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## **THE MASTER AND SLAVE CONFIGURATION IN HEGEL'S SYSTEM\***

The surprising and most fascinating aspect of the master-slave dialectic is that the fortune reverses or, as Hyppolite put it, that “the truth of the master reveals that he is the slave of the slave, and that [of] the slave [that he is] the master of the master” (1974, p. 172). But aside of this handsome picture, the dialectic, as other parts of Hegel's writings, presents us with quite a miraculous work of philosophical art – one that appears formidably unintelligible.

This indeed is the one feature that contributed to the controversy over Hegel's philosophy to the greatest extent. He is famous for his esoteric language and his equally esoteric method, the so-called dialectic. In all his writings, there is one predominant feeling: everything moves, nothing is stable. And the force behind this movement are “contradictions” (whose nature remains somewhat of a mystery).

Probably the only way to understand a metaphysician is to take him seriously. This has its costs. If we took everything seriously, we would not progress beyond Hegel's own obscurity. We will claim below that Hegel's method involves an interesting constructional innovation. The widely acclaimed dialectic is simply a rule guiding the process of explication. This we shall take quite seriously. In fact, we will show how the application of a provisional rule of that kind, couched in terms of an ontology of relations, clarifies a great deal of the structure of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. What we shall ignore is the justification on which this method relies – we will thus neglect Hegel's appeal to “contradictions” which are to be somehow responsible for the derivation of the rule of explication itself. In a closer look at the master and slave dialectic, we shall see more clearly that such an appeal is unnecessary.

We shall thus abstract from the most Hegelian aspect of Hegel's system, his claim that the "movement" of categories, and ultimately of reality, is driven by contradictions. Sometimes, however, liberating oneself from first impressions, even if so powerful, can only pay off.

The present paper splits into roughly two parts. First, we try to impose a certain vision of the Hegelian enterprise in general and some of his methods in particular. Since the proof of the pudding is in the eating, we apply this scheme to the reading of the text by reconstructing the sequence of configurations of consciousness and self-consciousness. The master and slave dialectic will appear as just one of such configurations.

### *Hegel's Legacy*

As noted times and times again, Hegel does not really bother to argue for his claims except at very rare occasions. It is not in arguments going back and forth that he sees the strength of a philosophical system but rather in its explicative power. The more encompassing a framework — the more issues and notions can be made sense of in its terms, the better it is. But not only that. In contrast to the great majority of philosophers, he does not view the immense variety of philosophical systems of the past as simple mistakes. He sees the proverbial "grain of truth" in each. At the same time, however, he bewares of the dangers of such an attitude, which verges on eclecticism. One of his esteemed predecessors, G.W. Leibniz, who had the courage to think parts of other philosophies to be of value in the era of the Cartesian revolution against the tradition, and who actually tried to integrate the "grains of truth" into his own system, was affronted with just such charges of cheap eclecticism.

Hegel accordingly resolves not only to capture the other philosophical systems (or their core ideas) in his own terms, but in fact to (rationally) reconstruct their development showing how one "logically" (Hegelian-logically) follows the other. This is the proclaimed task of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is also thus that Hegel has found an antidote for the problem which, though ever-present in the history of philosophy, has probably hit hardest in the 20th-century so conducive to relativisms of various sorts. For it has to be taken for a fact that a good philosophical system cannot be destroyed from within. And yet, how else can one rationally convince someone that his views ought to be abandoned if one does not proceed according to the views expanded in his system? And this is indeed what philosophy has been — a playground for good arguments blocked by invincible targets.

