

Hegel's Concept of Desire

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THERE IS A LONGSTANDING TENDENCY in philosophy, and in some pre-theoretical contexts, to regard persons as essentially disembodied points of view on the world. In the thought of figures as diverse as Plato, Descartes, and Thomas Nagel, this tendency results in the division of a person, with features of our conscious lives such as bodily awareness, the feeling of desire, or the relation to other persons relegated to inessential status. In what follows I propose one way of understanding some early developments in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* that involves attributing to Hegel a concern with denying that these aspects of human experience may be sorted in this manner.

My exposition of Hegel's position focuses on his concept of desire, which figures most prominently in his assertion at the beginning of the fourth chapter that "self-consciousness is *desire* in general" (§167).¹ There are almost as many understandings of this assertion as there are interpretations of the *Phenomenology*, but I believe the reading I offer to be novel. I propose that we understand Hegel's identification of self-consciousness and desire as the claim that desiring plays an important role in an apperceptive subject's relation to itself. In arguing for this reading, I demonstrate that there exist deep affinities between Hegel's remarks on self-consciousness and desire in the *Phenomenology* and Fichte's treatment of these topics in his applied philosophy during the Jena period, in particular in his *System of Ethics*.² Understood in this way, Hegel's concept of desire figures in an ambitious attempt to establish relations of interdependence between subjective capacities regarded as essential to consciousness and those often relegated to inessential status.

¹Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* [*Phenomenology*], trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). References to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* are to Miller's translation and will be made within the text using the paragraph numbers in Miller, while all other references will be made in notes. I have also made use of Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1952).

²Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The System of Ethics*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale and Günter Zöllner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). References are to this edition and *Sämtliche Werke* [SW], ed. Immanuel Hermann Fichte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971). I have also made use of Fichte, *Das System der Sittenlehre nach den Prinzipien der Wissenschaftslehre* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1995).

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I begin in the first two sections with an examination of Hegel's concept of desire itself and understandings of this concept in the work of John McDowell, Robert Pippin, and Terry Pinkard. I argue in section one that one strategy for interpreting Hegel's remarks on desire, what I term the "contextual" reading, fails as a reading of the text. In section two I examine the relations between Hegel's concepts of desire, life, and self-consciousness, eventually arriving at a more adequate understanding of the concept of desire. In these sections, I aim to abstract from the question of how desire emerges from the dialectic of the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology* in order to focus on Hegel's actual use of the concept in "Self-Consciousness." While this approach to the text certainly violates the spirit of Hegel's methodological commitment to constructing each stage in the development of the *Phenomenology* from those that precede it, I believe that worries about the "necessity" of transitions in the work, as well as obscurities associated with this particular transition, warrant this approach to Hegel's discussion of desire.

In section three, I explain how desire, understood as a determination of a living being, can play a role in an explanation of self-consciousness that is neither genetic nor foundational. Hegel's construction of such an explanation of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, I argue, constitutes one of his most important inheritances from Fichte. Section four places Hegel's views on the relation of desire to self-consciousness within the broader context of the opening chapters of the *Phenomenology*. Here I show how Hegel's employment of the concept of desire can be regarded as part of a larger concern with demonstrating the interrelation between apparently unconnected subjective capacities. In addition, I argue that desire plays a surprising role in Hegel's account of the reality of objects of cognition.

Two preliminary points are worth noting here. First, I will have relatively little to say about the other obviously Fichtean element in Hegel's account of self-consciousness: the concept of recognition. With the exception of a few remarks in section four, my discussion of desire in Hegel will simply take for granted a rough understanding of recognition that is, I believe, uncontroversial. This is not because I find the notion of recognition to be unimportant in Hegel's thought. On the contrary, I take recognition and desire to be *equally* essential to his account of self-consciousness. A more complete account of Hegel's views on self-consciousness and subjectivity would obviously need to examine the relation between desire, recognition, and intersubjectivity.

Second, while the reading of Hegel that I propose here is quite Fichtean, I do not mean to suggest that Hegel intended the early chapters of the *Phenomenology* as an appraisal of Fichte, or that he had in mind the particular passages from Fichte's works that I discuss. However, I do believe that reading Hegel through Fichte has the benefit of making certain themes in Hegel clearer than they would otherwise be. It is often the case that Hegel's concerns in the *Phenomenology* become clear only against the background of his understanding of his predecessors. And while I believe that this is especially so in the case of Hegel's identification of self-consciousness and desire, the reading of this identification that I propose also receives considerable support from the text of the *Phenomenology* itself.

1. THE CONTEXTUAL READING OF DESIRE

If we read Hegel's claim that self-consciousness *is* desire as applying to consciousness in general, then we must treat this identification as a claim about the kind of things we all are—a claim about rational, sentient beings.³ That is the reading of Hegel that I will pursue beginning in section two, but Hegel's introduction of desire in ¶167 suggests an alternate reading of this identification, one that does not entail any conclusions concerning consciousness in general. If we take the term 'self-consciousness' to refer primarily to a particular stage in the development of the *observed* consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, then the identification of self-consciousness and desire becomes a claim about the observed consciousness *at this point in the dialectic*, namely, upon its realization that the object of cognition is essentially an object for consciousness, determined by its capacities for cognition.⁴ Hegel would be telling us that in virtue of having reached the end of the reflection found in the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology*, the "protagonist" of the work now finds itself as desire. And it would be natural to understand such desire as a desire for some particular state of affairs.

Hegel can be read as suggesting such an understanding of this identification in his discussion of the two moments of consciousness, one in which consciousness relates to objects as independent and essentially other (the point of view of the first three chapters of the work), and one in which consciousness sees this difference between itself and its objects as one without being (*deran sich kein Sein hat*) (¶167). These two moments of consciousness are *prima facie* incompatible. One and the same subject, it would seem, cannot relate to objects both as independent and as nothing more than appearances for it. But the observed consciousness has by this point in the *Phenomenology* discovered that these two points of view are essential to it, insofar as the realist standpoint of the first three chapters—the point of view of natural consciousness that no one can abandon for any significant length of time—has as its condition an implicit self-relation in any relation to an object.⁵ This revelation might be regarded as motivating the task of constructing a self-conception that enables the observed consciousness to see these two moments of consciousness as compatible.

If such a self-conception is what consciousness needs at this point, it is tempting to regard Hegel's identification of self-consciousness and desire as a partial description of the *problem* that confronts the observed consciousness here. This is

³In what follows I abstract from Hegel's use of the term 'in general' (*überhaupt*) to characterize desire in the assertion "self-consciousness is desire in general" (¶167). On my reading of Hegel, the need for this qualification becomes evident only later in the fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology*. I return to this point in section four.

⁴By 'the observed consciousness' I mean the subject of the various experiences in the *Phenomenology*, such as the experience of discovering that some conception of knowledge or its object is inadequate. This figure is the *observed* consciousness insofar as we, the readers of the *Phenomenology*, are to consider the significance of its experiences and order those experiences in such a way that they constitute a single course of reflection. See ¶¶86–87.

⁵Hegel states that the realist standpoint of consciousness, for which the "whole expanse of the sensual world" is preserved, exists "only as connected" with the second moment of consciousness, namely self-consciousness (¶167). By this he means that while this realist standpoint is conditioned, it is not cancelled or abandoned in the transition from "Consciousness" to "Self-Consciousness."

John McDowell's view, according to which desire enters the picture as a preliminary characterization of the attitude of the observed consciousness *qua* self-consciousness—the second moment in Hegel's "two moments" formulation—toward the first moment of consciousness. The latter is the object of desire since it is what must be incorporated into the subject that finds itself as self-consciousness if that subject is to possess a stable self-conception. Our understanding of exactly what this desirous *Aufhebung* or "sublation" involves for Hegel—the annihilation of the other moment, its incorporation and preservation, or something else—would then depend on a prior understanding of the two-moments problem, not on some independent understanding of the concept of desire.⁶

The contextual reading finds some support in Hegel's opening remarks in the chapter "Self-Consciousness." He identifies self-consciousness with desire immediately following a remark on self-consciousness's need for "unity" in the face of this apparent division, stating "this unity must become essential to self-consciousness, i.e. self-consciousness is *desire* in general" (§ 167). If unity is the goal of the observed consciousness *qua* self-consciousness, it would be understandable that Hegel now characterizes the observed consciousness as desirous. At this point in the *Phenomenology* it finds itself, for the first time, forced to give up a very basic aspect of its self-understanding—the assumption of the absolute independence of objects of cognition characteristic of the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology*—and, as a result, it now aims to reconcile the second moment of consciousness with the natural point of view it is reluctant to leave behind entirely.

This reading of the concept of desire also has the benefit of cohering with a very reasonable understanding of the central result of the later discussion in "Lordship and Bondage." This section ends with Hegel's account of the integration of two forms of consciousness within one subject; the figure of the bondsman is revealed to contain essential marks of the lord's cognition, but only implicitly, or in itself (*an sich*) (§ 194). Viewed formally, Hegel's account of the bondsman as a synthesis of two different aspects of subjectivity suggests that it embodies the desired solution to the two-moments problem.⁷

⁶McDowell states, "Hegel offers 'Self-consciousness is desire *überhaupt*' (§ 167) as a paraphrase, not here further elaborated, of one of his schematic descriptions of the required movement. . . . We understand what Hegel means by introducing desire only to the extent that we understand those schematic descriptions of the movement of self-consciousness. 'Desire *überhaupt*' functions as a figure for the general idea of negating otherness by appropriating or consuming, incorporating into oneself, what at first figures as merely other. That is, schematically, what self-consciousness has to do to the first moment in its doubled object" (John McDowell, "The Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self: Towards a Heterodox Reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*" ["The Apperceptive I"], *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 47/48 [2003]: 1–16, at 5–6). McDowell proposes, in other words, to regard desire not as a product of Hegel's dialectic, but as a different way of picking out that dialectical progression. This heterodox reading is a variation on a more traditional approach to the appearance of desire that takes the observed consciousness to be desirous insofar as it *aims at* proving the central result of "Force and the Understanding"—that consciousness is the essential moment in its relation to objects. While the general structure of the *Phenomenology* suggests this more traditional form of the contextual approach to desire, considered as a complete account of the concept of desire it faces the same kind of problem as McDowell's, that of failing to give sense to the role played by desire in the experience of the bondsman at the end of "Lordship and Bondage."

