures*, Hegel tells us, speaking of Descartes;

17. His discussion of Hume is in *Lectures*, trans. Haldane and Simson (New York: Humanities Press, 1955), vol. 3, pp. 369–75.

18. *Vocation of Man*, p. 93.

19. *Wiss.*, p. 93ff., “First Unconditioned Principle.”

20. *Lectures*, 3, p. 228.

The "I" has significance here as thought, not as individuality of self-consciousness. . . . hence the immediate certainty of thought. Certainty is only knowledge as such in its pure form of self-relating.²¹

It is with Descartes that "modern philosophy" begins²² and Fichte with whom it begins to reach its modern completion (which is in Hegel, of course).

Self-consciousness does not entirely begin in chapter 4; the "I" has been with us since "Sense-Certainty" (100–102, especially). Descartes's *Cogito* and certainly the empirically discovered particular of John Locke's self (which Hume couldn't find) more properly belong to that discussion. The self of "Sense-Certainty" is uncritically assumed to be a bare particular, a knowing self, which is sufficiently unproblematic so that all of our attention is turned to the nature of the object of knowledge, which is shown not to be a particular at all (90–110). A similar argument is advanced against the "I" (102) in which it too is said to be a universal and indeterminate ("everyone is equally 'I'"), but so briefly that it must be considered there as but a foretaste of a more massive set of considerations yet to come (if also briefly and obscurely presented) in chapter 4. The "I" is not an individual "I" after all; it is, or tries to be, *everything*. This is certainly not to be ascribed to Descartes; it is pure Fichte, and no one else: "Nothing is more insupportable to me than to be merely by another, for another, through another; I must be something for myself and by myself alone."²³

Descartes worried about how he could infer from consciousness and its "thoughts" to the reality of things "outside" of him; Fichte, a thorough idealist, does not worry about this—"whatever has existence has it through myself"²⁴ and "Strictly speaking, you have no consciousness of things, but only a consciousness of a consciousness of things",²⁵ which Hegel summarizes as:

When I philosophize, I make my ordinary consciousness itself my object, because I make a pure category of my consciousness; I know what my ego is doing, and thus I get behind my ordinary consciousness. Fichte thus defines philosophy as the artificial consciousness, as the consciousness of consciousness.²⁶

21. Ibid. 227.

22. Ibid. 166, 220ff.

23. *Vocation of Man*, p. 95.

24. Ibid. 108.

25. Ibid. 55.

26. *Lectures*, vol. 3, p. 484.

And in the *Phenomenology*;

With that first moment [recognition of things], self-consciousness is in the form of *consciousness*, and the whole expanse of the sensuous world is preserved for it, but at the same time only as connected with the second moment, the unity of self-consciousness with itself. (167)

Fichte does not deny the existence of “the sensuous world”; he only says that this world exists by being “posited” by the self. The self needs opposition to define itself, or as Hegel puts it in the *Lectures*, “the ego must not remain barren.”²⁷ The self itself, as Hegel puts it in the *Phenomenology*, cannot remain as a “motionless tautology” (i.e. “Ego = Ego” or “I = I,” as Fichte sometimes stated his first principle²⁸) or, in the *Lectures*, an “abstract undetermined identity.”²⁹ The self “posits” the “not-self,” the sensuous world. It is worth noting that Hegel also attributes this move to Descartes (which is certainly not justified by the text) when he says that “the celebrated *Cogito ergo sum* is Thought and Being inseparably bound together”³⁰ (III 228). In defense of Fichte’s move, he curiously comments:

This other is the negative of the ego: thus when Fichte called it the non-ego he was expressing himself in a very happy, suitable and consistent manner. [!] There has been a good deal of ridicule cast on the ego and non-ego; the expression is new, and therefore to us Germans it seems strange at first. But the French say *moi* and *Non-moi* without finding anything laughable in it.³¹

In the *Phenomenology*, of course, Fichte does not emerge as “happy” at all, for it is his initial “positing” of the distinction between self and not-self and what Hegel too freely translates into “appearance and truth” (167) that leads us, in the course of this chapter, to the most “unhappy” of consciousnesses.³²

For Fichte (but not Descartes), the self, though immediately known by “intuition,” has to *prove* itself. It will find itself (that is, become

27. Ibid. 484.

28. The “A = A” formula is derived from Leibniz (see pp. 67). God, in Leibniz’s philosophy, knows all truths as necessary and, all necessary truths are ultimately equivalent. Thus, for God, or for an absolute Ego, everything is identical to everything else, or “A = A.”

29. *Lectures*, vol. 3.

30. Ibid. 228.

31. Ibid. 488–89.

32. Fichte does not use this distinction, since he rejects the Kantian dualism of phenomenon (appearance) and noumenon (thing in itself). Indeed, even in his more popular and initially Cartesian *Vocation of Man*, this distinction plays virtually no role at all. But the idea that Fichte ignored the “truth” of knowledge, in his zealous pursuit of the practical, is of course the main point of both Schelling’s and Hegel’s rejection of Fichte’s philosophy.

determinate) only through conflict and struggle. Thus the concepts of conflict and striving become central to Fichte's *Wissenschaftlehre*. Struggle against what? The not-self, of course, and it is the unresolved "opposition" between them that leads Hegel, from his early *Differenz*-essay of 1801 until his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, to ultimately reject Fichte's philosophy as "unsystematic." In other words, he never achieves that vision of ultimate harmony that had always been Hegel's ideal, which remains his ideal in the *Phenomenology* and throughout his life. (Yet, it is Fichte who insists too: "It is the vocation of our race to unite itself into a single body."³³)

Life is struggle, Fichte tells us, and despite the distant ideal of harmony, it is clear that, without "opposition" life would have no meaning at all.

This would seem to pre-figure the life-and-death struggle between the soon-to-be master and slave right at the heart of Fichte's philosophy, but this turns out not to be so. In the *Wissenschaftlehre* there is precious little mention of other people, and insofar as they are mentioned, they are "self-existent, free substantive beings, wholly independent of me." The obvious consequence (given Fichte's insistence on being "everything") is an inevitable conflict between individuals, but this does not emerge in the *Wissenschaftlehre*. Even in *The Vocation of Man*, we get only: "It is not nature but freedom itself by which the greatest and most terrible disorders are produced; man is the cruelest enemy of man."³⁴

The struggle for self is essentially a struggle against the impersonal not-self and against the "counter-striving of the not-self." It is not at all clear that this struggle involves a struggle between persons, and Fichte "deduces" not conflict but rather respect and morality—the ends of "practical reason" à la Kant. The life-and-death struggle only begins with Fichte's ethics which, strangely enough, is just as distinct from his theory of "knowledge" as it is in Kant, whom Fichte criticizes for just this separation.

The struggle with the not-self produces *feeling* for Fichte, "longing" as well as "desire."³⁵ This, of course, is the link with "desire" in chapter 4 of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel's argument there—like all of the arguments in this chapter—should strike us as shockingly short; he says:

The antithesis of its appearance and its truth has, however, for its essence only the truth, viz. the unity of self-consciousness with itself;

33. *Vocation of Man*, p. 120.

34. *Ibid.* 117.

35. *Wiss.*, pp. 218ff. esp. 254–71.

this unity must become essential to self-consciousness, i.e. self-consciousness is *Desire* in general. (167)

Taken at face value, this is unintelligible, but with Fichte as our guide, we can easily enough understand the move. It is by opposing oneself to other things and then “negating their otherness”—e.g. by eating them or by buying them or by declaring them one’s own “property”—that we achieve a sense of self. Thus it was a common argument of the day (and it is still dominant) that private property is nothing less than the definition (not merely an extension of) the self; it is our “negation” of the natural world around us which makes us most human. We can “negate” in conceptual ways unimaginable to animals; a dog can negate a piece of meat by chewing it, but he can’t “negate its otherness” by buying it at the super-market. For the dog, possession (negation of otherness) requires physical command; we, on the other hand, have even “negated the otherness” of the Heavens, by naming the stars and understanding them, thus making them, in some sense “our own.” (This sounds far-fetched, but Hegel’s theory of knowledge involves “owning” the world in precisely this sense, and it is a view that we find again and again in Nietzsche, in Jean-Paul Sartre, and in Einstein, to name but a few.)

Hegel’s “argument,” in other words, is but a condensation of Fichte’s picture of self against not-self, which is to be *practically* understood not so much in terms of knowledge as *feeling* and desire. It is feeling and desire that together make up *life*.³⁶ What Fichte and Hegel call “life,” however, is *unity* of the self and not-self; it is a *process* (171), a “universal fluid medium” (*ibid.*) which divides itself up and takes on separate “moments” (*ibid.*). It is here that we get Hegel’s outrageous set of leaps from this Fichtean point to his odd thesis that what we desire is necessarily also a “living thing” to his all-important conclusion that; “self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness” (175). I have tried to make some sense of this set of transitions in the preceding chapter. Let me now try to make some good sense out of the conclusion.

The Origins of Self-Consciousness

Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only by being acknowledged. (178)

36. Fichte, *Wiss.* p. 262; Hegel, *PG* 169 f.

If one begins with the traditional view of the self as a particular, "self-existent" and autonomous monad, which knows itself immediately and the world only "mediately," this set of transitions is absurd. The appearance of "another self-consciousness" in particular seems sudden and arbitrary. In fact, Hegel himself confuses the issue in his terminology, since he is perhaps too quick to use the term "self-consciousness" when it is not at all clear that there is as yet any such thing. At the beginning of "Self-Certainty," we have a concept of self not much more advanced than the conception of self in "Sense-Certainty"; it is less particular and less defined in terms of knowledge, but it is still the "immediately given". But like the "this" of "Sense-Certainty," the "I" of "Self-Certainty" is quickly reduced to an empty gesture, a philosophical grunt, a "motionless tautology." To say this, again as Hegel said of the objects of "Sense-Certainty," is to say that the "I" is really nothing at all. It is a process which has yet to be initiated, and the question that defines the whole of this chapter is just this: *how does the concept of self-consciousness ever arise?* This in essence challenges what Fichte (and everyone before him) simply took for granted, the existence of consciousness as self-consciousness. Monads, the *cogito*, and Fichte's "self as everything" thesis just seem to beg the question, and begin where, at most, they ought to end.