Hegel's cure is impressive. For his goal is not only to do what the other systems aim at: produce a system of philosophy whose aim it is to provide a consistent view of reality and hence of all philosophical issues. This he does in *The Science of Logic* and its developments. Moreover, he tries to show how (from the perspective of his system) the various apparently contradictory views are merely stages in (his) rational reconstruction of the development of philosophical cognition. The latter is the task of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The complete system thus conceived has not only the ordinary argument for adequacy, viz. that it makes coherent sense of the world – itself included, but also that it makes coherent sense of the place of the competing alternatives. Not only is it reflective, not only is it self-reflective – it is also *other*-reflective. It is thus that *The Phenomenology of Spirit* provides foundation, and justification, for Hegel's Logic and subsequent elements of the system.

As far as the philosophical method is concerned, both *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and *The Science of Logic* can be viewed as systems of explications: the former – of the progression of various philosophical doctrines (or the core ideas underlying them), the latter – of the multiplicity of metaphysical notions. In thus far Hegel does not differ from Carnap, the father of explication in the analytic tradition, who defines his aim at the outset of *The Logical Structure of the World* as that of:

... establish[ing] a “constructional system”, that is an epistemic-logical system of objects or concepts. ... Unlike other conceptual systems, a constructional system undertakes more than the division of concepts into various kinds and the investigation of the differences and mutual relations between these kinds. In addition, it attempts a step-by-step derivation or “construction” of all concepts from certain fundamental concepts, so that a genealogy of concepts results in which each one has its definite place. It is the main thesis of construction theory that all concepts can in this way be derived from a few fundamental concepts, and it is in this respect that it differs from most other ontologies (1969, p. 5).

As most (especially early) analytic philosophers, Carnap shared his contempt for the murky German philosophy, and was probably not aware that not so many years earlier Hegel wrote in the *Introduction* to *The Science of Logic*:

In the present state of logic one can scarcely recognize even a trace of scientific method. It has roughly the form of an empirical science. The empirical sciences have found for their own appropriate purposes their own peculiar method, such as it is, of defining and classifying their material. ... Hitherto philosophy had not found its method... All that is necessary to achieve scientific progress ... is the

recognition of the logical principle that the negative is just as much positive... [KP: Omitted here is a closer description of the dialectic method which is to issue in] ...a fresh Notion [which is] higher and richer than its predecessor... It is in this way that the system of Notions as such has to be formed – and has to complete itself in purely continuous course in which nothing extraneous is introduced (1969, pp. 53-54).

The crucial difference between these two thinkers is, however, evident when we reflect that for Carnap there is no rule which would guide the process of explication. Once some primitive concepts are given, it is up to the intuitions of the explicator to explicate some notions rather than others. It is not up to the intuitions of the Hegelian explicator to do so: he has a rule which guides the explicative process, the dialectic.

At any given stage of explication, the rule is applied to the notions that have been obtained (i.e. to their explicans) and thus another explicans is postulated (this is the sense of the recurring notion of “positing”). It then only remains for the process of explication to be completed by providing the explicandum. It is this application of the dialectic which accounts for the “movement of pure essences” [34],<sup>1</sup> as Hegel speaks of it. At any given stage (of explication), before we are told what (ordinary) concept we will encounter next we must witness the “dialectic movement”. This movement is nothing else than the application of the rule of explication to the already present explicans.<sup>2</sup> The process of explication is thus given a definite direction rendering the system even more systematic.

In fact, Hegel criticizes the method of proof in mathematics as unsystematic in this way. — Although each step is licensed by a rule, there is no rule to indicate which rule to choose at any given point:

This proof... follows a path that begins somewhere or other without indicating as yet what relation such a beginning will have to the result that will emerge. In its progress it takes up *these* particular determinations and relations, and lets others alone, without its being immediately clear what the controlling necessity is; an external purpose governs this procedure [44].

Systematicity — at least of the kind to which Hegel aspires (and we must remember that this same dialectic method will be applied both in his system proper as well as in his reconstruction of the development of systems) — requires that there be a guiding rule, the “controlling necessity”, which, in Hegel’s system, is the dialectic. The imposition of a rule on the process of explication is an innovative idea which — in comparison with other philosophical systems — faces a greater risk of failure as well as a perspective of greater glory.