⁷While I believe that the integration of these two moments of consciousness in general is one of the central results of "Lordship and Bondage," one need not adhere to the contextual reading of the

While the contextual reading has some initial plausibility, it is also essential to note just how limited a role it accords to the concept of desire within the developments of "Self-Consciousness." In taking the term 'desire' to pick out an attitude that the observed consciousness bears toward some aspect of itself, we are committed to regarding it as little more than a label for the central problem of this chapter. As a consequence, difficulties arise for the contextual reading when we consider the role played by desire later in "Self-Consciousness." In "Lordship and Bondage," for example, Hegel asserts that the bondsman comes to contain the negativity or being-for-self of the lord only once *the bondsman's* desire is transformed by its commitment to serving the lord, thus becoming desire "held in check" (*gehemmte Begierde*) or work (*Arbeit*), as opposed to the merely natural desire described in ¶¶174–76. In this later context, desire is unambiguously a relation to objects, not an attitude that the observed consciousness bears to aspects of itself that appear essential but irreconcilable.⁸ Of course there is a kind of work done by the bondsman upon itself that deserves the title '*Bildung*' or 'formation' (¶197), but this work does not aim at a physical change in a living being. In addition, it is the modification of the *bondsman's* desire that constitutes this turning point in the *Phenomenology*, while the contextual reading of desire must take the second moment of consciousness—which is related to the lord, the apparently abstract "I" that we might think of as a mere point of view on the world—to be the subject of desire. And since Hegel never describes a relation to another subject as desirous, McDowell's approach to these issues, which takes the relation of lord to bondsman to be a reappearance of the two-moments problem from the point of view of the observed consciousness—a reappearance of a relation of desire, on this reading—fails to fit the text in a further, significant way.⁹ Thus despite its initial plausibility, this formulation of the contextual reading cannot be the correct approach to Hegel's concept of desire.

Perhaps this reading can be saved if we expand our notion of the background used to understand the concept of desire. If we take Hegel's identification of self-consciousness and desire to be an elucidation of a feature of consciousness that has been implicit throughout the development of the *Phenomenology*, then the previous (and subsequent) experiences of consciousness could serve as material for interpreting Hegel's concept of desire. The movement from the chapter "Sense Certainty" to the beginning of "Self-Consciousness" could then be read as an illustration of Hegel's claim in the introduction that consciousness is "something that goes beyond itself" (*das Hinausgehen . . . über sich selbst*) (¶80), which, once exhibited in the *Phenomenology* proper, gets summed up in the claim that

concept of desire in order to hold this view. The problem of unifying the two moments of consciousness is evident in the text independent of Hegel's use of the concept of desire. In section four below, I explain how the Fichtean reading of desire that I advocate enables us to provide a more satisfying account of the end of "Lordship and Bondage."

⁸In section two I consider how, as a relation to objects, desire also figures in a self-relation. I should note here that I take these to be two distinct relations. McDowell recognizes, of course, that Hegel describes desire as a relation to objects, but he takes this relation to be identical with the relation to self picked out by the contextual reading of desire. It is, on his reading, this self relation as it appears to the observed consciousness (McDowell, "The Apperceptive I," 6–7).

⁹McDowell, "The Apperceptive I," 11.

self-consciousness is desire in general.¹⁰ On this reading, self-consciousness is best viewed as desire in general because it is the kind of thing that aims at ends, is goal-oriented, and thus “moves” due to some inner force or principle. The desire for unity described in ¶167 would, accordingly, be an instance of this general mark of consciousness.¹¹

This proposed modification of the contextual reading of Hegel’s concept of desire faces two significant difficulties. First, it leaves open the question of why this facet of consciousness becomes explicit here and not elsewhere. An appeal to the goal of unifying both moments of consciousness is nothing more than a return to the first form of this reading of Hegel,¹² and no other features of the text appear capable of explaining the origin of the concept of desire within the framework of the contextual reading. Second, and more importantly, such a broad notion of desire frustrates any attempt to give a determinate sense to the notion of desire “held in check” that plays such an important role in the dialectic of lordship and bondage. What could the hemming-in of a fundamental feature of the observed consciousness, present in any development in the *Phenomenology*, have to do with the act of setting oneself the end of serving another subject? Of course one might maintain that the concept of desire found in the dialectic of lordship and bondage is a particular instance of the genus “desire in general” that appears in ¶167 (which, on the modified contextual reading, just is the activity of consciousness), but without any textual evidence to support the claim that there are two distinct concepts of desire present in “Self-Consciousness,” related as genus to species, the inability of the contextual reading to make sense of later developments in “Lordship and Bondage” constitutes a significant shortcoming of this view.

2. DESIRE AND LIFE

In light of the inadequacy of the contextual reading of Hegel’s identification of self-consciousness and desire, it is reasonable to conclude that this claim is intended

¹⁰Judith Butler maintains that Hegel’s concept of desire picks out just such a general, defining mark of consciousness in general. Butler notes, for example, that “the appearance of desire at this juncture is curious, for if the progress of the *Phenomenology* is impelled by desire, why does desire emerge as an explicit theme only in the fourth chapter of the text?” (Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1987], 24). She answers, in part, that “desire *appears*, but the moment of appearance is not necessarily the initial moment of its efficacy. In a sense, nothing comes into existence *ex nihilo* for Hegel; everything comes into explicit form from a potential or implicit state; indeed, everything has, in a sense, been there all along” (Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 24). While I agree with Butler that Hegel offers nothing like a construction or derivation of desire—this is one way in which his methodology will differ from Fichte’s—this fact should not, I think, lead us to conclude that the concept of desire picks out such a general aspect of subjectivity.

¹¹In articulating this form of the contextual reading of desire, I ignore an additional problem the reading must face. Hegel introduces desire in ¶167 in an account of *self-consciousness*, the second moment of what I have called the two-moments problem. But Butler’s version of the contextual reading requires that we understand the appearance of desire in terms of Hegel’s remarks in the introduction concerning *consciousness in general*. Of course, it is true that consciousness in general is self-consciousness for Hegel, in the sense that all awareness of objects presupposes an implicit relation to oneself. But this relation to self is just one aspect of consciousness in general, as Hegel’s terminology in ¶167 makes clear.

¹²This is Butler’s strategy for dealing with the problem. She states, “if this unity is to take place, and one of the terms of this unity is the sensuous world, then it makes sense to assume that self-consciousness itself must have a sensuous expression” (Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 33). The sensuous expression Butler has in mind is, of course, desire.

as a characterization of the capacities of rational, sentient beings, not simply as a remark about the observed consciousness at this point in the *Phenomenology*. The concept of desire must, accordingly, be understood through appeal to claims Hegel makes at this point in the work concerning consciousness and its objects. One route that immediately suggests itself involves the emergence of the companion concept of life during the transition from “Consciousness” to “Self-Consciousness.” This concept is introduced in ¶168 in order to articulate a consequence of the identification of self-consciousness and desire, that the object of desire is a living thing.¹³ It is not immediately clear *why* this claim about life is a consequence of what has come before, but if we attend to Hegel’s remarks concerning life, a single interpretation of the concept of desire emerges.

The central mark of life in the rather bewildering discussion of ¶¶168–71 is self-preservation; life is a “self-developing whole which dissolves its development and in this movement simply preserves itself” (¶171). While Hegel does not offer an illuminating characterization of that which is preserved, he evidently intends for the reader to understand this self-preservation on analogy with the maintenance of form or shape found in an individual living being, a notion that he describes in a recognizably Kantian manner.¹⁴ Just as individual living beings preserve themselves as the matter that constitutes them changes, life as a whole preserves itself as individual living beings and kinds of beings change and pass away. But this analogy fails in one important way. Hegel describes life as “infinite,” “independent,” and the “pure movement of axial rotation” (¶¶169–71) in order to indicate that, from our point of view, life is a substance, an entity that depends upon nothing else for its existence. Individual living beings do not have this independence since they depend upon life as a whole for their sustenance. It is this difference between life and individual living things that Hegel appeals to in explaining the experience of the observed consciousness in ¶¶174–75, where the merely desiring subject learns that it is dependent upon its living environment.

Hegel’s discussion of life and living beings, with their characteristic mark of self-determination, suggests one way of understanding the concept of desire. Since living beings preserve themselves—that is, maintain their form—desire can be viewed as that feature of the organism responsible for such self-preservation. This understanding of the concept of desire gains support from the first, implicit appearance of the concept in the *Phenomenology*. The chapter “Sense Certainty” concludes with a very brief discussion of “the practical sphere” in which Hegel identifies desire as the feature of animal life responsible for the consumption of

¹³Talk of life actually appears earlier, in ¶162, where Hegel clearly is not discussing living things considered either individually or collectively, but rather the notion of self-determination in general. In what follows I focus on Hegel’s narrow notion of life articulated in ¶¶168–71.

¹⁴In §64 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant describes a living thing as something that is both cause and effect of itself, that is, something that develops itself and thereby maintains itself (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 243; *Kants gesammelte Schriften* [AK], ed. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, 29 vols. [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902–], 5:370). This is clearly the notion of self-preservation that Hegel appeals to when he terms life a living thing (¶171), even though Hegel maintains that the self-preservation of life ought not to be considered as persistence of form.

objects (§ 109). Hegel does not actually use the term ‘*Begierde*’ in this passage, but it is clear that he intends his later discussion of desire as a return to this initial contrast between theoretical and practical relations to objects and to oneself.¹⁵ Looking at the matter in this way has the advantage of tying Hegel’s concerns in the chapter to familiar themes in the work of predecessors such as Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, but it also faces a serious problem.¹⁶ While it makes sense of Hegel’s invocation of life in § 168, understanding desire in terms of life also makes the identification of self-consciousness with desire even more mysterious. How could a capacity that human beings share with mere animals be identical with, or somehow constitute, a relation to self? Adopting this reading of Hegel’s concept of desire appears to give us very little to go on in interpreting this crucial step in the *Phenomenology*.