The *Phenomenology*, from beginning to end, is a conceptual interplay of what Hegel calls "forms of consciousness." It is important to remind ourselves of this, especially here, where the text so readily lends itself to interpretation as a historical or a psychological progression, in which case it becomes almost unintelligible. One can, of course, ask why a creature should advance from mere desire to desire for recognition, but this empirical question is none of Hegel's concern and, in any case, it is probably unanswerable. Kojève, notably, treats this part of the *Phenomenology* as a historical-social progression, but this is a mistake even if one interprets the Master-Slave parable (as I intend to) as Hegel's version of the "state of nature" allegory presented by Rousseau and Hobbes, among others. Indeed, in a long and impossibly obscure excursus in his "Natural Law" essay a few years before, Hegel goes on and on against any such "empirical" interpretation of the origins of civil society.³⁷ This is a *conceptual* progression, to be understood in terms of the adequacy of forms, not the circumstantial emergence of humanity in history. Clark Butler advances an interesting interpretation of the *Phenomenology* as a Freudian devel-

37. *Natural Law*, trans. T.M. Knox (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), pp. 64–76.

opment from narcissistic infancy ("desire"), devoid of recognition of other people and aware of only one's own needs, to the first glimmer of others (Mother), and then the trauma of Oedipus (Master and Slave) and various defense mechanisms (Stoicism, Skepticism, and "Unhappy Consciousness") leading up to adolescence.³⁸ But though Hegel certainly thinks that the actual order of things will more or less follow the progression of forms he is tracing, the *Phenomenology* is by no means concerned with childhood or human development in general. What concerns Hegel here are the conceptual preconditions and presuppositions of self-consciousness.

The notion that self-consciousness has preconditions or presuppositions at all, of course, is just what Descartes, Fichte, and the others deny. Even for Kant, who makes some effort to "deduce" the transcendental ego, the precondition for self-consciousness seems to be only the existence of experience as such, not experience of any particular kind and, in particular, not *interpersonal* experience. Thus even Hegel's *question* is a rejection of the tradition, and his answer to it is so radical that even he has some trouble expressing it. Thus he speaks of self-consciousness coming "out of itself" (179), as if it were somehow "in itself" to begin with. The language here is Fichtean, but the result is confusion: there is no self, and no self-consciousness, before it comes "out of itself." Or as Sartre puts the same argument in his *Transcendence of the Ego*³⁹, the self is "out there, in the world, like the self of another." The argument is that there can be no (phenomenological) theory of consciousness which is not also a theory of self-consciousness. (This much is virtually a conceptual truth,—"I cannot talk about *my* consciousness unless I am also conscious of *my* being conscious.") Less trivially, there can be no description of self-consciousness which is not at the same time a discussion of one's relations with other people.

J.N. Findlay, in his interpretation of this section, provides the argument that a second self-consciousness is necessary as a "mirror" for the first, a position which Ivan Soll rejects (unfairly, I think) as "infinitely obscure."⁴⁰ But if anything, Findlay's imagery is not radical enough, for one can quite properly ask what there is that can be reflected in the mirror to begin with. A dog or a cat can look in a mirror with complete indifference; they do not see themselves at all. Or more

38. In *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research*, vol. 36 (June 1976), esp. 507–14. The comparison with Freud is not intended as an interpretation as such, which Butler has provided at length in his very sympathetic *Hegel*.

39. Translated by Forrest Williams (New York: Noonday Press, 1957), p. 31.

40. Findlay, p. 94; Soll, p. 16.

philosophically, we might recall the dilemma of Sartre's character Estelle in *Hell*, in the play *No Exit* (*Huis Clos*);

(ESTELLE is powdering her face. She looks around for a mirror, fumbles in her bag, then turns toward GARCIN)

ESTELLE Pardon, sir, have you a mirror? (GARCIN does not answer)

Any sort of glass, a pocket mirror will do. (GARCIN remains silent)

Even if you won't speak to me, you might lend me a mirror.

(His head buried in his hands, GARCIN remains silent)

INEZ (Eagerly) Don't worry. I've a mirror in my bag. (She opens her bag, looks annoyed) It's gone! They must have taken it at the entrance.

ESTELLE How tiresome!

(ESTELLE shuts her eyes and sways, as if about to faint. INEZ runs forward and holds her up)

INEZ What's the matter?

ESTELLE (Opens her eyes and smiles) I feel so queer. (She pats herself)

Don't you ever feel that way too? When I can't see myself I begin to wonder if I really exist. I pat myself just to make sure, but it doesn't help.⁴¹

The mirror imagery in Findlay's suggestion seems backward; it is not that we need another person as the mirror for self-consciousness, but rather that the mirror is *derivative* of self-consciously being looked at by others, or, in grandmotherly phrase, "seeing yourself as others see you." Hegel does not say that we (as self-conscious) want to be recognized; he says that we cannot be self-conscious *unless* we are recognized. The argument here has been further worked out in this century, by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* and by Wittgenstein and more recently P.F. Strawson in *Individuals*, by George Herbert Mead and some latter-day pragmatists in America. Strawson puts the argument most succinctly when he insists that we can ascribe certain predicates ("P- or "person-Predicates") to oneself only if one is also prepared to apply them to others as well.⁴² Taken out of the linguistic idiom, the argument is that one cannot be *self-conscious* of oneself as a person unless one also recognizes the personal existence of others. Self-consciousness, in other words, presupposes consciousness of others *as* others, not just as things, as limitations of myself. "The world is my oyster" only once I have come out of my own shell, and it is only when other people begin to take things away from me that I first get the conception "this is *mine*." This, of course, is precisely Fichte's thesis too, except that, for him, self-consciousness is already presup-

41. From *No Exit and Three Other Plays*, trans. S. Gilbert (New York: Vintage, 1947).

42. Strawson, *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1953), ch. 3, "Persons."

posed. Hegel, in return, is arguing that there can be no such self-consciousness without the existence of others already presupposed. You might say that these are opposite sides of the same coin; perhaps, but Hegel's side was a side that had never been adequately argued before.

The argument that self-consciousness presupposes recognition of and by other people is in fact two arguments. The first is an argument to the effect that one cannot have self-consciousness *at all* (in the sense that a dog or cat lacks self-consciousness, for example) without the "mediation" of other people. Then there is the argument that one cannot have a *particular* self-consciousness—that is, self-consciousness of oneself as a particular person, without other people. The first sense of self-consciousness is the indeterminate Fichtean sense of the *Wissenschaftslehre*; it is dealt with in the last few pages of the section on "self-certainty" (175–77). The second sense of self-consciousness is also Fichtean, but it is an *ethical* sense of self, a sense of one's *rights* and *status*; it is the heart of the Master-slave conflict, through which it is determined.

The general sense of self-consciousness is not, *contra* Descartes and Fichte, an immediate "intuition." It emerges from struggle with the world, but not, as in Fichte, with the "non-self." There is a sense, perhaps, in which my dog becomes "self-conscious" when he is threatened by a larger dog or dragged to the veterinarian, but this is something less than the "absolute" and "unconditioned" metaphysical insight announced by the philosophers. Indeed, the more one thinks about this general sense of self-recognition, the more mysterious it becomes, either an unwarranted hypostatization of some odd entity from the mere facts of syntax and self-reference (the trend in modern "analytic" interpretations of the *Cogito*)⁴³ or else, in Nietzsche's phrase, "it becomes remarkable only when we begin to realize how dispensable it is":⁴⁴

... we could in fact think, feel, will and recollect, we could likewise "act" in every sense of the term, and nevertheless nothing of it all need necessarily "come into consciousness" (as one says metaphorically). The whole of life would be possible without its seeing itself as it were in a mirror; as in fact the greater part of our life still goes on without this mirroring—and even our thinking, feeling, volitional

43. E.g., Jaakko Hintikka, "Cogito Ergo Sum: Inference or Performative," *Philosophical Review* 1964.

44. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 197) "The Genius of the Species".

life, as well, however painful this statement may sound to an older philosopher.

What then is the purpose of consciousness generally, when it is so *superfluous*?⁴⁵

Now it may be that Hegel pays too little attention to the role of language in primal self-consciousness (but, as we have elsewhere pointed out, the appreciation for the deep significance of language is a more modern development, in only the crudest form in Rousseau and Herder and Hegel). And it may be that Hegel, for whom *Spirit* is the ultimate goal of philosophy, would not have been willing even to consider Nietzsche's easy dismissal of the whole of consciousness (in fact, self-consciousness) as a community convenience (which Nietzsche ultimately attributes to "the interest of the herd," and "the most fatal stupidity by which we shall one day be ruined.")⁴⁶ But at least Hegel sees what Fichte does not—that there is something extremely peculiar about the "immediate intuition of self" that had been the cornerstone of philosophy since Descartes. Although he is painfully brief on the connection between self-consciousness and the recognition of other people, he at least is clear that this is the connection that is essential.

The concept of self-consciousness, Hegel tells us, is "completed in three moments":

- (a) the pure undifferentiated "I," [which is "immediate"].
- (b) The satisfaction of Desire [or "mediation"].
- (c) a double reflection, the duplication of self-consciousness. (176)

The third is said to be the "truth" of the first two, which one can read as the claim that, in fact, it is their necessary condition. The *Cogito* is an outcome, not a premise, and what Hegel is trying to do is to fill in the missing steps (refusing to put Descartes before the source, so to speak). This general consciousness, which is ultimately *Spirit*, presupposes for its recognition the sense of ourselves as individuals—"this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousness which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence" (177). In other words, the general sense of self-consciousness depends upon a prior sense of individual self-consciousness, which in turn depends upon our interaction with other people.

In what has come before we have repeatedly emphasized that every form in the *Phenomenology* implies, in some sense, an ontology, a claim

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

about what is *real*. In the first three chapters, what are real are objects, though what *makes* them real is a matter of some dispute. But now, we enter a world which is, Hegel would argue, much more accurate as a representation of our own. The world (as Sartre said of Hell) is *other people*. Philosophers have long taken it as too obvious that reality ultimately consists of material entities, some of which take on the peculiar form of human beings. (Strawson argues this, for example, in *Individuals*.) But if we accurately characterize our world, our sense of reality, without the prejudices of science and the philosophers, it is clear that what has most meaning, what occupies by far the lion's share of our time and energy, are other people and our interactions with them. We deal with things mainly indirectly, by reference to others. A car is not, first of all, a material object; it is a status symbol, a piece of private property which I (and not others) may drive; it is a convenient way to visit friends and relatives, get to work, and so on. Reality is *interpersonal* reality, not Thales' water or Pythagoras' numbers or Plato's Forms or atoms, electrons or electromagnetic fields. It was Socrates' conversations, not what they were about, that constituted his reality. With this reading of Hegel, our view of reality turns around once and for all, away from mere knowledge and back to ourselves—collectively. Nature is, like other people, a mirror of ourselves, the stage of our interpersonal world.

We are not yet to the heart of the argument—and we have not begun to enter into the Master-Slave parable. Master and Slave is one (particularly dramatic) illustration of the formation of individual self-consciousness, but it is not the only one, and, more generally, we have to first understand the sense in which mutual recognition and the demand for recognition is the precondition of self-consciousness.