### *Assumptions*

Thus far, we have attempted to make some provisional sense of the Hegelian enterprise. We have tried to clarify both the goal and the method of Hegel. At one score, however, we failed miserably. For nothing said above promises to explain why Hegel is so atrociously difficult to understand. We could, of course, disregard this question. Instead, however, we shall try to answer it. And the answer is very simple. Hegel adheres to an entirely different (kind of) ontology than the ones we are used to — and, equally importantly, than the ones our language is used to. He relies on an ontology of relations.

In contrast to Heidegger, who adheres to a broadly similar ontological framework, Hegel does not reflect on these issues directly. In what follows, we shall accordingly accept the thesis that his framework presupposes an ontology of relations as a working hypothesis which can be rejected if useless but if it turns out to be fruitful so much the better. At the very outset, we should note the fact that relations are formal structures underlying processes (they have a direction, a beginning and an end), which would partly account for the movement evident in Hegel's system. In fact, we will see below that it is often possible to understand Hegel's term "movement" as signifying "relation".

An ontology of relations<sup>3</sup> constitutes a fundamental challenge to the traditional conceptions of what is real, which wavered between taking things (reism) or properties (attributivism), or both (aristotelianism), to be basic. A metaphysics of relations, on the other hand, gives primordial reality to relations, bonds, influences, social relationships, etc. The traditional building blocks, both things and properties, do not exist *sine qua non* but are conceived of as constructions from relations. Accordingly, we have to change the way we think about relations from thinking that relations hang between things to thinking that *things hang between relations*.

In contrast to traditional ontologies, a metaphysics of relations is particularly well suited for explicating various kinds of holisms. Wholes are said to be something over and above their parts. This something else is what relation ontologies capture as basic — relations. Wholes are structures of relations and not composites of things. Though such a scheme is not frequently explicitly admitted, it seems to be the metaphysical picture underlying a number of philosophical systems ranging from Hegel through Heidegger to social pragmatism.

Two primitive concepts are needed: a relation and a point. The interpretation of relations has been indicated above. Points, on the other

hand, do not have an equivalently “realistic” interpretation. In particular, they are *not* things. To points relations attach. They function as *centers* from which relations start (exude) and into which they project. Points keep relations together. In thus far they perform the function of substance in substance metaphysics and of formal constructions in attribute metaphysics.<sup>4</sup>

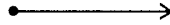
We have to address the question about the kinds of relations there are. There are two possibilities. It might be that there are many primitive kinds of relations which make up complex constructions. In such a case, isomorphic configurations may constitute explicans of different phenomena. The alternative is that there is only one basic kind of relation. Explication must then proceed entirely in terms of the structure so that two isomorphic structures can only explicate one phenomenon. The former seems to be the framework in which Heidegger wrote his *Being and Time*. We shall assume that Hegel chose the latter. As a point of evidence, it is worthwhile to note that he often seems to use the term “relation” interchangeably with “negation”,<sup>5</sup> which would suggest that only one relation is present at the rock-bottom. Of course, this is not to say that it is not possible to explicate different sorts of relations. On the present hypothesis, however, this would be to say that “intrinsically” identical relations are “different” in virtue of the different structures, in which they are embedded.

### *Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis*

The dialectic is a rule guiding explication. It is applied at each explicatory stage. It has been intuitively described as the schema “thesis—anti-thesis—synthesis”. In order to learn something more about the structure of this schema, we will be well advised to look at the three categories of qualitative being: mere being (“Sein”) — determinate being (“Dasein”) — being-for-self (“Fürsichsein”). The “transitions” between those three categories are supposed to, first, exhibit the schema of the dialectic and, second, provide a justification for it through a careful logical derivation. Since we set out to ignore the “careful logical derivation”, we will stipulate the structure of the three forms of being in terms of the primitive relation of negation. The arising schema will be our representation of the schema underlying the dialectic.