At this point, it is tempting to give up the assumption that, in talking about self-consciousness, Hegel means to pick out apperception itself, our awareness of ourselves in relation to an object. This is the strategy of contemporary Hegelians such as Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard, who provide “non-metaphysical” readings of the *Phenomenology*.¹⁷ On Pippin’s influential reading, which actually takes Kant’s transcendental deduction of the categories as its starting point, the fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology* presents us with an “anthropological representation” of a model of cognition intended to replace that of “Consciousness,” which took cognition to involve a passive, merely observational relation to an independently existing given element.¹⁸ For Pippin, the term “self-consciousness” picks out this new model of cognition, account giving, and explanation, which does not rely on an appeal to anything merely given as a basis for the determinacy or legitimacy of a particular judgment or claim.¹⁹ Cognition is now to be understood as an active determination of the object, an act of taking an object to be such-and-such that is, at the same time, an awareness of the various commitments that the subject has taken on as a result of making such a judgment or claim. Understanding cognition in this way obviously requires that we regard the subjects of such cog-

¹⁵In § 109, Hegel states that in their relations to sensuous things, animals are “completely assured of their nothingness” (*in der völligen Gewißheit ihrer Nichtigkeit*). Similarly, the merely desiring subject he considers much later in the *Phenomenology*, in § 174, is described as “certain of the nothingness” (*der Nichtigkeit . . . gewiß*) of that which confronts it. The parallel language in these two sections suggests that the concept of desire picks out a determination of living things.

¹⁶Kant defines life as “the faculty of a being to act in accordance with laws of the faculty of desire” (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor [Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 8; AK 5:10). Both Fichte and Schelling attempt to integrate their accounts of agency and natural teleology. I discuss Fichte’s views in sections three and four below.

¹⁷Pippin uses the term ‘non-metaphysical’ to pick out readings of Hegel that do not take him to be engaged in the traditional metaphysical project of pursuing *a priori* knowledge of substance (Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 5–6). In both Pippin’s and Pinkard’s work there is also, however, a tendency to de-psychologize Hegel in such a way that his remarks on cognition no longer pick out mental faculties or acts. It is this latter tendency that I think should be resisted, as I argue below.

¹⁸Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 163.

¹⁹Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 149. Pippin’s willingness to substitute talk of claim-making for Hegel’s talk of cognition demonstrates that Pippin does not take this chapter of the *Phenomenology* to be concerned with self-conscious experience *per se*. This assumption underlies the project of producing a “non-metaphysical” account of cognition, one devoid of psychological content or a metaphysics of experience.

nition as, in an important sense, self-conscious; apperception is the condition of a subject's awareness that, in determining the object, it has committed itself to giving up that claim should future experience (i.e., future determinations of objects) have a certain character. Similarly, any experience of the inadequacy of a particular conceptual determination of reality also involves an essentially apperceptive awareness of the way in which that aspect of our conceptual scheme fails to accord with others. But for Pippin, Hegel's term 'self-consciousness' picks out the most general ways in which a reflective subject might understand its relation to objects—the conceptual moments of that relation—and not that capacity for reflection or apperception itself, which on this reading is simply presupposed throughout the *Phenomenology*.²⁰

The understanding of cognition labeled 'self-consciousness' is identified with desire in general, Pippin claims, because the self-determination of a desiring being is analogous to the self-determination of a set of conceptual determinations of reality, which are determined only by other conceptual capacities (not by any merely given feature of the world) and thus can be regarded as self-grounded and self-determining—as an aspect of spirit (*Geist*).²¹ On this view, the concept of desire appears rather suddenly in ¶167 because it serves only to designate, in a provisional manner, the understanding of cognition that has already emerged as a result of the failure of the realist position of "Consciousness."

Pippin's approach to "Self-Consciousness" yields a more coherent *Phenomenology* than almost all previous readings of this chapter. It shows how the emergence of concepts such as desire and life can be viewed as a step in the development of Hegel's account of cognition as an active determination of reality that is both self-developing and capable of giving an account of itself independent of the "fact" of judgment that grounds Kant's metaphysical deduction of the categories. Pippin's reading also finds some support in the discussion of animal desire in ¶109 since he takes the chapter "Self-Consciousness" to have as its primary focus a more adequate account of a subject's relation to objects, and the relation to an object is the explicit topic of ¶109. Furthermore, the introduction of a subject's dependence on another subject as the essential constraint on conceptual activity (which appears even more clearly in Pinkard's reading of "Lordship and Bondage") is a Hegelian idea that still possesses considerable promise.²² Nevertheless, this reading of "Self-

²⁰"It is important to note that Hegel is not engaged in any account of the 'origin' of self-consciousness, as if he were maintaining that human beings 'become' self-conscious in interaction with others. What he wants in this section is an account of the determinate and objective forms of self-consciousness, an issue that is a problem for him because of his insistence on the 'independence' of self-consciousness" (Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 291).

²¹Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, 146. There plainly exists an isomorphism between the relation of a living, desiring being to life, and the relation of a rational being to spirit. We can therefore explain the appearance of spirit at this point in the work in a couple of ways. Most obviously, Hegel introduces spirit in ¶177 because he has just noted that his account of self-consciousness and rationality in general will have a social component. A self-conscious agent and knower will, for Hegel, find itself as some part of a social whole. But we also have the structure of spirit before us in the thought of life as a self-developing whole that contains living beings as its parts. This relation between life and spirit underlies Pippin's reading of Hegel's concept of desire; the concept of desire is to prepare us for the appearance, or emergence, of spirit within the *Phenomenology*.

²²Robert Brandom's recent work on conceptual content is one clear example of Hegel's effect on contemporary work in philosophy. See his *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Consciousness” fails to fit the text in significant ways and thus cannot be accepted as a complete account of Hegel’s intentions in “Self-Consciousness.”

One shortcoming of Pippin’s approach concerns the emergence of distinctively practical considerations at this point in the work. In ¶109 Hegel notes that his discussion of desire serves to “anticipate how the case stands in the practical sphere,” which clearly indicates that he intends “Self-Consciousness” to enact some kind of a turn towards the practical. This talk of the practical sphere could, of course, pick out a number of different notions, ranging from distinctively ethical concerns to the “agency” and “activity” of consciousness in general considered as a kind of spontaneity. This latter notion of the practical does in fact cohere with Pippin’s reading of “Self-Consciousness.” He finds in the concept of desire a provisional description of the “acting, desiring, purposive nature of a self-conscious subject” considered merely as such.²³ But it is difficult to see how this very general understanding of the practical can be made to fit the developments that confront the reader in “Self-Consciousness.” Hegel’s talk of the consumption of an object, the fear of death, and the work performed upon a physical object for the sake of pleasing another subject all suggest a more straightforward understanding of the practical here.

Of course, Pippin need not deny that there is a real practical dimension to these developments. He makes clear, in fact, that Hegel is committed to regarding the articulation and development of norms of thought and action as a social, historical process. My concern is that in focusing on the emergence of what we might call a purely normative idealism, Pippin fails to recognize that Hegel is, at the same time, providing us with an account of the subjects who operate with these norms (and that the claim that such subjects are embodied, desiring beings is not simply a corollary of the argument for a normative idealism). Establishing that this is in fact Hegel’s aim is the task of sections three and four below, but the plausibility of this view on the appearance of desire and other practical phenomena is clear, I think, from Hegel’s rather detailed descriptions of these phenomena. To take the bondsman’s work as an example, Pippin is committed to regarding the ungroundedness of work, not its status as a determination of a subject’s conative capacities, as Hegel’s reason for introducing the notion. But while it is true that the bondsman’s work is not grounded in any merely natural phenomenon or fact, and is an act of service only insofar as lord and bondsman regard it as an act of service, it seems that Hegel could have made this point without offering an account of the form of the object of work, the fear that motivates formative activity, or the bondsman’s awareness of the reality of the end it pursues.²⁴ Hegel’s elaborate description of the phenomenon of work certainly seems to indicate an interest in just this practical relation to an object (and, as I will argue, to oneself), not simply an interest in the ungroundedness of our operation with norms of action.²⁵

²³Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 148.

²⁴These topics, the subject of ¶¶194–96, warrant a much more extensive discussion than I will be able to offer in this context. See section four and my concluding remarks for a sketch of how their relation to desire might be understood.

²⁵Pippin claims, in addition, that when Hegel talks about the “pure negativity” found in the bondsman’s work, or its “pure being-for-self,” he means to pick out only the self-determination of work (Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 162). As I argue in sections three and four below, it is more natural to see here

Terry Pinkard's discussion of the emergence of desire in "Self-Consciousness" employs a similarly broad notion of the practical in explaining the appearance of desire in the *Phenomenology*. On Pinkard's view, Hegel's focus never strays from the generally epistemological themes introduced in "Consciousness." He states that by 'self-consciousness' Hegel has in mind, in the opening paragraphs of the chapter, a "new, more reflective conception of what counts as knowledge."²⁶ This new conception involves understanding knowledge of objects not as apprehension, but as a form of acting guided by a subject's ends. As Pinkard puts it, "the agent has various desires that demand satisfaction, and his conceptualizing activities are *tools* for the satisfaction of those desires."²⁷ In his analysis, Pinkard attributes to Hegel two independent claims, which are not always distinguished. First, there is a claim about knowledge, namely, that all knowledge requires an active determination of the object by the subject.²⁸ Second, there is the claim that all such activity is ultimately in the service of desire satisfaction, insofar as the goodness of concepts and reasons for belief is to be judged through appeal to "life's various desires and demands."²⁹ Each claim can be viewed as constituting a turn toward the practical in "Self-Consciousness." The first claim is essentially Pippin's point concerning self-determining conceptual determinations of reality, and I will not discuss it further. The second, however, is unique to Pinkard's interpretation of Hegel and suggests a different approach to the claim that self-consciousness is desire in general.

If we take Hegel to be claiming that all conceptual activity is in the service of our desires or interests, he would be asserting a primacy of the practical within our cognition of objects insofar as claims to knowledge, or claims concerning the validity of a concept, would be settled through appeal to our needs, ends, and projects. Self-consciousness, understood as a cognitive standpoint, would then *be* desire in general insofar as the force responsible for the evolution of our concepts would be located in human interest in its various forms. If desire played such a role in the *Phenomenology*, the developments of "Self-Consciousness" would indeed constitute a turn to the "practical sphere," but this is not, I think, the kind of turn to the practical that Hegel presents in the *Phenomenology*. This proposal fails to fit the text of the first two sections of "Self-Consciousness," where Hegel quite clearly presents an account of the development of *desire itself*, not an account of desire setting in motion changes in a set of concepts.³⁰ The independence found in the

a concern with a subject's relation to itself in distinctively practical activity. This is in part because on Pippin's reading very little is accomplished in "Lordship and Bondage"—we simply move from the incomplete, merely natural self-determination characteristic of natural desire to the more complete self-determination of work. In saying this, however, I do not pretend to have given anything close to a complete response to Pippin's account of the practical dimension of "Self-Consciousness."