Hegel never tells us—nor am I sure what he would say—how it is that the demand for recognition emerges in the first place. Rousseau had a theory according to which we were all “by nature” *indifferent* to one another, though also compassionate when need be.⁴⁷ But it is not clear in Rousseau either, why we should have ever dropped that attitude of indifference and compassion, except that he is very clear that it is modern society (not society in general) which has “corrupted” us. Hobbes suggested that our “original” position vis-à-vis one another was selfishness and the threat of homicide, but he too seemed to pre-

47. Rousseau's argument is in his second *Discourse On the Origins of Inequality*, (New York: Dutton, 1976), though this is not the only characterization to be found there. For a good discussion, see Arthur Lovejoy, “The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*,” in his *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1948), pp. 14–37.

sume that self-consciousness itself was not in need of explanation. So too Fichte, in his ethical works,⁴⁸ takes individual self-consciousness as more or less an already established matter (the self-differentiation of the ego) and not in need of account. In this tradition, Hegel may be forgiven for not postulating a mechanism for the concept of self in its formation; at least he is clear, as others are not, that the general context for formation of self is *conflict* and *opposition*.

The phenomenological argument for the acquisition of a particular consciousness of self, and thus a particular self, is central to Jean-Paul Sartre's life-long philosophical project, though he too seems too easily to suppose that there is some primitive self-consciousness (which he obscurely calls "prereflective cogito") that precedes definition. In his later work, *St Genet: Actor and Martyr*, Sartre has young Genet accused of being a thief by his elders, and thus accused, that is what he becomes; that is what he *makes* himself.⁴⁹ There is no "indifference" between us, for Hegel; we *create* each other. A person is neither ugly nor beautiful; it is the opinions of others that make him or her so. A person is not intelligent or stupid, except by comparison with and in the eyes of others. A person is not courageous, or generous, or shy, or tall, or fat, except in the context of other people, and what they say to us. (How long can I think myself brilliant when my friends all call me "dumb?") "The dizzying word" uttered to young Jean Genet was "thief"; for some of us it is "fat" or "stupid" or "clumsy" or "inferior" or "sick," and that is indeed what we become. Or as Sartre puts it elsewhere, "I am . . . as I *appear* to the Other."⁵⁰

Of course, this is only half of the story; the other half is that I am, in Sartre's Hegelian terms, "for myself," though this is something I also acquire, not simply a "given" in consciousness. At some point, in certain societies, I can also learn to reject the ascriptions of others, rebel against them, and therein lies the existential tension in which human relations develop. A young woman thinks of herself as "mature"; her mother treats her as a child. The bureaucrat treats the young man as a faceless number on a list; the young man resents this and makes an obscene gesture to crudely assert his identity. How this concept of individuality develops is, again, a question that Hegel treats only briefly, later, in the chapter on "Reason." But it is important to note that, even in these two homely examples, the assertion of self is

48. *Das System der Sittenlehre* (1798), trans. A.E. Kroeger as *System of Ethics* (London: Trübner, 1897); and *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (1796), trans. A.E. Kroeger as *The Science of Ethics* (London: Trübner, 1889).

49. Sartre, *St. Genet: Actor and Martyr*, trans. B. Frechtman (New York: Braziller, 1963).

50. *Being and Nothingness*, Part III, ch. 3.

a *reaction*, not an “immediate intuition.” It is a reaction against a concept of self imposed by others which, for reasons yet to be understood, one finds unacceptable. Moreover, it might make sense to say at this point that the self is mainly a *theory*—or a set of competing theories, which are borne out or refuted, confirmed or discouraged, only in practice. And “practice” means—not obedience to the moral law, which is the paradigm for Kant and Fichte—but contact and confrontation with other people.

What is the argument? Unfortunately, Hegel does not give us one. But then, there is precious little argument to be found elsewhere either. The question “What would a person be like if he or she were raised from infancy without the company of other people?” has been part (though the smaller part) of the “state of nature” mythology ever since Hobbes and Rousseau, at least (though one could certainly trace it back to the Medievals, and perhaps to the early Greeks).⁵¹ The current assumption seems to be that a person so deprived of companionship would hardly be “human” and self-conscious, if at all, in the sense that a wild dog is self-conscious, aware of its body and its needs (which is not even to say aware *that* it has certain needs.) It is not clear how uncompromisingly Hegel would have accepted this modern assumption, but it is clear that, standing on Fichte’s shoulders, he came much closer to it than almost any philosopher before him—and many after him. With Marx, he was one of the first and most powerful proponents of a view that still has too little respectability in philosophy: that “truth” is first of all social truth, and that the self of self-consciousness is not so much a logical oddity (as in the *cogito* and its variations) as an interpersonal construction—at which point philosophy suddenly takes a turn away from metaphysics and epistemology into the foreign territory of social ontology.

Master and Slave: A Parable of the Self in Formation

The activity (of the self) in conjoining opposites, and the clash of these opposites . . . are to be united . . . That the clash, as such, is and must be conditional upon a conjoining, is easy enough to see. The opposites, as such, are completely opposed; they have nothing whatever in common; if one is posited the other cannot be: they clash only insofar as the boundary between them is posited, and this boundary is posited by the positing neither of the one nor of the other; it must be posited on its own.—But the boundary is then nothing other than what is common to both . . . They clash only if

51. Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

they are conjoined. . . . Both are therefore one and the same. —Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre*

This opposition is the condition in virtue of which the Ego becomes practical: the Ego must suspend its opposite. . . . one of the opposites must become dependent on the other. . . .

For any rational being (*Vernunftwesen*) must make unto itself a sphere for its freedom; it ascribes this sphere to itself. But it is only by antithesis that it is itself this sphere; the sphere is constituted only insofar as the rational being posits itself exclusively in it, so that no other person can have any choice within it. —Hegel, *Differenz*-essay (on Fichte)

It must supersede this otherness of itself. This is the supersession [*Aufheben*] of the first ambiguity ["it has lost itself, and finds itself in another being"], and is therefore itself a second ambiguity ["in the other sees its own self."] First, it must proceed to supersede the *other* independent being in order thereby to become certain of *itself* as the essential being; secondly, in so doing it proceeds to supersede its *own* self, for this other is itself. —*Phenomenology* (180)

The Master-Slave parable is a specific illustration of the reciprocal formation of two self-consciousnesses. There can be no master without a slave, no slave without a master (though the two can co-exist in a single person).⁵² There is no dependency without someone to be dependent upon, who thereby becomes *relatively* independent. A son may be financially dependent on his father, who is thereby presumably independent, but the father may in turn be financially dependent on his boss, and emotionally dependent upon his son, who thereby is relatively independent emotionally. It is a familiar interpersonal quandary; relationships often hold together because of their *asymmetry*. Master-slave is but an extreme; domination and submission are common in a great many interactions—on the basis of who's smarter, who's neater, who's more mechanically inclined, who's more charming, who's more angry, who's more sexually demanding, who's more insecure, and so on. (Sartre was not at all out of the Hegelian line when he transferred the Master-Slave parable to the arena of sex and romantic love; but it must not therefore be thought that Hegel's parable is identical to Sartre's brilliant if somewhat morbid use of it.) Mutual definition takes other forms as well; love redefines selfhood in a way that need have nothing to do with power and asymmetrical dependency-independency, but can still be asymmetrical (for example, one person is sensual, the other more abstract; one can be

52. *Differenz*-essay, p. 149, on Fichte's "Natural Law" essay; and in "Unhappy Consciousness," in the *PG*, 206ff.

“soft,” the other “hard”). Hatred can define mutual selfhood; so too can membership on a team (where each player has a different role or position); dancing together briefly defines a certain physical selfhood, which need not have anything to do with dependency-independence. But in “the state of nature”—as well as in most middle-class relationships—dependency and independence tend to be primary self-defining categories. In that imaginary situation before the advent of society—even before the unity of families and tribes—dependency and independence had to turn on a single factor (since financial and emotional dependency as such had not become possible), and that factor is—life and death itself.

The Master-Slave parable is a life-and-death struggle. In more modern circumstances, death might be more symbolic, for instance, not inviting an antagonist to your next dinner party; but in the state of nature, there is nothing else to fight for, nothing else at stake, no property, no status, no possibilities for promotion. There is only that vaguely defined “sphere of freedom” that Fichte and Hegel (in the *Differenz*-essay, not in the *Phenomenology*) talk about. Indeed, one might argue that the life-or-death clash is always implicit in every confrontation—and often surfaces in at least ritualized form in philosophy debates (“demolished his argument,” “murder him in debate,” “criticisms right on target”) and, of course, in sports and politics.⁵³ Almost always—except in some absurdist theater—no one dies, except, perhaps, in mortification (the etymology of the word is significant) or ostracism. But in the Master-Slave parable too, no one dies. (If one did, the parable would simply be over.) The fight to the death is a device; it is also, of course, the key ingredient in the Hobbesian—and Fichtean—“state of nature” mythologies. It is the extreme, the “absolute negation.” It is the limit of life. But is it, therefore, the limit of self? Hegel says “no.” The limit of self is rather the notion of *dependency*.

Hegel is not at all clear about the relationship of general self-consciousness to specific self-consciousness. It sometimes seems as if the general self-consciousness is already formed at the outset of the master-slave confrontation, which is concerned with the determination of the specific sense of self. But a good case could also be made for the argument that Hegel first establishes specific self-consciousness through the original meeting and then introduces the formation of the general sense of self-consciousness through the life-and-death struggle. In any case, that specific self, if not also the more general sense of

53. See, e.g., “Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language,” by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 76, no. 8 (Aug. 1980), esp. p. 454 f.

self as sheer self-conscious existence, is defined in the “state of nature”—before the origins of social bonds—by *independence*, by self-consciousness itself, that pre-reflective Fichtean sense that one is everything, that the world is one’s own.

This sense of omnipotence is destroyed by the intrusion of another person. Consider yourself alone in the mountains, feeling so “at one” with the miraculous landscape laid out before you, as if it were for your eyes alone. Suddenly, another climber appears, and the whole phenomenology changes, from your experience of “oneness” to an interpersonal confrontation—even if it is limited to such banalities as “Hi, how are you?” That sense of presence is lost, and we can well understand Sartre’s somewhat grotesque image of “my world going down the sinkhole of the other’s consciousness.”⁵⁴ Of course, this brief scenario does not yet in any way make me *dependent* upon the other person, but I have already lost that sense of *independence*, that sense of myself as everything, and it is this loss with which the Master-Slave parable begins. As Fichte said, “I must be something for myself and by myself alone”; other people are *always*—as “other”—a limitation on my self.

The Master-Slave parable itself falls into two parts: the first is the battle for mutual recognition, in which each person tries to regain—through the other—the lost sense of independence (178–89). This part of the parable culminates in the “life and death struggle” and the victory of one over the other, tentatively establishing the winner as independent master, the loser as dependent slave. The second part of the parable (190–96) is the turn-about in which the master becomes dependent on the slave and the slave independent of the master.

Independence and dependence can be defined in a slightly different way (one which plays a primary role in Sartre’s use of the parable): independence is being “self-existent,” and *subject*; dependence is being defined by criteria not one’s own, as an *object*. To appreciate the power of this tension between seeing oneself as one wishes and being forced (whether by circumstances or other people or—usually—both), it is important to remember the force of the Kantian dualism between self as subject and as “freedom” and self as “an object of nature.” In his own practical philosophy, Kant insisted,

54. That metaphor is from *Being and Nothingness*, Part III, but cf. Estelle’s unhappy comment in *No Exit*:

INEZ Suppose I be your looking-glass? . . .