²⁶Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 46.

²⁷Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 49.

²⁸"Our conceptualizing activities are not to be construed on the model of our *apprehending* objects; knowing something is construed instead as a form of *acting*" (Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 49).

²⁹Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 48. Pinkard later asserts that "whatever contrasts we may make in describing the world are sustainable only to the extent that they function to satisfy these desires better than some alternative set of contrasts" (Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 49).

³⁰By 'the development of desire itself' I do not mean a change in the concept of desire at work in this part of the *Phenomenology*, but rather a development of the role played by desire in the successive

mere self-determination of desire is first revealed to be a kind of dependence, insofar as desires simply appear within a subject, and can be satisfied only if the world offers up the conditions of their satisfaction. Once the desiring subject comes to bear a recognitive relation to another such subject, this dependence upon life develops into the independence that is one of Hegel's central concerns in this section. Desire "held in check" by the recognition of another subject implicitly contains the independence, being-for-self, or freedom that constitutes the essence of self-consciousness, as expressed in ¶¶ 166–67.

There is one further textual problem to consider here. The general interpretive strategy shared by Pippin and Pinkard succeeds in providing an account of Hegel's apparent turn to the practical that engages with his concerns in "Consciousness" only by reading the term 'self-consciousness' as a name for a new understanding of objective cognition that regards cognition as essentially involving various reflective, conceptual moments, while Hegel's use of this term often seems to pick out not only the ways in which we relate to ourselves and to objects, but that very capacity to bear such relations—Kantian apperception, the root of Cartesian certainty.³¹ While Hegel does begin by characterizing self-consciousness as a "new shape of knowing," this new shape is quickly distinguished through appeal to its object in the claim that this knowing is the knowing of itself (¶ 167). He could have a number of "objects" in mind here. The knowing of knowing could designate knowledge of the subject, knowledge of its essential concepts or categories, or knowledge of that activity by means of which a subject deploys its concepts. Hegel most likely has all of these topics in mind to some degree, but in focusing exclusively on the activity of knowing and the concepts involved, neither Pippin nor Pinkard engages directly with Hegel's interest in the self-relation itself.

The title of this chapter, "The Truth of Self-Certainty," indicates that Hegel is concerned with offering an account of what, in truth, the certainty of self first described in "Sense Certainty" is. Just as the observed consciousness of "Sense Certainty" was certain of the existence of an independently existing sensible given, it took itself to be immediately acquainted with itself (¶ 101). Of course the mere utterance of 'I' was revealed to be an inadequate expression of this certainty of self (¶¶ 102–03), but the certainty itself never disappeared in the *Phenomenology*. On the contrary, this certainty becomes the explicit theme of "Self-Consciousness," as Hegel indicates in his assertion in ¶ 166 that "the certainty is to itself its own object" once the observed consciousness gives up its attempt to explain all cognition in terms of an essentially passive relation to an independently existing entity. The question that Hegel means to confront is this: What *is* the certainty of self that was merely *designated* in "Sense Certainty"? And it would seem that the answer he means to give involves the concept of desire. In addition to asserting that self-

experiences of the observed consciousness. See the end of section three for a brief account of how I believe these earlier appearances of desire ought to be understood once we see what desire is and how it functions at the end of "Lordship and Bondage."

³¹Hegel's opening remark in "Self-Consciousness" that certainty of self is "a certainty which is identical with its truth" (¶ 166)—that is, one that could not conceivably vanish for the observed consciousness as a result of its future experiences—clearly evokes Descartes. Hegel is much more interested, however, in the idea of a self-relation in general, as is obvious from his quick transition to a generally Fichtean account of this self-relation in relation to an object in ¶ 167.

consciousness is desire in general, Hegel goes on to assert that self-consciousness is "certain of itself" only through doing away with a physical object, and that by examining such certainty we are on our way to an account of a "true certainty" of self, "a certainty which has become explicit for self-consciousness itself in an objective manner" (§174).

While these considerations count against the exclusively non-metaphysical approach to Hegel's concept of desire found in the work of Pippin and Pinkard, this rough characterization of Hegel's aims of course generates as many questions as it answers. For example, we still do not have a clear picture of *what* Hegel means to account for—what aspect of the relation to self he means to illuminate. There is also the problem of understanding what such illumination could consist in. It would appear that if Hegel means to explain how self-conscious subjects such as ourselves came to exist within a world of mere matter or life, his remarks on desire, recognition, and the social relation of lord to bondsman would fall almost comically short of this goal. This second problem could support a reading of the *Phenomenology* as presupposing self-consciousness as a "fact" that underlies Hegel's investigation as a whole, much as the fact of the meditator's sanity underlies Descartes's project in the *Meditations*.³² This is, roughly, Pippin's position, which takes Hegel to presuppose apperception and to focus on its various conceptual moments. While I agree with Pippin that Hegel has no interest in explaining the emergence of apperception from mere matter or life, I believe we must also conclude that Hegel does aim to provide some kind of explanation of apperception itself through the elucidation of conditions under which the capacity for reflection presupposed throughout the *Phenomenology* is possible. On this reading, desire serves as one feature of the context in which an apperceptive "I" can exist.³³

3. THE BEGINNING OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

Approaching Hegel's use of the concept of desire in this manner involves seeing his argument in "Self-Consciousness" as deeply indebted to Fichte, but not so much the Fichte of the 1794 *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, who sought to derive notions such as representation, the "not-I," and the practical activity of the "I" from the mere thought of the self-positing subject. This side of Fichte's thought certainly appears in the *Phenomenology*, taking a prominent position at the beginning of the sections "Consciousness," "Self-Consciousness," and "Reason." The sensible, intuitive certainty found in the "I" (§§100–01), the "mere tautology" of "I am I" (§167), and the expansion of this certainty into the Idealist proposition that the "I" is all reality (§233) are all expressions of Fichte's starting point, but Hegel finds them to be "unscientific" assertions, and for this reason suspect. This fact should not, however, lead us to conclude that Hegel's engagement with Fichte in these sections of the *Phenomenology* is always unsympathetic. His treatment of notions

³²There are important disanalogies here as well. For example, while one's sanity can be doubted, self-consciousness as an act or *Faktum* of the subject certainly cannot be doubted.

³³Hegel certainly does not regard desire as a *sufficient* condition of self-consciousness. Both Hegel and Fichte regard the recognition of another subject as equally essential. I would also hesitate to classify desire as a strictly *necessary* condition of any self-conscious experience for Hegel. See section four for a discussion of this important difference between Fichte and Hegel.

from the *Natural Right* and *System of Ethics* is much less critical. For example, the appearance of the concept of recognition in “Lordship and Bondage” constitutes a significant Fichtean inheritance, regardless of the quite different roles played by this concept in the *Natural Right* and *Phenomenology*. And this is not the only significant element of Fichte’s thought to make an appearance in the *Phenomenology*. As I will argue, Fichte’s general project in the *Natural Right* and *System of Ethics*, and the role played in that project by his concept of drive (*Trieb*), had a significant effect on Hegel’s discussion of self-consciousness and desire.

One of the principal aims of Fichte’s applied works is to substantiate the claim that his system alone is able to demonstrate the existence of a certain “unity and connection” within the subject’s various capacities.³⁴ This aim is clearest in the introduction to the *System of Ethics*, where Fichte makes the following assertion.

I find myself as effecting [*wirkend*] in the world of sense. From this all consciousness begins [*hebt . . . an*]. Without this consciousness of my own efficacy, there is no self-consciousness; without self-consciousness, there is no consciousness of something else that is not supposed to be I myself.³⁵

That Fichte is eager to articulate necessary relations between self-consciousness, efficacy, and objective experience is not surprising to the reader of the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*, but in the *System of Ethics* the particular relations between practical activity and other aspects of our experience are new and innovative. While in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte sought to demonstrate that the practical activity of striving (*Streben*) and its resistance through a check (*Anstoß*) constitute the condition of any experience of an object—“no striving, no object,” as Fichte put the point—in the *System of Ethics* practical activity, here designated by the term ‘effecting’, is such a condition only indirectly.³⁶ Effecting appears as a condition of *self*-consciousness, which is itself a condition of objective experience. The same primacy of the practical in accounting for other aspects of our experience appears in the *Natural Right*, where Fichte asserts that “the practical faculty is the innermost root of the I; everything else is placed upon and attached to this faculty . . . all other attempts to deduce the I in self-consciousness have been unsuccessful.”³⁷ In linking practical capacities to the subject’s relation to itself, Fichte in effect gives up his earlier strategy for demonstrating the interconnectedness of subjective capacities through appeal to the conditions of objective experience.³⁸

³⁴Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge: with the First and Second Introductions* [*Wissenschaftslehre*], trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 259; SW 1:295.

³⁵Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 8–9; SW 4:3 (translation emended).

³⁶Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre*, 231; SW 1:261–62. In the *System of Ethics*, Fichte uses the term ‘effecting’ to pick out an effective act of willing, that is, an action-guiding “demand” that a state of affairs obtain. At times Fichte goes so far as to equate effecting with the combination of an act of willing and the reality of the willed state of affairs. See *System of Ethics*, 72; SW 4:70.

³⁷Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right* [*Natural Right*], ed. Frederick Neuhouser, trans. Michael Bauer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 21; SW 3:21.

³⁸Of course the *Anstoß* or “check” is still in a sense practical, insofar as it is the experience of a constraint on the activity of thought. That all cognition requires that a subject be active, or “practical” in this sense, is the claim found in Pippin’s and Pinkard’s readings of Hegel. In emphasizing the importance of the practical for *self*-consciousness, both in Fichte and in Hegel, I take an approach to Hegel that is different from that of most commentators. For another example of the *Anstoß* reading of Hegel’s concerns in “Self-Consciousness,” see Frederick Neuhouser, “Deducing Desire and Recognition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 24 (1986): 243–62.

It is important to note that, in attempting to explain a subject's relation to itself in terms of its practical capacities, Fichte in no way means to suggest that these practical capacities are themselves independently intelligible. Willing and effecting undoubtedly require the capacity to represent an object. As Fichte states in the *Natural Right*, "one will readily acknowledge—as it has been for a long time—that all willing is conditioned by representing: I must represent whatever I will."³⁹ Fichte seeks instead to demonstrate that, insofar as some aspects of any positing activity of a subject are conditioned by the presence and exercise of practical capacities, there exists a primacy of the practical within cognition in general.⁴⁰

Fichte's argument for such a primacy turns on the claim in the passage above that all consciousness "begins" with an experience in which the subject "finds" itself. It should be clear from the intended function of Fichte's account that such finding is not an event in the development of a particular subject, and that talk of the beginning of all consciousness does not pick out a beginning in time. The temporal notions of finding and beginning are meant to pick out the relative priority of the practical in an *account* of self-consciousness, not a temporal priority within the developmental history of a single subject. For Fichte, to say that self-consciousness begins with a particular experience is to say that self-consciousness considered as apperception, the mere ability to form the representation 'I', is conditioned by features of that experience. He maintains that the apperceptive subject must be capable of experiencing itself as an agent, since it is only in its agency that a subject has before itself its own characteristic activity or spontaneity in a determinate form.⁴¹ Such a determinate form is required if a subject's activity is to become an object for it, that is, if a subject is to be capable of finding itself as a subject. And since we are all, undoubtedly, present to ourselves as active subjects, Fichte maintains that all capacities constitutive of agency are necessary aspects of subjectivity in general. The simple, abstract, apperceptive "I" considered in isolation from such capacities is an unreal philosophical construction.

To the obvious question of why the subject cannot find its own activity already in a determinate form in a theoretical context, such as that of sense perception, Fichte responds that a subject's "activity in intuiting the world cannot be posited by the rational being as such, for this world-intuiting activity, by its very concept,

³⁹Fichte, *Natural Right*, 22; SW 3:21. This difference between the *Wissenschaftslehre* and the applied works is significant. Only in the latter works does Fichte consider self-consciousness exclusively *in relation to a world of objects*, just as Hegel does following "Sense Certainty."

⁴⁰Daniel Breazeale has convincingly argued that Fichte is best understood as maintaining the equiprimordiality of theoretical and practical capacities of the "I," according to which there exist theoretical and practical elements within any actual conscious experience (Daniel Breazeale, "The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory: Fichte and the 'Primacy of Practical Reason'," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 36 [1996]: 47–64). Günter Zöllner also emphasizes this aspect of Fichte's thought in connection with the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* in *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). In what follows I will continue to speak of the primacy, or priority, of the practical in Fichte's theory of subjectivity in order to emphasize the relation of dependence Fichte sees the theoretical "I" bearing towards the practical "I," but it should be kept in mind that the real aim of Fichte's work is to demonstrate that this division between subjective capacities is an unreal construction of the transcendental philosopher. As will become clear below, I also read Hegel as advocating the equiprimordiality of theoretical and practical capacities in his account of the observed consciousness's gradual realization that its practical capacities are essential to it.

⁴¹Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 24–28; SW 4:18–23.

is not supposed to revert into the intuiiter. . . .”⁴² By this, he means that within our everyday experience, perception does not appear to the subject as a case of self-determination. And since the subject appears to itself as absolutely free and unlimited within abstract thought, Fichte takes for granted that mere thinking cannot contain any experience of the subject as determined in one way or another.⁴³ On the basis of these phenomenological claims, Fichte is tempted to conclude that the experience of willing and pursuing an end constitutes the most basic awareness a subject has of itself.

The appeal to phenomenology is not sufficient, however, to establish the conclusion that the possession and exercise of practical capacities is a *necessary* condition of the “I.” Fichte most likely recognized this point, and in order to substantiate this claim in the *System of Ethics* he constructs an ambitious, extended transcendental argument that begins with the fact of self-consciousness and proceeds through the construction of an uninterrupted “chain” of conditions of that consciousness.⁴⁴ For our purposes, the most important component of Fichte’s account of the beginning of self-consciousness is his notion of a drive (*Trieb*), one of the final links in this chain. Fichte attempts to construct the concept of a drive through formulating an “antinomy” that can be resolved only through the postulation of a particular determination of the subject, an activity that exists independently of any free act of the subject and is felt simply as such.⁴⁵ The antinomy turns on the possibility of finding oneself as a subject in a determinate state. Finding oneself is possible, the antithesis maintains, only if a subject cognizes something within itself. But since all cognition presupposes this same relation to self, as the thesis states, it would appear that no explanation of knowledge or a subject’s “first” consciousness of self is possible. Fichte maintains that this antinomy can be solved only through the postulation of a necessary determination of the subject that combines knowledge and activity in a single entity. As simply found in a subject, independent of the subject’s free activity and involvement, this activity must be no more than a tendency (*Tendenz*) of the subject, present “objectively” as a determination of the activity characteristic of the “I” as such. A collection of such determinations is, Fichte points out, just what we mean to designate when we assert that a subject possesses a nature, a system of drives that it simply finds within itself. But for the “I,” the mere existence of a system of natural drives does not constitute any kind of awareness of self. Fichte thus concludes that there must exist some immediate (nonconceptual, noninferential) awareness of such drives—a *feeling* that one is driven to act in a particular manner. This feeling of a drive, what Fichte calls a longing (*Sehnen*), is the synthesis of knowledge and activity necessary for resolving the antinomy in question.⁴⁶

⁴²Fichte, *Natural Right*, 19; SW 3:18.

⁴³Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 26; SW 4:20.

⁴⁴Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 77; SW 4:76.

⁴⁵Since Fichte resolves his “antinomy” in such a way that the illusion, or conflict of reason, does not persist, this clearly is not Kant’s notion of an antinomy. Kant states of the thesis in an antinomy, “both it and its opposite [the antithesis] must involve no mere artificial illusion such as at once vanishes upon detection, but a natural and unavoidable illusion, which even after it has ceased to beguile still continues to delude though not to deceive us. . . .” (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A422/B449–50, in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Kemp Smith [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965], 394).

⁴⁶Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 102; SW 4:106.

It must be admitted that this antinomy and its solution are somewhat artificial, and it is clear that what really interests Fichte here is not the problem posed by the “antinomy,” but his proposed solution. This feeling of being driven to perform a particular act is Fichte’s candidate for the beginning of self-consciousness, as described in the introduction to the *System of Ethics*, and as such it occupies a central position in his account of the subject and its necessary unity. Unfortunately, Fichte fails to make this point as clear as he should.⁴⁷ His return to the temporal language found in the introduction nevertheless marks his theory of drive as the essential element in the account of the beginning of self-consciousness. He describes the state of longing as “a necessary and immediate consciousness, to which we could then attach the series of all additional consciousness”⁴⁸ and asserts that “my first action can be none other than to satisfy the drive.”⁴⁹ Thus we ought to think of Fichte’s construction of the feeling of a drive as part of a more comprehensive account of the act of willing in which the subject finds itself. The relation to self in the feeling of a drive must exist in order for any other awareness of one’s projects or acts of willing to be possible, for the reason that all acts of practical self-determination are in relation to a collection of merely given drives that a subject regards as its own, as determinations of its own activity. Thus, if we are persuaded by Fichte’s generally phenomenological argument for the claim that I find myself only in willing, as well as his derivation of the notions of drive (*Trieb*) and longing (*Sehnen*) in his solution to the antinomy, we must conclude that the possession of an objective, conative nature is a condition of the possibility of self-consciousness and, indeed, any consciousness whatsoever.⁵⁰

Reading Hegel’s opening moves in “Self-Consciousness” as an articulation of this Fichtean position yields a line of argument that fits into the structure of the *Phenomenology* and enables us to make sense of some of the obscurities present in Hegel’s text noted above. If we understand the claim that self-consciousness is desire in general as an articulation of the Fichtean claim that self-consciousness begins with a feeling of a drive, then Hegel’s remarks on desire and life—as well as those concerning lordship, bondage, and recognition—would not be an attempt to explain in more basic terms the mere fact of apperception, or the gradual development over time of an awareness of self. Instead, desire would have the status of a condition of finding oneself as a self-conscious subject, and the development of desire in “Lordship and Bondage” would serve as an account of the conditions under which desire can count as—that is, can be understood by the phenomeno-

⁴⁷While Fichte tells his reader that a proof of the claim that all consciousness begins with finding oneself effecting in the world of sense is to be found in the second chapter of the *System of Ethics* (SW 4:3), he furnishes a proof of the claim that “I find myself, as myself, only willing” in the *first* chapter of the book (SW 4:18–23). But Fichte does not regard his proof of the central claim in the introduction as complete until he has constructed the concept of a drive.

⁴⁸Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 102; SW 4:106.

⁴⁹Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 104; SW 4:108. Fichte’s mention of a subject’s “first” action in this context demonstrates again that his talk of the beginning of consciousness in a particular awareness of self picks out an explanatory priority, not a temporal relation.

⁵⁰The project of disentangling the phenomenological and more properly transcendental strands in Fichte’s argument, and then showing how Fichte understands the relation between the construction of a proof and the experience of, for example, “thinking the wall” (*System of Ethics*, 24; SW 4:18) is one that I happily set aside.

logical observer as—a determination of a subject's activity that is immediately present to that subject. Hegel's desire, like Fichte's drive, would appear as one condition of finding oneself in relation to an object in general, and thus would partially constitute the general context in which the apperceptive "I" can exist.