AM I not better than your mirror?

ESTELLE I don’t quite know. You scare me. My reflection in mirrors never did that. I was used to it, like something I had tamed. I knew it so well. I’m going to smile and my smile will sink down into your pupils, and heaven knows what will become of it.

Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.⁵⁵

Fichte, following Kant, saw treating someone else as an object—or worse still, treating yourself as an object of nature—as horrendous, an act of immorality in the first instance, extreme cowardice in the second.⁵⁶ Schelling and Hegel shared this horror of treating humanity as object and means rather than as free subjects and as ends, and for them, the distinction was of enormous importance, even if (as in Hegel) it can eventually be resolved. Thus understood, the Master-Slave parable involves each person's insistence that he or she be recognized by the other as a free and independent being, which, paradoxically, results in the limitation and *dependency* of each on the other. But this insistence, and the consequent paradox, is essential to Fichte's *System of Ethics* (*Sittenlehre*) and his theory of *Natural Rights* as well. Indeed, he saw an irresolvable tension between individual "self-identity" and the agreement to respect each other as such, and this tension was reflected in an equally irresolvable conflict between morality (which presupposed an absolutely free and independent self) and the state, which, through threat of punishment, treated the self as an object of nature. It is this that Hegel thoroughly rejects in Fichte, the same contradiction that he (somewhat confusingly) introduced in the "inverted world" in the chapter on "Force and the Understanding" (158–59). It is also the reason why, in the whole of the *Phenomenology*, he rejects the notion that the individual self is in any way "independent" or, for that matter, free and self-sufficient. The first step in this long argument is to reject the classical "state of nature" mythology—the mythology of already independent beings who sacrifice their independence in confrontation and then are forced to increasingly desperate (conceptual) efforts to regain the independence they believe themselves to have lost.

The key to the Master-Slave parable is the mutual recognition that self (or specific self-consciousness) is dependent on others in a complex reciprocal interaction, in what R.D. Laing appropriately calls "knots": "I see you, you see me, I see you seeing me, I see you seeing me see you see me. . . ." Hegel says just this in his first paragraphs, in his usual less than attractive manner:

181. This ambiguous supersession of its ambiguous otherness is equally an ambiguous return *into itself*. For first, through the super-

55. Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 66.

56. Wiss. Introduction and Part III.

session, it receives back its own self, because, by superseding *its* otherness, it again becomes equal to itself; but secondly, the other self-consciousness equally gives it back again to itself, for it saw itself in the other, but supersedes this being of itself in the other and thus lets the other again go free.

182. Now, this movement of self-consciousness in relation to another self-consciousness has in this way been represented as the action of *one* self-consciousness, but this action of the one has itself the double significance of being both its own action and the action of the other as well. For the other is equally independent and self-contained, and there is nothing in it of which it is not itself the origin. The first does not have the object before it merely as it exists primarily for desire, but as something that has an independent existence of its own, which, therefore, it cannot utilize for its own purposes, if that object does not of its own accord do what the first does to it. Thus the movement is simply the double movement of the two self-consciousnesses. Each sees the *other* do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same. Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both.

183. Thus the action has a double significance not only because it is directed against itself as well as against the other, but also because it is indivisibly the action of one as well as of the other.

Hegel's play on "double significance" here might be taken in an exponential fashion, in that each moment of awareness is reflected back and reflected again, and, as in two mirrors facing one another, the number of reflections multiplies rapidly.

Consider a pair of lovers—or a husband and wife, or two very close friends. Each sees his or her identity as defined by the other (at least to a significant degree). Each wants the other's approval. We would like to think, of course, that there is no problem or tension here; as in the more general "social contract," each simply agrees to give approval freely in return for receiving it as well. But life is not so simple, and it is the Fichtean paradox that shows us why this is so. Each person would like to be *certain* of the approval of the other, but to be certain of the other is already to lose that sense of the other as an independent judge. I want you to say "I love you," but the last thing I would want to do is to ask you, much less force you, to say it. I want you to say it freely, and not because I want you to or expect you to. But then, you know that I do want you to say it, and I know that you know that I want you to say it. So you say it; I don't really believe you. Did you say it because you mean it? Or in order not to hurt my feelings? And so I get testy, more demanding, to which your response is, quite reasonably, to become angry or defensive, until finally I provoke

precisely what I feared all along,—an outburst of abuse. But then, I feel righteously hurt; you get apologetic. You seek forgiveness; I hesitate. You aren't sure whether I will say it or not: I'm not sure whether you mean it or not, but I say, "I forgive you." You wonder whether I'm really forgiving you or just trying to keep from hurting your feelings, and so you become anxious, testy, and so on and so on. It happens a million times a day, in varying degrees of pathology and emotional violence. It is not the enlightened reciprocity imagined by many philosophers.

So it is that our selves get defined, from the earliest confrontations with our parents and siblings to our cocktail party gamesmanship and professional "ethics." By no means must this process by either antagonistic or unpleasant, for everything we have just discussed might just as well take place through love and constant approval—which Freud and Sartre rightly saw as just as manipulative as threats and disapproval. If one believes that the self is initially independent and wholly self-defining, then *any* such mutual process will appear to be confrontational and manipulative. But then again, this is by no means the only way to view the self, however much philosophical tradition there is to support it.

The self of Rousseau in the "state of nature" is healthy, happy, and independent; society involves the limitation of this independence, but in return for the possibility of virtue. Fichte, needless to say, is more than inspired by this vision, even if he takes the entrance into society as based as much on antagonism and conflict as on Rousseau's more optimistic vision of a "general will." Thus, Hegel says of Fichte, "Freedom must be *surrendered* in order to make possible the freedom of all rational beings living in community."⁵⁷ But such freedom he says, must be "merely negative" and it is this sense of "freedom from" others that Hegel proposes to reject, here and in the section to follow. Indeed, it is not the "liberation" of the slave that Hegel intends to show us—as if one thereby regains an independence lost; it is to the contrary the recognition that there is no "freedom" nor independence in the "state of nature"; indeed the idea of the "state of nature" is not only a historical fiction (to which all parties would readily agree), but it is a *fraudulent* fiction, which does not even make conceptual sense, much less is it based on historical or anthropological fact.

In the parable itself, each person finds himself "in the other"; that is, a person is defined not by his opinions of himself alone but by the opinions of others, and the reflection of one's own opinions by

57. *Differenz*-essay, p. 144.

them, and so on. Why then, the “fight to the death”? Hegel says, “the need to negate the other’s otherness.” But Hegel’s notion of negation does not necessarily mean death, as we have already pointed out. Making the other “one’s own” is also a way of “negating” the other. A warlord need not kill his enemies; he can make them his slaves. A powerful boss need not run the business by himself; he can surround himself with “yes-men.” Not only that, insofar as one’s identity arises and is defined only with other people, killing the others is self-defeating, for one loses precisely that source of recognition that one has come to require. Killing the other not only fails to remove this acquired need; it also deprives one of the power to possibly change the other’s views in the future. Thus the pre-execution curse has always had such a momentous effect in history and literature, regardless of the importance of the victim. What is essential is that it cannot be undone.

Hegel also says, and this part of the parable is not always appreciated, that only by staking one’s own life does one really become self-conscious. This risk of life entails in turn the attempt to kill the other (187). Of course, one can risk one’s life *and* win the approval of others without trying to kill anyone (for instance, in some death-defying feat of courage), and it is not at all clear, again, that “risking one’s life” has to be taken literally. But the point is clear enough, and it is here, that the *general* sense of self-consciousness can be argued to arise. The point is proto-Heideggerian, one might say, though it is also in Fichte and, before him, indisputably in Socrates and the Bible: “only by risking your life can you regain it.” Whatever the specific definition of self, it is only confrontation with death itself (so the argument goes) that forces us or allows us to appreciate the meaning of life as such. Thus it is that the general sense of self-consciousness arises, and thus it is that the need for a “life-and-death” struggle emerges, *not* from the need to “negate” the other so much as from the alleged and very romantic need to risk one’s own life.

Hegel does not always keep these two motives in order, but, in any case, the outcome is clear. By limiting his “state of nature” parable to the traditional confrontation of two, isolated individuals, Hegel eliminates all extraneous considerations (social status and etiquette, for example) and allows his characters to indeed fight to the death. But they don’t;

This trial by death . . . does away with the truth which was supposed to issue from it, and so too with the certainty of self generally. . . . death is the natural negation of consciousness, negation without independence, which thus remains without the required significance of recognition. (188)

Here too the primary proof—to risk one's own life—comes to the fore. If one does die, that shows that he certainly did risk his life; but, if he doesn't, the struggle is not yet a proof. One needs the other to keep alive the recognition of the struggle, and so, death is not the goal of the struggle after all, but rather, the goal is the struggle itself, the "clash" of Fichte's works; this is the "truth" of self-certainty. A lively debate has gone on in the literature—whether the slave does not die because he would rather be a slave than dead,⁵⁸ or whether he lives because the master "prefers a servant to a corpse."⁵⁹ The text supports neither view in any detail, but provides some evidence for both. The question is not the dynamics of mercy and survival but the essential nature of selfhood and its relationship to other people and the prospect of one's own death. These two points, whatever the details, are sufficiently clear: (1) there is no selfhood without the continued recognition of others (though the continuation may carry on in one's own consciousness); and (2) selfhood may sometime seem more important than life, since one is willing to risk one's life for the sake of self-consciousness. In other words, *contra* Hobbes and Fichte (if not Rousseau) the threat to one's life is not the limit of one's independence, since, at least in a "negative" sense, one can prove one's independence of the other by risking one's life.

Life isn't everything: for self-consciousness, selfhood is.