This reading of Hegel is supported by the existence of noteworthy similarities between Hegel's concept of desire and Fichte's central notions in the *System of Ethics*. Fichte's definition of a desire as "a longing [*Sehnen*] that is determined through its object"⁵¹ clearly resembles Hegel's concept of desire, insofar as the latter notion contains those of a *felt* relation to self (*Selbstgefühl*) (§195) and an intentional relation to objects and life generally that is revealed to be one of dependence (§175). And while Hegel's concept of desire is not equivalent to any single notion found in the *System of Ethics* (due to the fact that Fichte employs distinct terms to designate conative and aesthetic elements of this entity), Fichte's notions of drive and longing match up quite closely with the component parts of desire in the *Phenomenology*. Finally, just as Fichte takes drives to be capable of determining something as food, for example, Hegel regards desire as a form of negation that determines its objects.⁵²

Approaching the opening sections of "Self-Consciousness" with this Fichtean understanding of Hegel's concerns with self-consciousness and the concept of desire involved in his project yields a rough understanding of the turn to the practical Hegel is making at this point in the *Phenomenology*. He postulates a kind of primacy of the practical insofar as the concept of desire is introduced as a component in Hegel's account of the "second moment" of consciousness, the relation of a subject to itself, which is the central topic of concern for all Idealists. But apperception is *not* to be constructed from component parts. Rather, it is taken for granted here, as it is in the introduction to the *Phenomenology* and throughout the work, but also illuminated through an account of the role played by conative elements of consciousness in a subject's most basic awareness of itself. The goal here is to show that desire plays an essential role in an account of how we conscious, rational beings are present to ourselves as subjects—the account that will best respond to the needs of the observed consciousness following the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology*.

The observed consciousness has, since "Sense Certainty," felt a need to explain its relation to itself. Following its failure to explain what is meant by 'I' through appeal to a simple act of "meaning" or intending (*Meinen*), the observed consciousness abandons the task of accounting for its relation to itself, turning its attention instead to the various ways in which a realist relation to an object might be understood. And when these various strategies themselves fail, revealing that all cognition of objects requires some determining activity on the part of a subject, the task of understanding consciousness's relation to itself reappears in an

⁵¹Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 121; SW 4:126–27.

⁵²"I do not feel hunger because there is food for me; instead, something becomes food for me because I am hungry" (Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 118; SW 4:124). In his account of the role of desire in the *Phenomenology*, Terry Pinkard emphasizes the way in which in desiring we take an object an object to be one way or another (Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 50), which I regard as the more important notion of negation at work in "Self-Consciousness" (as opposed to the annihilation of the object described in §174).

even more urgent manner. If knowledge of objects is to involve as an essential moment a reflective act of taking an object to be such-and-such, then the problem of accounting for a subject's relation to itself must return to the forefront of the *Phenomenology's* concerns. Hegel's Fichtean suggestion at this point is that an agent's awareness of its desires constitutes its most basic awareness of self, insofar as this awareness of activity requires no contribution from the subject. We simply find ourselves driven to perform an act, and in this experience, are inevitably and immediately aware of ourselves as subjects that are determined in this way. Regardless of whether we regard Hegel's argument as turning on the notion of a *felt* determination of oneself, or as appealing to a phenomenological description of the experience of committing oneself to a course of action that is not a mere function of one's bodily desires, his conclusion concerns the unique status of desire within a subject's experience of itself.⁵³ It is primarily as desiring subjects that we are present to ourselves, and the representation 'I' picks out, in the first place, the complex phenomenon of determining oneself to act in relation to a set of given desires. The view is not that all self-conscious states are states of desire, but that desiring is (in the proper circumstances) a self-conscious state, without which there would be no "I" at all.⁵⁴ Hegel, accordingly, sums up the central result of "Lordship and Bondage" as the claim that "to think does not mean to be an abstract 'I', but an 'I' which has at the same time the significance of being-*in-itself* [*Ansichseins*], of being for itself an object [*sich Gegenstand sein*]" (§197; translation emended). In other words, the simple, abstract "I" of apperception is best understood as a part of a more complex phenomenon characterized by distinctively practical capacities that make possible the presentation of the subject to itself in a determined, objective manner. The Hegelian analogue of the Fichtean notion of finding oneself in the determinate, objective experience of willing is therefore the bondsman's experience of work, in which its "being-for-self becomes an object for it [*wird . . . zum Gegenstande*]" (§196).

In carrying out this project of demonstrating the interrelation of subjective capacities, Fichte and Hegel employ quite different methodologies, and this point constitutes one of the most significant differences between Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Fichte's applied works. Fichte divides the central claims of his theory of action in the *System of Ethics* into "theorems" and attempts to demonstrate them through deductive argument. Individual theorems are then related to each other as steps

⁵³While Hegel's talk of a feeling of self (*Selbstgefühl*) in §195 connects his view with Fichte's construction of the states of drive and longing, I believe his argument to be much more phenomenological than Fichte's, in the sense that it must appeal to the reader's own reflective experience. However, a complete account of Hegel's theory lies outside the scope of my concerns here. Such an account would need to examine the end of "Lordship and Bondage," where we see for the first time how desire appears to a laboring subject and why desire in general must give way to work, as well as the very general question of the relation between observed consciousness and phenomenological observer in the *Phenomenology*.

⁵⁴Substantiating the claim that Hegel regards some desiring states as themselves self-conscious states (as opposed to pre-existing conditions of self-conscious states) would require that we consider in detail the bondsman's experience of work in §§195–96. While such an investigation lies outside my scope here, my discussion in section four of the relations between lord and bondsman provides a rough sketch of how the bondsman's experience looks once we see in the *Phenomenology* a generally Fichtean notion of desire.

in a single transcendental argument that takes the fact of self-consciousness as its starting point and attempts to exhibit claims in the theory of action, teleology, ethics, and right as indubitable conditions of the possibility of self-consciousness. The theory of drive, for example, is intended to connect Fichte's account of self-consciousness to a theory of nature as organized independent of our capacities for judgment, and to do so in such a way that the truth of the theory stands as a necessary condition of a subject's finding itself in a state of self-determination relative to its natural drives.

In Hegel we find a similar move from the fact of self-consciousness to claims about the world inhabited by a self-conscious subject, but the connections between individual claims in the *Phenomenology* are of an importantly different kind. The argument does remain transcendental in the broadest sense, an argument from a feature of our experience accepted as fact to the conditions of that feature of experience. But Hegel does not take the procedure of mathematical proof as his model, and this results in both a more convincing argument and a correspondingly weaker conclusion concerning self-consciousness and desire.

First, Hegel does not attempt to construct the concept of desire, as Fichte does following his antinomy. The appearance of desire at the end of "Sense Certainty" attests to the fact that animal desire is a notion familiar to natural consciousness that can enter the dialectic at any point. It appears again quite abruptly in ¶167, once the observed consciousness experiences a need to explain its relation to itself, and desire is only later shown to occupy an important position in consciousness's understanding of itself insofar as it can be regarded as the objective determination of a self-conscious willing subject's *self*-determination. In other words, desire first appears as nothing more than a familiar feature of our experience (just as space, time, and objects of experience do), but the subsequent account of desire's role in self-consciousness constitutes an elucidation of its nature and its relation to other capacities previously regarded as unrelated.

The second difference between these two accounts of self-consciousness and desire concerns the relations that are postulated between the two concepts. Fichte's transcendental argument from the fact of self-consciousness to the existence of bodily drives and a nature towards which they are directed aims to establish the impossibility of a subject's finding itself independent of a cognition of itself as driven to perform some action within a background of a teleologically ordered living whole. Hegel's aims are more modest. The self-understanding of the observed consciousness at the end of "Force and Understanding" is that of an abstract "I" in relation to an object in general, or as we might say, a mere point of view on the world. Since the determinacy of the objects of consciousness has been revealed as originating in the subject, the observed consciousness now ascribes to itself complete independence. In what follows, Hegel's goal is simply to demonstrate to us the relative inferiority of that self-understanding by illustrating the way in which such a point of view on the world is connected with those features of the subject that were taken to be inessential, such as its animal capacities, through their presence in an act of finding oneself. In ¶¶173–75 he shows, first, how a desiring subject that has a merely natural, animalistic engagement with the world can be seen to be lacking the kind of freedom characteristic of consciousness. The

actions of such a subject can be explained by the physical presence or absence of objects that satisfy desire. Then in ¶¶194–96 of “Lordship and Bondage,” Hegel exhibits desire as it appears within the practical experience of a self-conscious subject that is, implicitly, free. That very same desire is now a felt need that does not directly bring about action, but instead, in light of the bondsman’s commitment to serving the lord, offers a reason for action.

Thus we might say that both Fichte and Hegel produce transcendental arguments for the claim that a self-conscious subject finds itself within a teleologically-ordered natural whole. But while the argument in the *System of Ethics* proceeds by attempting to show that the deduced “nature” of a subject—its collection of drives—presupposes a background of an organized whole,⁵⁵ Hegel’s introduction of life involves no such derivation. Neither desire nor its relation to self-consciousness is deduced, and there is no argument in ¶¶167–68 (or anywhere else in the chapter) for the *necessity* of assuming a natural whole within which a self-conscious subject exists.⁵⁶ This is why Hegel simply states that, for us, the object has become life. The concepts of desire and life, and eventually that of another subject, are revealed as interrelated within the observed consciousness’s account of the aspects of its own experience that it takes to be essential, but this self-understanding has been presupposed from the beginning of the *Phenomenology*, and the task of “Self-Consciousness” is simply to illuminate the interrelation between capacities of a subject that were previously taken to be unrelated. The argument does concern the notion of the conditions of the possibility of a given phenomenon, but it does not aim to demonstrate the transcendental necessity of the claim that a self-conscious subject possesses a system of natural desires. The goal is only to induce the observed consciousness and its phenomenological observers, who already understand themselves as desiring subjects, to recognize the way in which desire is integrated into the fabric of apperceptive experience.

4. LORD, BONDSMAN, AND THE UNITY OF THE SUBJECT

Reading Hegel as introducing the concept of desire as an element in an account of the beginning of self-consciousness has the further advantage of enabling us to see how the figures of lord and bondsman fit into Hegel’s broader concerns with illuminating the structure of consciousness. The dialectic of lordship and bondage quite clearly has as its end the integration of these two general forms

⁵⁵Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 110; SW 4:115–16.