The second part of the parable contains the twist which has transfigured much of recent history as well as philosophy; it is the *inversion* of master and slave; the master becomes dependent on the slave; the slave becomes independent of the master. Marx, of course, transformed the inversion parable into a prognosis about the whole of civilized history and the eventual but "inevitable" victory of the servant classes. Hegel, however, is concerned at this point with still isolated individuals, who need be in no sense "civilized" and, in any case, are not yet concerned with the "surplus value" of their efforts and their ability to invest it for further gain. The imagery here is rather that of a feudal lord, growing fat and lazy on the sweat of his servant (probably servants, but let's leave it at one). Hegel's liberal attitudes toward serfdom and feudal divisions of power were uncompromising, but so too were the attitudes of virtually all of his friends and colleagues at the time, most of whom were far more radical in their liberalism than he. He looked at the lord and master with undisguised repulsion, but he saw the slave with something less than sympathy too. Indeed, if we want a good concrete portrait of the master

58. Kaufmann, p. 153; Royce, p. 177.

59. Soll, p. 20.

and the slave in Hegel's parable we might well go back to his early essay on "the positivity of Christianity" of 1795, in which his characterization of the "slave mentality" of the early Christians is almost matched in sarcasm by his comments about the decadence of later Rome, and both in contrast with his shining commentary on the ancient Greeks. ("The Greeks and Romans, who by this time [3rd to 5th centuries, A.D.] were overcivilized, servile, and plunged in a cesspool of vice."⁶⁰)

Perhaps the modern word which best fits the master is "jaded," since the fruits of life come to him effortlessly, with instant satisfaction, which leads him therefore to a continuous search for new satisfactions, and ever more extravagant desires. It is at this point that Hegel's too brief *Faustian* discussion of desire earlier in chapter 4 becomes essential to the argument; it is this: Satisfaction ultimately doesn't satisfy. Desire seeks not to be satisfied but to be prolonged. This too, is pure Fichte, for in the final sections of his *Wissenschaftslehre* he goes on at great length about the importance of "longing," and in this, we may suppose, Hegel, also a romantic of sorts (despite his criticisms of Romanticism), would well agree. What is wrong with the feudal master and his late Greek and Roman counterparts is that they have ceased the struggle, lost the virtues and restraints that made the ancient Greeks so admirable, and sunk themselves in "a cesspool of vice." They have lost the ability to satisfy themselves, ironically, because they are so easily satisfied. What is more, they have increasingly lost their sense of just that which makes them "masters," namely, their independence; they have become materially dependent upon the slaves, and Hegel is enough of a materialist (*contra* Feuerbach's and Marx's opinion of him) to believe that, where there is material dependency, phenomenological dependency cannot be far behind.

What also emerges in this parable, as the other side of Hegel's disgust with the jaded desires and instant satisfactions of the master, is the glorification of *work* as the answer to this—the old Protestant ethic about "busy hands" and virtue. In fact, as Marx rudely but correctly pointed out, "the only labor Hegel knew was the abstract labors of the mind."⁶¹ But what he extols here in the *Phenomenology* is clearly physical work, the shaping and creating of *things*. Part of the thesis is pure Schelling, that art (creativity) is "the synthesis of the subjective and the objective," the imposition of one's desires and conscious intentions

60. Hegel, "The Positivity of the Christian Religion," trans. T.M. Knox in *Early Theo. Mss.*, p. 168. Cf. also Hegel's rather inhuman comments about the peasant class in his Jena lectures (see Chapter 9, sect. 2 d).

61. Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor*. (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1978).

onto material nature, thus re-forming it as our own, and no longer as mere "nature." The imposition of ourselves on nature—or "the clash between freedom and nature"—plays a major role in Fichte's *Wissenschaftlehre* and even more so in Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*. But the work ethic is by no means original with them, and one has to trace it (at least) through the already established secular ethics of Luther and Calvin. But the point for the parable is simply that work—the imposition of free consciousness on physical nature—is the mark of freedom and self-realization. (It is not unimportant that Hegel had been reading Adam Smith's labor-theory of value—"only labor has intrinsic value"—only a few years before.)

It is because the master doesn't work that he becomes jaded. Satisfaction through work is continuous, culminating in the enjoyment of its fruits but by no means limited to this. By not working, the master, who imposes his will on "the thing" only by using it and, where appropriate, eating it, becomes estranged or "alienated" from things by not working on them. He has no sense of the process of food production; he only eats. He has no sense of crafts; he only takes and uses. And it is such sense of production, Hegel insists, that goes into true satisfaction. The slave, on the other hand, does get this sense, of turning an "independent" material thing (the language here is intentionally confusing) into a "dependent" thing to be enjoyed by the master (190). But the slave has his problems too, for even while getting the satisfaction of work, he does not get to enjoy the fruits of his labors. He may take pride in the wheat he has grown and sown, the bread he has made, but he will not enjoy its "dependent aspect" by eating it. This is what Marx later calls "alienated labor,"⁶² and it is, in part, what makes the slave a slave.

But it is a mistake to take these material inequities themselves as the problem of "independence and dependence," for what Hegel is concerned with is the nature of selfhood. This is not to say that one's material productions and enjoyments have nothing to do with selfhood, but they are secondary to what Hegel calls "recognition," and they are significant only insofar as they signify patterns of mutual recognition. (If I buy bread from my baker, I do not thereby turn him into a slave, even if he grew the wheat and baked the bread himself; and it does not matter whether I pay him or not—that is, so far as the master-slave question is concerned. What matters is the regard we have for each other, whether he feels that growing, baking, and

62. The first of four forms of alienation: "Alienation from the Product of One's Activity," in "Alienated Labor," in *Early Writings*, ed. L. Coletti (London: Penguin, 1974), p. 429.

giving me the bread is *his* decision, rather than mine.) The master-slave parable turns on a shift in the status of their mutual recognition; it is the master who must come to *see himself* as dependent, and the slave who must come to see himself, in some sense, as independent of the master. But this sense is not primarily his work. Indeed, the problem is that the slave never gets to really see himself as independent; he is only relatively independent of his master, in that his master is now dependent on him. But what he does come to see is that, while he has mastery over some things, he still is not independent, regardless of his revised relationship with the master. And it is this that drives *both* the slave and the master to ever-more desperate efforts to regain what they see as their former independence, "the whole of objective being" (196).⁶³

Hegel gives us three factors in the slave's gradual recognition of his independence from the master—his *fear*, his *service*, and his *work*. By virtue of his fear, the possibility of his own death gives him a sense of general self-consciousness (this century proudly preserved as "authenticity") which allows him to realize, at any moment, that freedom from the master (if only "negative freedom") is his. He need only kill himself, or allow himself to be killed. He does not do this, of course, but the fact that he knows that he can, the fact that he knows that he will die eventually anyway puts a distance between himself and his master, establishes at least the flicker of life itself as somehow his own, and not entirely within the control of the master or "the fear of Death, the absolute Lord" (194). Similarly, the slave becomes aware that, in service to the master, he is establishing his own identity, and, indeed, is redefining the master in terms of his relationship to him. The servant becomes as important to the master as the master is to him and thus (in the jargon of "for itself") he no longer exists simply for the master, but for himself, and the master, in turn, exists *in him* (191–93). Finally, there is the work relationship itself, between the slave and "the thing", which is not enjoyed by the master; thus the slave comes to recognize his mastery over at least some things, and so, as a master in this restricted sense, sees himself as no longer wholly dependent.

One could go on at length and extrapolate from this simple parable some profound truths about work, human relationships, and who knows what else; but it is my intention here only to try to capture

63. If there is unanimity among the commentators on one thing, it is that the slave emerges independent of the master, who drops out of the picture, while the slave moves on in the dialectic. John Plamenatz, e.g., says, "the future lies with the slave." *Man and Society*, (New York: 1963), vol. 2, p. 155. This is simply wrong, and fails to take account of one of the most important features of the text—that the slave is not free, and that the master ends up in as wretched shape as his servant.

what Hegel himself is immediately trying to do, and he has done it: the master, who thought that he could regain his mythological independence by subjecting the slave to his will and forcing him, under penalty of death, to recognize him (the master) *as master*, now finds himself in the awkward position of being just as dependent upon his position in life and those who surround him as his slave, whom he once considered merely as "his thing." The slave, on the other hand, realizes that he is not necessarily a slave, after all, but has some measure of independence too. It is at this point that it becomes clear—as Hegel argued explicitly and frequently in his early manuscripts—that independence and dependency are not necessarily to be found only in confrontation with the other. Once self-consciousness has found itself, it then internalizes these categories within itself, so that even the master sees himself somewhat as a slave, and even the lowest and most fearful slave comes to recognize in himself some degree of mastery, or what Fichte called "an impulse to absolute independent self-activity."⁶⁴ Both are thereby "unhappy" with what they find in themselves, and both are compelled to rationalize their unhappiness, and find for themselves a solace of imagined independence which in fact they never knew, in the various philosophical escape fantasies of Stoicism, Skepticism, and primitive Christianity—the same unworldly, miserable, oppressive, servile cult of consciousness that Hegel so rudely criticized in his early manuscripts—which he now calls, "unhappy consciousness."

Stoicism, Skepticism, and Unhappy Consciousness: Freedom Through Fantasy

For the independent self-consciousness, it is only the pure abstraction of the 'I' that is its essential nature, and, when it does develop its own differences, this differentiation does not become a nature that is objective and intrinsic to it.

We are in the presence of self-consciousness in a new shape, a consciousness which, as the infinitude of consciousness or as its own pure movement, is aware of itself as essential being, a being which *thinks* or is a free self-consciousness.

In thinking, I am free. —*Phenomenology* (197)

Freedom is just another word, for nothing left to lose. —Kris Kristopherson

64. *Vocation of Man*, p. 95.

The progression called "Freedom of Self-Consciousness: Stoicism, Skepticism, and Unhappy Consciousness" is the ever more desperate series of attempts to regain a mythical independence. The master-slave parable marked the loss of that sense of unlimited, isolated existence, as if, that is, one could imagine without absurdity the possibility of anything we would call human with an "independent" existence in the first place. The master-slave is therefore not the first step in the formation of social consciousness, but a pre-social myth which has been abused by philosophers to draw conclusions about the nature of society which are absurd.⁶⁵ The section on "Freedom" is the continuation of that myth, and the concept of "freedom," accordingly, is conceived of in a strictly negative fashion, and as it expands it is increasingly empty. The criterion of freedom, in fact, is total independence from the limitations of other people—Rousseau's criterion in his second *Discourse*. And if there is nothing one can do to achieve that independence within a relationship—whether as master or as slave—then it will have to be found somewhere else, outside of all human relationships, perhaps, in a sense, even outside of the whole sensuous world of consciousness that has concerned us so far.

The three philosophies herein discussed have one trait in common above all else; they are reactions *against* the frustrations of the world. They are primarily denials and thus "negative." A popular song today says, "freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose"; it is not a bad summary of "freedom" in this part of the *Phenomenology*. It is *not* a reaction against slavery as such, but a rejection of any sense of limitation to self-consciousness, even if that means skimming off self-consciousness from the world through which it emerged in the first place. No error is more common than viewing Stoicism *et al.* as a reaction against the oppressions of slavery, and the idea that it is the slave, but not the master, who is followed from here on.⁶⁶ But this would be totally at odds with Hegel's all-inclusive ambitions. (After all, masters are part of Spirit too.) And it totally ignores the fact that, at the end of the master-slave parable, the problem of the master is the same as the problem of the slave—namely, loss of that same sense of independence that he once thought he had guaranteed, as a master. But if we need any further argument on this point, the conclusive consideration should be this—that two of the most readily identifiable

65. *Differenz*-essay, p. 144ff.

66. Thus John Plamenatz says: "... the future lies with the slave. It is his destiny to create the community in which everyone accords recognition to everyone else, the community in which Spirit attains its end and achieves its satisfaction" (*Man and Society*, vol. 2). Cf. George Armstrong Kelly, "Notes on Hegel's 'Lordship and Bondage'" in MacIntyre, *Hegel*, p. 193,— "Where did Hegel ever say this?" Indeed, he never did.

voices in the "Freedom" section are Marcus Aurelius, Stoic philosopher and the emperor of all Rome, and Epictetus, a slave. The problems of self-consciousness are not only the domain of the socially oppressed.

It is unnecessary to repeat Hegel's early enthusiasm for the Greeks and his thorough knowledge of ancient philosophy. Perhaps it is worth repeating the fact that Skepticism (with a "k") as it appears here refers only to the ancient philosophy of life taught by Pyrrho and Sextus Empiricus, who were influenced by Oriental religions rather than David Hume and the eighteenth-century "sceptics." But the period of Greek philosophy here discussed, unlike the brighter days of Athens reported by Plato and Aristotle and their contemporary playwrights, has a gloomy, anti-worldly cast, with which Hegel obviously has little sympathy. Indeed, he sees them not as alternatives and as opposites of Northern Christian gloom, as Goethe wrote in *Faust*, but as its logical precedents. Indeed, the path from Stoicism to the early Christian church is easily marked, so long as we make some distinction between the philosophy of the church (which is what "unhappy consciousness" is about) and the reality of Jesus himself—which will have to wait a later and much more favorable place in the dialectic of the *Phenomenology*.⁶⁷ Stoicism, Skepticism, and "Unhappy Consciousness" mark a conceptual path of progressive renunciation of the world, and Hegel, accordingly, despises them all.

STOICISM

Freedom is independence from others, and if this is so, then the one truly free activity is *thinking*

because I am not in an *other*, but remain simply and solely in communion with myself, and the object, which is for me the *essential* being, is in undivided unity my being- for-myself. (197)

This notion of freedom as thinking, Hegel identifies in "the history of Spirit" as *Stoicism*;

Its principle is that consciousness is a being that thinks, and that consciousness holds something to be essentially important, or true and good only in so far as it *thinks* it to be such. (198)

Stoicism is a rejection of the master-slave relationship (199) for it realizes that, whether as master or as servant, there is no escape from

67. I will argue, the section on "the Beautiful Soul," in the last part of Chapter 6, "Spirit."

dependency. Or, in other words, given the strict definition of freedom as conceptual independence, only God can be free, as “thought thinking itself,” in the classic phrase from Aristotle.⁶⁸ And yet, our aim is to be free in precisely this sense (which led Sartre, in a sometimes stoical *Being and Nothingness*, to say that we “desire to be God”).⁶⁹ And to do this is to withdraw from the world and its master-slave dependencies and to become “indifferent” (*apatheia* was the word of the ancients).⁷⁰ And this is no less true of the most powerful earthly lord, the emperor of all Rome (Marcus Aurelius) or the lowest of slaves (Epictetus);

whether on the throne or in chains, in the utter dependence of its individual existence, its aim is to be free, and to maintain that lifeless indifference which steadfastly withdraws from the bustle of existence, alike from being active as passive, into the simple essentiality of thought. (199)

And lest anyone still think that it is only the slave that becomes a Stoic, Hegel tells us, in no uncertain terms, that,

As a *universal* form of the World-Spirit, Stoicism could only appear on the scene in a time of *universal* fear and bondage, but also a time of universal culture which had raised itself to the level of thought. (199; emphasis added)

Hegel spends only a little over two pages of opaque prose discussing Stoicism, but its references are absolutely clear if one compares his phrases with the original sources. The question of the “criterion of truth” (*Phenomenology*, 200), for example, is drawn directly from Sextus Empiricus, who defines it as: “the thing in view of which we assert that these things exist and those do not exist, and that these are the case and those are not.”⁷¹ The answer to the question of the criterion, in turn, is the now familiar word *recognition*, or what we would probably call “by intuition.” The too-simple phrase “the True and the Good shall consist in reasonableness” (*ibid.*) summarizes the whole of Stoic thought in a single sentence, and the cumbersome phrase “achieve its consumation as absolute negation” (201) refers to the ultimate assertion of freedom—namely, suicide, which is, of course, exactly what Seneca did, after thinking and writing about it for years. (There are

68. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072.

69. The argument is that we want to be absolutely free (as “for-itself” or consciousness) but at the same time completely formed (as “in-itself”); but this is the classical definition of God, as “in and for Himself” both completely free and completely formed with “all possible perfections.”

70. See J.M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 26, 31, 34, 35, 38, 45, 195, 196.

71. *Against the Mathematicians*, 7.29, quoted in Rist, p. 133.

few better examples of the fact that Hegel's so-called "speculative language" is more often than not euphemisms and intentional avoidance of simply saying what he means.)

In terms of history, it is evident from these passages that Hegel is in fact not talking about the whole of Stoicism, from Zeno of Citium and Chrysippus (in the third century B.C.) to Panaetius and Posidonius in the century before Christ, but only the last years of the school, and Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius. Much of his information seems to come from the reportage of Sextus Empiricus, in the second century A.D.⁷² The early Stoics were not the dualists that Hegel speaks of here, separating thought and spirit from the world; that is distinctively Marcus Aurelius. The notion of "indifference" was not to be found so much in the early Stoics, who followed Aristotle in their celebration of virtuous action,⁷³ but mainly in Epictetus, who made it his dominant principle. And the notion that the ultimate assertion of freedom is suicide ("absolute negation") is distinctly Seneca, no one else.⁷⁴ Indeed, Hegel seems to have done little research into the Stoics, and even so thorough an investigation as Harris's *Hegel's Development* uncovers only an occasional reference to Stoicism.⁷⁵ But this is not surprising if the Stoics—that is, the very late Stoics in Rome—were as he insists so antithetical to the early Greek ideals he celebrated with Hölderlin. Withdrawal from the world—and suicide in particular—was not Hegel's idea of virtue and the good life.

Although what he gives us is too brief, it is not difficult to show how the (late) Stoic philosophy fits in so well with the section on "Self-consciousness." Indeed, Hegel seems to be tacitly claiming (and there

72. Of all of the ancient Stoics and Skeptics, Sextus Empiricus by far gets the most attention in Hegel's own *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. Haldane and Simson, esp. vol. 1. But Sextus Empiricus was antagonistic to the Stoics, and in any case not always a dependable reporter. Curiously, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, who play key roles in the section here, are barely mentioned in the later lectures, and Chrysippus and the early Stoics, who play very little role here, are given much greater attention.

73. Chrysippus in particular defended a conception of Stoicism that placed most of its emphasis on responsibility and virtuous action. See Rist, pp. 112–32. Also Edelstein, *The Meaning of Stoicism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 19f.

74. Marcus Aurelius "had his doubts" about the reasonableness of suicide, and Epictetus clearly preferred indifference to death by suicide as an assertion of one's freedom. See Rist, p. 251.

75. Harris, pp. 299, 302: "... we finally reach the opposite extreme of enlightened optimism or stoic cosmopolitanism, where the positive (authoritarian) element is reduced to a minimum assumption of 'the Author of Nature,' who is supremely Just Judge and Monarch in his own kingdom of the spirit." He quotes an early manuscript by Hegel, in which he says, "the [Stoic] citizen of the world comprehends the whole human race in his whole—and so much less of the lordship over objects and of the favor of the Ruling Being falls to the lot of any one individual; every individual loses that much more of his worth, his pretensions, and his independence; for his worth was his share in lordship." (p. 299).

is some justification for this) that the *metaphysical* notion of freedom—which is today usually discussed as “the free will problem”—originates with the Stoics, and originates in reaction to the insufferable conditions of the decadent Roman empire.⁷⁶ Freedom, on this account, is *negative* freedom, freedom *from* the determinations of the world, the sense that one aspect of us, at least, is free to do (that is, to think) what it pleases. The self thus becomes identified with thought, and thought thereby becomes freedom.⁷⁷ For the earlier Stoics, the ideal was virtue; for Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, freedom from the sufferings of the world became the ideal. Thus Seneca wrote to Lucilius, “to think about death is to think about freedom,” and Epictetus, not such a fan of self-disposal, preached the importance of apathy.⁷⁸

It should be clear how this is a distinctive conceptual advance over the master-slave way of thinking, *if*, that is, one accepts their common goal of total independence. For the master as well as the slave, there is no independence to be found in our daily life, and so, if one is to find it at all, it will only be in the unworldly realm of thought, of “spirit.” Again, the emphasis on the late Stoics is evident: it is really Marcus Aurelius who preached the division of spirit and body, and the divine nature of thought alone;

Live with the gods. But he is living with the gods who continuously exhibits his soul to them, as satisfied with its dispensation and doing what the *daimon* wishes. . . . And this *daimon* is each man's mind and reason.⁷⁹

The variations on the theme of “withdrawal” are perhaps more interesting but not as important as the central theme itself; even the early Stoics, who did not accept withdrawal from the world, believed that the world was a rational organic entity—Reason as “the soul of the World,” and they accepted a certain denigration of the physical world (or “matter”) in favor of the survival of more spiritual elements. The world would be periodically destroyed by fire, Chrysippus used to teach, but God would survive and the world would be-

76. It is generally agreed that the so-called “free will problem” was not to be found in the classic Greeks—Plato and Aristotle in particular. Aristotle simply defined “freedom” as voluntary action, which means that it is not due to “compulsion or ignorance” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110). See, for example, D.J. O'Connor, *A Critical History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Free Press, 1964), p. 58. By the time of Augustine, however, the problem is already well defined (pp. 91–93) and it clearly has at least its origins in Chrysippus and the early Stoics (Rist, *op. cit.*).

77. This conception of “freedom” as self-identification is developed in Frithjof Bergmann, *On Being Free* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1979), ch. 1.

78. Epistles 26.10, in Rist, p. 247. On Epictetus, p. 251.

79. A.S.L. Farquharson, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Oxford, 1944), 5.27.

come "soul." The ideal life, they all believed, was life according to reason, and it is only in the late Stoics that reason turns against life, as freedom from the passions, even freedom from life itself. Thus Hegel says (too briefly) that consciousness must "grasp the living world as a system of thought" and find freedom in "pure thought" (200). Stoicism is the celebration of Reason and the rationality of the world, despite its appearances; it is the recognition that, in thought, there is nothing to fear from life. Indeed, Stoicism could be characterized (as Hegel implies) as a philosophy against fear, teaching that, with proper understanding, there is nothing to fear, not even death. Thus Seneca says, "free yourself from servitude, the fear of death and poverty; learn there is no evil in them"⁸⁰ and it would not be unwise to remind ourselves here of Fichte's own somewhat stoical stance toward reality, in his *Vocation of Man*, where he says,

... with this insight, mortal, be free, and forever released from the fear which has degraded and tormented you. You will no longer tremble at a necessity which exists only in your own thought, no longer fear to be crushed by things which are the product of your own mind.⁸¹

Stoicism is denial; it denies what it cannot control, what it cannot master, in terms of something else, only dimly recognized, the True and the Good, the flicker of cosmic Reason within us, yearning for the world as a rational whole. It would not be unfair to point out that our confidence in this view, stated more positively, is precisely what Hegel too came to believe, at least certainly in his later works. But in the *Phenomenology*, he is still too much of an intellectual activist to tolerate any form of "withdrawal from the world."