⁵⁶My claim that Hegel does not regard his theory of life and desire as a necessary condition of self-consciousness may appear to conflict with Hegel’s assertion of a “necessary progression” from one form of consciousness to the next in the *Phenomenology* (¶79). But I think that we ought to regard the transitions in the *Phenomenology* as necessary only in the sense of being *needed* by the observed consciousness in its attempt to explain itself. Individual steps in Hegel’s dialectic are thus necessary in the same way in which the individual moves within a Platonic dialogue are necessary. I thus disagree with Neuhouser, who states that, by showing desire to be a necessary condition of self-consciousness (insofar as desire serves as a condition of experiencing something as distinct from the subject), Hegel can be said to have “in a quite strong sense ‘deduced’ desire” (Neuhouser, “Deducing Desire and Recognition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,” 251). Neuhouser’s reading attributes to Hegel a method that is not as extreme as Fichte’s attempted construction of the concept of a drive, but still more rigorous than the Hegelian argumentative strategy I sketch here.

of consciousness, what Hegel calls their “reflection into a unity” (§189). By the end of §197 the lord has, of course, disappeared from the landscape since he has become superfluous; the bondsman contains within itself the “pure being-for-self” characteristic of the lord and becomes aware of this fact through the experience of its work. But we can think of this integration of subjects in at least two different ways. On the one hand, the laboring bondsman appears to develop a lord-like aspect *internally* as a result of its implicitly free commitment to serving the lord.⁵⁷ This is how Hegel presents the situation in §§195–96, where the bondsman is described as coming to see its own independence in the form of the object it produces for the lord. The thought here is that, in fashioning the object and regarding its reality, the bondsman is implicitly aware of itself as a subject that has set itself this task in opposition to its natural desires. This implicit awareness of self is thus Hegel’s candidate for the experience of finding oneself as a subject.

On the other hand, we can also see the conclusion of this section as the result of the gradual education of the protagonist of the *Phenomenology*, the observed consciousness that has consistently been inclined to regard itself as a mere point of view on the world (§91, §167). This self-understanding stands fast until our protagonist takes up the project of explaining “what consciousness knows in knowing itself” (§165), that is, until desire appears on the scene as an essential element of this explanation, requiring consciousness to give up this self-understanding. Desire is now an integral part of its self-conception, as is a position within the social whole of spirit. Looking at matters in this way, we might say that the protagonist of the *Phenomenology*, previously defined by its “lordlike” tendencies, has come to recognize its opposing moment, the empirical, desiring self. Thus a recognitive relation between lord and bondsman is realized between two elements of a single subject. The abstract “I” of §167 (which we might also think of as an “ideal” subject, a transcendental subject, a mere point of view on the world, etc.) has finally come to regard its concrete particular self (the desiring, “real,” empirical subject with a particular biological and historical constitution) as essential to it. And it is only through appeal to the concept of desire that we can explain why this lord-like pole of the subject is *right* to acknowledge the moment corresponding to the bondsman.⁵⁸ Without such a foundation for consciousness’s recognition of its

⁵⁷We must view the bondsman’s situation as a result of a free commitment to serve, even though the bondsman finds itself in a state of servitude due to the actions of another subject. While the lord provides the threat in §194, it is the bondsman’s non-natural (that is, rational) response to this threat that gives rise to its predicament. In taking the effect of a recognized other to be the internal development of one’s freedom, Hegel is appropriating Fichte’s notion of a summons (*Aufforderung*), according to which a subject can determine another to be *self-determining* (Fichte, *Natural Right*, 31; SW 3:32–33).

⁵⁸In “The Apperceptive I,” John McDowell argues that this claim concerning the integration of two parts of a single subject is the primary meaning of the confrontation Hegel describes in “Lordship and Bondage.” While I agree with McDowell that “Self-Consciousness” aims at this end of integration (and have been influenced by him on this point), I believe that only by considering the lord *also* as a recognized other who serves as a constraint on desire satisfaction can we understand the reasons why the subject is integrated in this way. Furthermore, since McDowell advocates what I have called the contextual reading of Hegel’s concept of desire, he is unable to explain how this reconciliation between the two moments of consciousness takes place. A recognitive relation between two parties is always a normative relationship, one that stands in need of reasons, and insofar as the contextual reading of desire leaves us unable to explain *why* the abstract “I” ought to acknowledge the working,

bodily self, Hegel's transition from self-consciousness in general, in the opening paragraphs of "Self-Consciousness," to a consideration of concrete social norms and possible relations to one's body and desires, in "Stoicism, Skepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness," would appear as a mere assertion concerning the nature of consciousness—exactly the kind of transition that Hegel's methodology forbids.⁵⁹

Similarly, we might say that the aspect of consciousness corresponding to the merely desiring consciousness of ¶¶ 174–76 comes to see in the lord's being-for-itself a condition of its own being. By ¶ 196, the mere existence of a set of natural desires for a subject is revealed to have, as its condition, the ability to abstract from the demands of nature and determine itself in relation to a willed end and other actual or possible subjects. Since the self-determination of desire can be understood as the determination of a subject only from the point of view of agency—the bondsman's standpoint of actively holding in check its natural desires for the sake of pursuing an end it has chosen—a set of desires by itself cannot be regarded as an instance of subjectivity in any form. The introduction of desire in a discussion of an animal's consumption of an object should not, then, be seen as the beginning of a naturalistic account of self-consciousness. On the contrary, it serves only to foreshadow a step in the gradual development of consciousness's self-understanding, within which desire always already plays a role in consciousness of oneself. Here again there is a clear Fichtean influence. After articulating the role played by a drive in the beginning of self-consciousness, Fichte asserts:

To be sure, I follow the dictates of the drive, but I do so with the thought that I could also have not followed them. Only under this condition does the manifestation of my force become an instance of *acting*; only under this condition is self-consciousness—and consciousness in general—possible.⁶⁰

Hegel and Fichte diverge in their accounts of the conditions of free self-determination in relation to desire or drive, with Hegel proposing only the barest recognition of another subject as sufficient for agency in contrast to Fichte's view that a commitment to ethical action is necessary for any willing of an end.⁶¹ Their views

synthesizing empirical subject, McDowell's innovative account of "Lordship and Bondage" fails to explain the emergence of a subject that has reconciled itself to having an empirical, embodied moment. I find this to be the main shortcoming of McDowell's "heterodox" reading of "Lordship and Bondage" and the sections leading up to it.

⁵⁹The first acknowledgement of a living "moment" of consciousness by a figure in the *Phenomenology* appears to be just such a mere assertion. In ¶ 189 Hegel describes the result of the fight to the death in ¶¶ 186–88 in the following terms: "In this experience, self-consciousness learns that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness." Since Hegel has almost nothing to say on the question of why one figure in this struggle backs down and accepts the role of bondsman, many commentators have wondered how Hegel means to explain this development. But if we understand "Lordship and Bondage" as a non-genetic account of the structure of self-conscious experience, the acceptance of this role and the associated fear of death are simply conditions under which desire can be understood as part of a self-conscious experience. An actual struggle to the death—the only possible result of a conflict between desiring subjects in a context lacking norms of conduct—plays no role in Hegel's account of self-consciousness, so there is no need to explain how it might be resolved.

⁶⁰Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 104; SW 4:108.

⁶¹This view on the status of ethical norms underlies Fichte's attempt to improve on Kant's practical philosophy by providing a strict deduction of the moral law. If free agency and moral agency are one and the same, Fichte argues, the authority of the moral law has been established. See *System of Ethics*, 19–23; SW 4:14–18.

on the reciprocal relation between desire and spontaneity are, however, quite similar. To put the point in Hegel's preferred terminology, self-consciousness is in fact desire in general, but only because desire held in check by a commitment to serving another subject plays an essential role in the experience of finding oneself.⁶²

Thus, by the end of "Lordship and Bondage," there does exist a relation of *mutual* recognition, even though no such relation between distinct, desiring subjects is achieved. Each of the two poles of a single consciousness regards the other as essential to its being. Because this reciprocal recognition within the subject is conditioned by the existence of an interpersonal cognitive relation, the Fichtean interpretation of Hegel pursued here preserves the familiar Hegelian conclusion that self-consciousness is a social, intersubjective phenomenon. But the argument for this conclusion now appears in a very different light. Interpersonal recognition serves as a condition of self-consciousness not because another subject somehow "mirrors" my subjectivity to me, but because freedom from the compulsion of desire requires seeing that the ends of another willing subject can serve as a constraint on my own desire satisfaction.⁶³ Since it is the concept of desire that connects the "second moment" of consciousness in general with the conditions of free willing in ¶¶ 195–96, Hegel's use of the concept perpetuates Fichte's project of demonstrating "throughout the whole man that *unity* and *connection* which so many systems fail to provide."⁶⁴

Viewing "Lordship and Bondage" in this way also sheds new light on Hegel's introduction of the concept of desire in ¶ 167. There he asserts of self-consciousness:

This antithesis of its appearance and its truth has, however, for its essence only the truth, viz. the unity of self-consciousness with itself; this unity [*Einheit*] must become essential to self-consciousness, i.e. self-consciousness is desire in general. (¶ 167)

The role played by the concept of desire in "Self-Consciousness" enables us to give a more precise sense to the unity mentioned in this passage. The first two sections of "Self-Consciousness" result in a self-understanding on the part of consciousness that commits it to regarding as essential the elements of its being that initially ap-

⁶²Viewing the identification of self-consciousness and desire in this manner may seem to yield an opaque structure for Hegel's argument, since the remarks on desire in ¶¶ 167–68 would appear to be comprehensible only retrospectively. However, in writing the *Phenomenology*, Hegel most likely assumed a familiarity with the Fichtean background of his argument. Other allusions to Fichtean claims or concepts are never flagged as such, so it should not be surprising that this use of Fichte in ¶ 167 is not identified either. And while the identification of self-consciousness with desire can sound bizarre today, it would not have struck Hegel or his first readers as a remark in need of immediate explanation. It would have shown up instead as an expression of Hegel's commitment to demonstrating the fundamental unity of subjective capacities.

⁶³The question of what, precisely, serve as the conditions under which self-consciousness is possible—interaction with another actual subject, possession of the concept of another subject, etc.—is too broad to be considered in this context.

⁶⁴Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre*, 259; *SW* 1:295. In light of the central role played by desire in Hegel's account of the unity of the subject, one might even attribute to Hegel the Fichtean claim that the "I" is fundamentally a practical phenomenon, or as Fichte puts the point, that "the practical faculty is the innermost root of the I" (Fichte, *Natural Right*, 21; *SW* 3:21). However, I believe that Hegel's point is better expressed through the claim that practical and theoretical capacities of the "I" are mutually-conditioning.

peared inessential, such as its physical nature, its relation to other subjects, and even its location within a particular point in history.⁶⁵ Taking these elements to be essential to it commits the observed consciousness to thinking of itself as unified in a way that it did not at the beginning of "Consciousness," where it first came on the scene as a mere "I." Therefore, just as the object of knowledge has developed and unfolded in the opening chapters of the *Phenomenology*, the subject has shown itself to be something much different from what it first took itself to be.