SKEPTICISM

Readers of the *Phenomenology* have often been disturbed by the somewhat ephemeral distinction they find between Stoicism, on the one hand, and Skepticism on the other. Stoicism consists of a withdrawal from the everyday world and Skepticism consists of a denial that we can know that there even is a world. The distinction is fuzzy, at best, and matters are not at all helped by the fact that Hegel's language is too similar in the two discussions. Skepticism was, historically, a direct successor to Stoicism and the attempt to solve some of the same problems. But the difference, in a few phrases, is this: Stoicism is a theory

80. Rist, p. 224.

81. *Vocation of Man*, 83.

about the world, in fact, the attempt to see the *real* world as a “system of thought.” Skepticism is, quite the contrary, the rejection of all theories about the world, since the world, if there is one, is unknowable and there is nothing intelligible to say about it. Thus, consistently, the first Skeptic Pyrrho (4th-3rd century B.C.) did not write down a word of his philosophy. Almost all of it comes to us from Sextus Empiricus, Cicero, and a few others. Hegel (in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*) rightly praises Pyrrho for his consistency in this, and beside him, the articulate and systematic scepticism of David Hume, 2500 years later, looks fraudulent by comparison.⁸²

Ancient Skepticism, unlike its modern versions, is not simply or primarily an epistemological theory; it is rather an *attitude* and, as such, a *practical* consideration, an *ethics*. It was said of Pyrrho that “he feared neither wagons nor precipices nor dogs,” and his philosophy was aimed, like that of the Stoics, at the attainment of human happiness.⁸³ Accordingly, Pyrrho recommended a life of simplicity; he placed no value at all on theoretical debate and aimed instead at a life of “psychic quietude” (*ataraxia*).⁸⁴ He was, perhaps, the only Greek philosopher who was influenced by the Orient, and he spent several years traveling to India and talking to holy men (Magi) there. His epistemological criticism—that our sense experience is contradictory and cannot tell us about the world—is to be understood in the context of these ethical views.⁸⁵ His insistence that it is useless to speculate about the nature of the reality behind the appearances was aimed, as in the Stoics and as in the quotation from Fichte above, to free us from fear, to make our lives more secure and tolerable. Its practical strategy was *silence*.

After Pyrrho, Skepticism became academic. And there is no such creature as a silent academic. It is arguable that Academic Skepticism is not so much an elaboration of Pyrrho’s views so much as a second version of this philosophy.⁸⁶ Under Arcesilaus and Carneades (3rd

82. Here, as before, I will distinguish more modern scepticism, as developed by Hume and utterly repudiated by Hegel, from ancient Skepticism, which Hegel praises as an attack on the dogmatism of common sense and “the untruth of the finite.” In an early review of Gottlob Ernst Schulze’s *Critique of Theoretical Philosophy* (1801) Hegel had contrasted the two (with Schulze, not Hume, as the modern representative) and called the modern version “anti-philosophy.” Though he utterly rejects Skepticism too, it at least deserves a place in the “History of Spirit,” which scepticism does not. Hume does not figure in any way in the section on “*Skeptizismus*”; in so far as he figures in the *PG* at all, it is only to be eliminated in the Introduction.

83. D. Hamlyn, on “Greek Philosophy After Aristotle” in O’Connor, p. 72; and Charlotte Stough, *Greek Skepticism* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1969), p. 4.

84. Stough, pp. 4, 6.

85. Hamlyn, p. 73; Stough, pp. 16–34; Myles Burnyeat, “The Sceptic in his Place and Time” (unpublished essay): “a recipe for happiness.”

86. Stough, pp. 6, 35–66.

and second centuries B.C., respectively), Skepticism became the art of criticism and debate, and by arguing both sides of a question, the Skeptics often succeeded in demonstrating that there was no single correct answer and, therefore, no answer at all. The first part of this strategy obviously appealed to Hegel, for whom contradiction had become an important concept, particularly in Kant's antinomies; but the conclusion that, therefore, we could not know reality, would be equally unacceptable to him, for exactly the same reason that Kant's discussion of the antinomies was unacceptable; contradiction is a virtue, not a vice of reason. Contradictions show us—they do not hide from us—the nature of reality (203–5).

In the third and second centuries B.C., Skepticism and Stoicism were rival schools, and the criticisms of the first did much to transform the latter. In the following century or so, Skepticism remained alive but assumed a shadowy presence in philosophy, largely critical and, true to itself in one sense at least, it left nothing by way of tangible evidence.⁸⁷ It is only in the second century A.D., with Sextus Empiricus, that Stoicism finds its more durable voice and a willingness to commit the Skeptical philosophy to writing. In his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and *Against the Mathematicians*, Sextus Empiricus describes with enthusiastic attention to detail the teachings of his predecessors.⁸⁸ But he too abstained from theory. For him as for Pyrrho, philosophy consisted of criticism, and its only use was to criticize and refute alternative philosophical views, especially Stoicism. The philosopher is like a man affected by an illness, he tells us (much like the later Wittgenstein); the Skeptic provides his cure. (Sextus Empiricus also happened to be a physician.)

Hegel confuses the rivalry between Stoicism and Skepticism;

Skepticism is the realization of that of which Stoicism was only the concept [*Begriff*], and is the actual experience of what the freedom of thought is. This is *in itself* the negative and must exhibit itself as such. (*Phenomenology*, 202)

He says, rightly, that Skepticism dispenses with the notion of the reality of the world, but his way of putting it sounds too much as if Skepticism were a further metaphysical theory,—which was certainly not the case;⁸⁹

87. Stough on Aenesidemus and Agrippa, pp. 8–11 and ch. 4.

88. Stough, ch. 5.

89. Hamlyn, p. 74. Cf. "For whereas the dogmatizer posits the things about which he is said to be dogmatizing as really existent, the Skeptic does not posit these formulae in any absolute sense . . . the Skeptic enunciates his formulae so that they are virtually cancelled by themselves . . . without making any positive assertion regarding external realities." (Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Chapter VII, 14–5).

With the reflection of self-consciousness into the simple thought of itself, the independent existence or permanent determinateness that stood over against that reflection has, as a matter of fact, fallen outside the infinitude of thought. . . .thought becomes the concrete thinking which annihilates the being of the world in all its manifold determinateness, and the negativity of free self-consciousness comes to know itself in the many and varied forms of life as a real negativity. (Ibid.)

Skepticism too is a reaction to the Master-Slave dilemma, and like Stoicism, it reacts by denying its reality. It rejects the possibility of understanding, as well as the importance of, the world. Stoicism appealed to an abstract confidence that the world itself was rational and meaningful; Skepticism denies this. But, Hegel points out (204), in denying the world the Skeptic must also deny his own relationship to it which, whatever the power of his arguments, is a *practical* impossibility. Thus the danger is that the arguments of the Skeptic will become pure "*sophistry*," compelling arguments that cannot possibly have any real application, and consequently are not really accepted even by the Skeptic himself. The argument against Skepticism, in other words, is the impossible contradiction between what it believes (or refuses to believe) about the world and the way one must actually act in it.

Its deeds and its word always belie one another and equally it has itself the doubly contradictory consciousness of unchangeableness and sameness, and of utter contingency and non-identity with itself. (205)

It does not believe what it says, and,

Its talk is in fact like the squabbling of self-willed children, one of whom says *A* if the other says *B*, and in turn says *B* if the other says *A*, and who by contradicting *themselves* buy for themselves the pleasure of continually contradicting *one another*. (205)

Thus Hegel sees Skepticism as not only escapist withdrawal from the world but as childish as well; it is not serious philosophy, nor does it even attempt to provide what philosophy ought to provide for us, a coherent and practicable view of the world. But behind this mainly moral criticism, an important philosophical criticism looms as well. The inconsistency of the Skeptic also lies in his uncritical emphasis on the purely "empirical" and "sensuous" aspects of experience, which it accepts as "real" apart from the world, an independent existence.⁹⁰ And this in turn is a metaphysical position—though unacknowl-

90. Cf. Sextus Empiricus' "empiricism" in which "sensibles" become the basis of all reality, somewhat as "Sense-Certainty" in the *PG*. See Stough, p. 107ff.

edged. But here Hegel uses the same objection he used against the modern sceptics, namely,—that the independent existence of such a consciousness is itself subject to serious scrutiny. The sceptic/Skeptic claims the independence of consciousness but in fact employs presuppositions and considerations drawn from the very world it claims to deny:

It lets the unessential content in its thinking vanish, but just in doing so it is the consciousness of something unessential. . . . It affirms the nullity of seeing, hearing, etc. but yet it is itself seeing, hearing, etc.
(205)

The philosophical reader will recognize here a prefiguring of what later phenomenologists would call “intentionality,” and the utter absurdity of trying to talk about sense experience as a self-enclosed realm. But Hegel’s main complaint here is the uncritical inconsistencies of Skepticism—Hume’s denial of the laws of necessary causation as he walks over to the table to play a game of billiards. This is couched in the more profound but not very helpful language of a “dialectical unrest” (205) but the point is simple enough: withdrawal from the world simply doesn’t work. The world is too much with us, and no adequate world-view or “form of consciousness” can intelligibly deny that fact.

“UNHAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS”

And yet we try. The misery of the world and our lust for freedom in this most extravagant of senses—as freedom from everyone and everything, goes still one step further. In Stoicism, thought itself is supposed to be freedom, and in Skepticism, this freedom can be made consistent only by denying the world but, inevitably, it is forced to recognize the reality of the world it denies, at least in practice. The next step is to view oneself *as* reality, at least as having reality within oneself. This yields a dual consciousness—a merely empirical, confused, and transient self (as in Skepticism) and an eternal, rational, *real* self, as in Stoicism (206). Hegel marks this progression as the realization of the Skeptic that he cannot both accept and deny the reality of the world, and so he “brings together the two thoughts which Skepticism holds apart”:

Skepticism’s lack of thought about itself must vanish, because it is in fact *one* consciousness which contains within itself these two modes. This new form is, therefore, one which *knows* that it is the dual con-

sciousness of itself, as self-liberating, unchangeable and self-identical, and as self-bewildering and self-perverting, and it is awareness of the contradictory nature of itself. (206)

Thus we become a single, contradictory, schizoid, and emphatically *unhappy* consciousness.