This development should not be surprising, given the importance accorded to the reciprocal relation between consciousness's concept of an object and its concept of itself within the notion of the experience of consciousness that provides the structure of the *Phenomenology* (§§ 86–88). And there is, again, a Fichtean precedent for describing as a unit the elements of consciousness that we are tempted to regard as only contingently related. In a passage in the *System of Ethics* that Hegel himself finds significant,⁶⁶ Fichte asserts:

[A]lthough a part of what pertains to me is supposed to be possible only through freedom, and another part of the same is supposed to be independent [*unabhängig*] of freedom, just as freedom is supposed to be independent of it, the substance to which both of these belong is simply one and the same, and is posited as one and the same. The I that feels and I that thinks, the I that is driven and I that makes a decision by means of its own free will: these are all the same.⁶⁷

The claim that apparently independent aspects of consciousness stand in relations of interdependence might be regarded as the most general result of Hegel's investigation into self-consciousness and desire in the *Phenomenology*. Of course, in his transition to the historical development of freedom in "Stoicism, Skepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness," Hegel presents the observed consciousness as systematically misunderstanding these relations of interdependence in its various attempts to regard its living, desiring, earthly qualities as inessential. This return to a generally lordlike stance that privileges the freedom of thought in relation to desire within a context of actual bondage (§ 199) is, however, nothing more than a misunderstanding of what stands fast for the phenomenological observer, namely the identity of the bondsman as object and the bondsman as consciousness. As Hegel puts it, "for the subservient [*dienenden*] consciousness as such, these two moments—*itself* as an independent object, and this object as a mode of consciousness [*dieses Gegenstandes als eines Bewußtseins*], and hence its own essential nature—fall apart" (§ 197). For us, however, this essential interrelation between practical and theoretical capacities of the subject established in "Lordship and Bondage" is to provide a framework within which such misunderstandings of the subject and its freedom can be unraveled.

⁶⁵Of course much more needs to be said in order to establish that social and historical aspects of our experience are in play in "Lordship and Bondage." Here I simply take for granted what I believe to be a reasonable understanding of one dimension of the *Phenomenology*.

⁶⁶Hegel discusses this passage, as well as his reasons for thinking that Fichte's philosophy fails to establish this result, in his "Difference" essay. See Hegel, *The Difference Between the Fichtean and Schellingian Systems of Philosophy*, trans. J.P. Surber (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1978), 54; Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1969), 2:74.

⁶⁷Fichte, *System of Ethics*, 104; SW 4:108.

This understanding of the overall intent of “Self-Consciousness” requires that we regard Hegel’s concerns here as much broader than they are commonly taken to be. However, in taking the unity of the subject to be Hegel’s primary concern, one is not committed to seeing the chapter as an aside of sorts, independent of Hegel’s investigation into our knowledge of objects. The *Phenomenology* might appear to accomplish very little on this point in its transition from “Consciousness” to “Reason,” since the “certainty of consciousness that it is all reality” (Hegel’s wildly Fichtean characterization of the thesis of idealism at the beginning of “Reason” [¶233]) is already implicit in the abandonment of a realist account of knowledge of objects at the end of “Consciousness.” But progress is made in coming to understand knowledge, and it is important to see how this progress depends upon the role of desire in the self-understanding of the observed consciousness.

In accounting for its relation to itself, consciousness finds that the awareness of bodily desires serves as a condition of any self-relation; as we have seen, this is the central result of “Self-Consciousness” upon which every other claim about self-consciousness—that it is social or intersubjective—ultimately depends. In coming to recognize the significance of its bodily nature, the subject that previously took itself to be a mere point of view on the world acquires a different attitude toward the world itself. Taking one’s bodily nature to be an essential part of consciousness involves seeing everything inextricably connected with that bodily nature (such as the organic whole of a living environment, particular objects of desire, etc.) to be a non-accidental aspect of one’s worldview. Thus the world of natural consciousness’s concern appears as essential to the point of view of the mere “I,” and the same objects that seemed, at the end of “Force and the Understanding,” to be nothing more than determinations of the subject are revealed to possess an independence of their own. This is just the result demanded by Hegel’s commitment to viewing self-consciousness as “the reflection out of the being of the world of sense and perception” and “essentially the return from *otherness* [Anderssein]” (¶167).⁶⁸

In light of the relation between self-consciousness and desire outlined above, we might say that it is a subject’s own bodily desires that constitute the “point of contact” between the two essential aspects of a subject, the simple, theoretical “I” and the embodied, social, historical agent acting within an objective world. Once a subject that considers itself to be a mere point of view on the world comes to regard its own desires as essential to it, and with them a living environment, objects of desire, other subjects, and so on, it is committed to the objective reality and independence of the objects of its cognition. It is through *desire* that the physical world loses the form of mere appearance for the observed consciousness, becoming something independent, real, and distinctively other. Thus desire plays the central role in Hegel’s attempt to assuage our worry that, in admitting the essential

⁶⁸McDowell sees important epistemological conclusions following from the relation Hegel establishes between the subject and its objects (including its empirical self) in “Lordship and Bondage.” In particular, he argues that it is only by understanding a subject as a stable synthesis of “lord” and “bondsmen” that we see how absolute knowledge is possible (McDowell, “The Apperceptive I,” 4, 11–12). I believe that the reading of “Self-Consciousness” that I offer here is at least compatible with McDowell’s claims.

determination of all objects of consciousness by our capacities for cognition, we have lost the objective world and are left with mere appearance or illusion. While objects are in this sense subject-dependent, they retain their independence and reality through their relation to desire and its status as an integral aspect of subjectivity.⁶⁹ And if we want to identify some particular entity as that which is both mere appearance and independent thing (the two objects of consciousness in general in ¶167), then it is surely the desire of a willing subject that fits the bill. While bodily desires show up for a willing subject as given determinations of its willing activity, in relation to the act of freely willing an end they are mere appearances, that is, possible reasons for action that derive their force only from the will.

Thus for Hegel, the *reality* of the object of cognition described in the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology* is ultimately rooted in desire. In making this point, however, I do not mean to suggest that Hegel has adopted a version of the “*Anstoß*” account of objectivity Fichte proposes in the third part of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, according to which our experience of the “not-I” as something other than consciousness is at base practical, the experience of resistance to our own striving. While some commentators have suggested such a reading of Hegel on the basis of his remarks in “Self-Consciousness,” I see little evidence for this view in the text.⁷⁰ In ¶175 Hegel does, admittedly, note that a desiring subject will inevitably regard itself as dependent upon its environment, which then appears to that subject as independent insofar as it simply offers satisfaction to desires or fails to do so. But Hegel never asserts that a subject’s experience of objectivity is a result of a desire’s satisfaction being dependent upon its object. Instead, he uses this point to argue for the necessity of a different kind of constraint on a subject’s practical activity—namely the rational constraint afforded by a recognized willing subject—if that practical activity is to be the activity of a self-conscious subject. To be sure, Fichte himself regards his notions of check (*Anstoß*) and summons (*Aufforderung*) as parallel accounts of the basic constraint on a subject’s activity, but absent any independent reason to attribute the former notion to Hegel, we should not, I think, take him to be following Fichte in regarding the objectivity of experience as a practical phenomenon. This is especially so in light of the fact that, in the bondsman’s experience described in ¶196, it is the object of work, with its recognizable form, that confronts the bondsman—not some alien, characterless constraint on its practical activity.

⁶⁹More specifically, objects are independent, or transcendent, through their connection with subjective states that presuppose the basic capacity of desire, namely work (*gehemmte Begierde*) and fear in the face of death (*Furcht des Todes*). See ¶¶194–96.

⁷⁰An example of this opposing view is found in Neuhouser’s claim that “in order to posit the ‘I’ as an entity, self-consciousness must be aware of something which is ‘not-I’ that serves to delimit the thing being defined. Being aware of this otherness, however, is impossible on a merely cognitive level” (Neuhouser, “Deducing Desire and Recognition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,” 250). More recently, Allen Wood has argued that Fichte’s striving doctrine, and in particular the organic tendencies of the “I” outlined in Fichte’s resolution of the “antinomy” of the second chapter of the *System of Ethics*, ought to be viewed as “the activity through which the I posits the not-I” and that such a view “would justify Hegel’s association of self-consciousness with desire, and moreover with desire grounded in life-processes of the self-conscious being as an animal being” (Allen Wood, “Fichtean Themes in Hegel’s Dialectic of Recognition,” delivered at the APA Pacific Division meeting, March 2005).

5. CONCLUSION

I have argued that acknowledging Hegel's appropriation of Fichte's strategy for demonstrating unity within consciousness, and in particular his implicit appeal to the role played by the notion of a drive (*Trieb*) in Fichte's account of the beginning of self-consciousness, is essential for understanding Hegel's use of the concept of desire. Much more would need to be said about the role played by desire in "Lordship and Bondage" in order to substantiate the importance of this concept for Hegel's views on self-consciousness. I have barely touched on Hegel's understanding of the will and its constraint through the recognition of another subject, for example. But my goal here has only been to demonstrate that a reading of "Lordship and Bondage" should be oriented around the assumption that Hegel does intend to appeal to an awareness of one's bodily desires in an account of the experience of finding oneself as a subject.

Viewing matters in this way does provide us with a principle to follow in reading "Lordship and Bondage." The central result of that section—the need for the bondsman's desire to become work through being held in check—must be understood as an articulation of a condition under which the mere sentiment of desire can be regarded by us, the phenomenological observers, as a part of the bondsman's experience of "finding itself willing" (to use Fichte's phrase from the *System of Ethics*). Hegel's detailed descriptions of the fear that underlies servitude, the end pursued by the bondsman, and the perceived reality of that end would then appear as a phenomenology of the context in which a self-conscious subject finds itself. This is not to deny that the notions of recognition and work are essential to Hegel's account of normativity and the historical development of our common conceptual scheme. Such notions can, I think do double duty here, since we have seen that the fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology* is best viewed not simply as an account of the social institution of norms, but also as an attempt to remedy the self-understanding of the self-conscious, rational subjects who employ them.⁷¹

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