The “unhappy consciousness,” Hegel famously tells us, is “the duplication which formerly was divided between two individuals, the lord and the bondsman . . . now lodged in one.” This has lead some readers to suppose some rather extravagant, even pathological interpretations,⁹¹ but the truth is quite simple, if we turn back, for the moment, to Hegel’s early manuscripts on religion: In his “Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” of 1798–99, Hegel writes of the Christian-Kantian-Fichtean who feels bound by universal Reason and duty within himself:

between the Shaman, the European prelate who rules the church and state, the Voguls and the Puritans, on the one hand, and the man who listens to his own commands of duty, on the other, the difference is not that the former have their lord outside themselves while the latter is free, but that the former have their lord outside themselves while the latter carries his lord in himself, yet at the same time is his own slave.⁹²

Earlier in that same essay, Hegel discussed the story of Noah, who was given the Lord’s promise that he would never again destroy mankind, so long as men in turn obeyed his commandments⁹³ (182–83). It is this that forms the basis for the “unhappy consciousness,” the internalization of such outside threats and fears. The unhappy consciousness, in other words, is the Judeo-Christian tradition, “the fear of God in one’s own heart,” even if the name “God” never once appears.

The observation that the “unhappy consciousness” is *religious* is not new, needless to say; most commentators begin with this as obvious.⁹⁴ But what is just as obvious but not so often recognized is the extremely sarcastic tone in which the entire section is cast; Hegel despises traditional Christianity just as much in 1806 as he did in 1793, and his treatment of Catholicism is particularly vicious. It is curious, for instance, that despite their obvious importance, Hegel all but ignores the great Catholic thinkers, and the commentators too seem to accept this. Yet, the one figure who best captures the “spirit” of the “Unhappy Consciousness” is—St. Augustine. In the historical pro-

91. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, and Richard Sennett, *Authority* (New York: 1981).

92. “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” in Knox, trans. *Early Theo. Miss.*, p. 211.

93. *Ibid.* 182–83.

94. E.g., Lauer, *A Reading*, p. 117f; Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 98.

gression from Stoicism, culminating in the philosophy of Marcus Aurelius in the second century A.D., to Skepticism, as summarized by Sextus Empiricus in the second century too, Augustine fits in perfectly, following the intervening period of the Gnostics, Plotinus, and other varieties of neo-Platonist philosophy. Augustine's Christian philosophy was thoroughly dualistic, so painfully obvious in his own *Confessions*.⁹⁵ He saw himself torn between two selves, the bodily self of desire and needs in bewildering confusion, and the rational self of the will with its quest for unity with God and the eternal. Augustine, more than anyone except Kierkegaard (who was not born until six years after the publication of the *Phenomenology*) is the "unhappy consciousness." But Hegel doesn't even allude to him.⁹⁶

This, of course, is too simple. "Unhappy Consciousness" does not refer particularly to Augustine, but to the whole of a certain kind of religious consciousness, from the ancient Hebrews through Luther and the Reformation, which Nietzsche—following Hegel—called "slave religions". What these all have in common is a "soul of despair," an attempt to escape from the hardships of life through a metaphysical scheme, in which they themselves become at one with reality, if at the same time pathetic because of it. At every moment, Hegel tells us, the unhappy consciousness is driven out of the world of everyday life or the world of eternal, unchangeable reality "in the very moment when it imagines it has successfully attained to a peaceful unity with the other" (207). The unhappy consciousness sees itself torn between two forms of existence—a "natural" existence, in which relationships with other people and the desires of the body play an essential part, and a divine, other-worldly, eternal existence, which presupposes the rejection of the first. Nietzsche, years later, would extend the concept of the unhappy consciousness all the way back to Plato.⁹⁷ But Hegel sees clearly that, in the early Greeks, "otherworldly" metaphysics never led to a withdrawal from or denial of the world of everyday life. That particular move, which culminates in the flesh-despising epistles of St. Paul and the anti-bodily edicts of the medieval saints, presupposed

95. *Confessions*, trans. F.J. Sheed (London, 1944).

96. In the whole of Darrel Christensen's *Hegel and the Philosophy of Religion* (Hague; Nijhoff, 1970), Augustine's name is mentioned only once, in a random list of important philosophers before Hegel. But the mystery deepens considerably when we see that Augustine is hardly discussed at all in Hegel's own *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, not at all in Harris's exhaustive survey of Hegel's early reading and influences. Why? The easy if unflattering answer was that Hegel hated Catholicism (Harris, pp. 21, 26, 45) and did not see it as appropriate even to deign to call Augustine a philosopher. Aquinas too gets short shrift, despite the fact that Hegel had either read or read about him. (See vol. 3, p. 80).

97. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (in Kaufmann, Viking Portable Nietzsche, 1964).

the general sense of “fear and bondage” and a “universal culture of thought” that Hegel anticipates in his discussion of Stoicism (199). It was one of the great accomplishments of human thought, in other words, that it had learned, over the course of centuries, to demean itself and reject the whole world.

Insofar as the “Unhappy Consciousness” plays an essential role in the dialectic of “Self-Consciousness,” the particular movements within it—which in fact represent not only the increasingly desperate logic of the world-withdrawal but the actual history of religion as well—might better be discussed later on, when we discuss Hegel’s philosophy of religion as such.⁹⁸ For now, it will be enough to sketch a general structural outline of this form of consciousness, and St. Augustine can serve as our starting point.

It is God and my soul I want to know.—Nothing else?—No; nothing whatever.⁹⁹

Thus Augustine summarizes his view of the world, and “unhappy consciousness” too: Two consciousnesses—divine and mine—in seclusion from the world of desire and other people. But two consciousnesses too that rage against one another, not just as Platonic parts of the soul but as absolutely incompatible and mutually destructive combatants (208). One part, unchangeable and essential (*das Unwandelbare, wesentliche*) can only make the other part, changeable and inessential (*das Wandelbare, unwesentliche*) feel hopelessly inadequate. And, indeed, this is precisely what makes the “unhappy consciousness” so unhappy—not mere schizophrenia but the ultimate in self-debasement and self-denial.

In Stoicism and Skepticism, the frustrated seeker after a dubious freedom turned against the world, only to find, inevitably, that the world and its troubles are too much with us. Or rather, we are too much with them, and so the next conceptual step is obvious—we must deny ourselves as well. In favor of what? In Stoicism, we have already learned that the world has Reason which transcends our ordinary experience; in Skepticism our ability to understand this ultimate Reason is denied, but the concept is already established. Thus Hegel rightly recognizes (though he doesn’t say this in the *Phenomenology*) that Judaism and the religion of the ancient Hebrews has much in common with Stoicism, and pre-figures the “unhappy consciousness” in several important ways. Judaism too rejects the world of the Romans and sees itself as facing an infinite and all-powerful consciousness, the Reason

98. “The Secret of Hegel: Kierkegaard’s Complaint,” chap. 10.

99. Augustine, *Soliloquies*, i.2.7.

of the world, compared to which we are pitiful and inadequate creatures but still, "the chosen people." It too compares the eternity of God with the mere transience of all of us and the things that we value (*Ecclesiastes*, notably). But, the Jews, unlike Christianity, strictly hold to a unified view of God, which, by way of Spinoza, certainly appealed to Hegel too. For the Jews, the sense of community had not been eclipsed by faith and dogma, and for the Jews (as for the Stoics) the belief in an immortal God did not bestow on them as individuals the same immortality. Despite Hegel's hardly complimentary attitudes toward the Jews¹⁰⁰ he would have seen in them much that both made possible the advent of Christianity and, less obviously, would make possible a new stage of religious experience which was just now, in the new German philosophy, being formulated.

This new self-affirming religion, however, is yet to be realized. Hegel's concern here is rather the traditional turn against oneself. It is a mistake, I think, to take the "Unhappy Consciousness" section to be primarily about the nature of God or religion or immortality.¹⁰¹ It is first of all a study of self-consciousness divided against itself, an attempt to do away with one's worldly self and thus "freeing" oneself from worldly dependency and coming to recognize oneself as at one with the whole of eternity. God (unnamed) is the eternal, projected by human consciousness by way of appeal. It is the opposite of Fichte's "Absolute ego," which posits individuals; individuals, already unhappy about the dependencies of life, posit the Absolute Ego. And, of course, it is this historical-conceptual move that makes the Fichtean-Hegelian position possible. But the conceptual move backfires, as Nietzsche pointed out more poignantly several decades later, "Man erects an ideal—the 'holy God'—and in the face of it is forced to a pathetic certainty of our own unimportance."¹⁰² It becomes a battle within oneself, "a struggle with an enemy" (*ein Kampf gegen ein Feind*; (209)).

The actual progression of the "unhappy consciousness" should be discussed not here, in the midst of this somewhat perverse discussion of "freedom," but later on, in our discussion of Hegel's philosophy of religion. For our purposes here, it is enough to say that the section is a Nietzschean progression of a series of "nay-sayings," increasingly

100. In the Positivity-essay and "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," in *Early Theo. Mss.*

101. Cf. Findlay, *Hegel*, p. 98f., who takes this section to be "medieval Christendom," and Taylor too (*Hegel*, p. 160). But cf. Lauer, *A Reading*, p. 117ff., and Findlay's comment in his "Analysis" of the *PG*, Miller tr., p. 527.

102. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Kaufmann trans. (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 93.

desperate rejections of the secular world and oneself as a secular being. This includes virtually the whole history of Christianity, from its roots in the Old Testament (God the “Unchangeable” as an “alien” Being, passing judgment upon us (210)) to the medieval Catholic church (“purity of consciousness” and “devotion” (214)) to the Reformation (the secular world as “sanctified” and salvation through work (219–22)) and, most desperately, to its culmination in self-despising asceticism (“the enemy reveals himself as flesh” (225)). From the schizoid split between two selves, one secular and one eternal, Christianity is thus viewed as the ever more degrading attempt to be rid of the secular self. For those who interpret Hegel and his *Phenomenology* as a “Christian” apology—however heretical, this section should prove a powerful antidote. His unhappiness with the gloomy mood of Christianity in his early manuscripts is with him still, even if, in a sudden upswing at the end of the section, he then announces that, in its unhappiness, consciousness has opened up the way to “Reason” (230). But what he is really saying here is that, having denied ourselves and the world so absurdly, there is nothing to do but swing around in compensation, and embrace the world, and ourselves, once again.

Kant always and everywhere recognizes that Reason, as the dimensionless activity, as pure concept of infinitude is held fast in its opposition to the finite. He recognizes that in this opposition Reason is an absolute, and hence a pure identity without intuition and in itself empty. But there is an immediate contradiction in this: this infinitude, strictly conditioned as it is by its abstraction from its opposite, and being strictly nothing outside of this antithesis, is yet at the same time held to be absolute spontaneity and autonomy. As freedom, Reason is supposed to be absolute, yet the essence of this freedom consists in being solely through an opposite.¹⁰³

103. “Faith and Knowledge,” p. 181. See Murray Greene, on “Hegel’s ‘Unhappy Consciousness’ and Nietzsche’s ‘Slave Morality’” in Christenson, ed, p. 125.