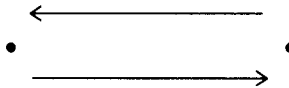
The first category of being is the immediate undetermined being which we shall accordingly represent as a point with no relations. (Given our characterization of points as playing the role of substances it is remarkable that Hegel explicates substance in terms of immediate being.)

From the first category Hegel “derives” the second, the determinate being (“Dasein”), which is a being with some properties and can roughly be thought of as the being of things. We shall characterize it as a point with an exuding relation:



If we remember that Hegel uses “negation” and “relation” interchangeably, this schema provides quite a literal interpretation of the characterization of determinate being as mere being (“Sein”) with a negation (1970, §§ 89-90). It will be noticed that this second structure of being “requires” another point — the one into which the relation projects. (Hegel in fact makes much ado about this by suggesting that he derives the “other” via an intermediate category of becoming.)

The third category is the being-for-self (“Fürsichsein”). It excludes everything from itself by “returning to itself from otherness”. It is characterized as negatively related to its own negations. Its graphic representation will be that of a two-point structure:



As a matter of terminological convention, we shall say that one point is for self (or has a being-for-self) in another point. Notably, the structure of being-for-self is entirely symmetric. This involves a certain ambiguity: for we can *not* treat the structure of being-for-self as pertaining to only one point and merely requiring the other; the very same thing has to be said about the other point. In the structure of being-for-self, we might be inclined to say, there are “two” such structures which “overlap”. But this is merely a matter of our thought and speech being overly concerned with the points, instead of focusing on what there is, viz. the structure of relations. There is only one structure of being-for-self but we can describe it in two ways. Being-for-self of one point then *is* the being-for-self of its other.

Applying the dialectic consists in adding relations in the sequence in which they have been presented above. There are three steps: first (corresponding to the “thesis”), the postulation of a point  $P$ ; second (corresponding to the “antithesis”), the postulation a relation from  $P$  to another point  $P'$ ; third, the postulation of the converse relation from  $P'$  to  $P$ , which corresponds to “synthesis”. The dialectic schema “thesis — antithesis — synthesis” can be thus represented as the schema “point —

a point with a relation — two points with two conjoining relations”. Once the three steps have been completed an entirely new stage of explication is entered. The transition from consciousness to self-consciousness will be seen to be just such a transition between stages. It is also in the transition between stages that there does not seem to be a definite rule concerning the place where to apply the schema.

### *Cognition*

Hegel sees this sequence and the resulting structure of being-for-self in almost all phenomena of reality. Cognition is not an exception. It is usually thought of as having an object and a subject, although this must not be taken to indicate an underlying ontological distinction.<sup>6</sup> The process of cognition can be thought of as spun between at least two points. One point represents the “I”, the therewith, the cognizing, the second point is the object, the cognized. The picture that underlies knowing oneself in Hegelian terms is rather mysterious. There is always an element, or to speak Hegelian language, a moment, of “*going into*” an object (out of oneself and into an other), and a moment of “*returning*” from the other to oneself. In the first moment, we are conscious of the object, in the second (but only when it follows the first) we become self-conscious.

The structure of the knowing process is thus the same as the structure of a dialectic move. And maybe well so, for Hegel will claim that his dialectic method is a way of knowing. In order to know something, we must establish a relation to it; we negate the thing.<sup>7</sup> The second relation exudes from the thing back to us. If it follows the first relation to the thing, we recognize ourselves in the object. If it stands on its own, the thing negates us: we become dependent on it.

Since everything is determined by relations, both the object and the subject, the cognized and the cognizing, are simultaneously determined in the process of cognition. This licenses us to talk about shapes or configurations of consciousness rather than either the subject or the object or both. It must be emphasized that the talk about the “subject” and the “object” is illusory. They will be identified as parts of a particular configuration of consciousness — and as different parts in different structures: sometimes mere points, sometimes subconfigurations. In fact, we shall see later, that some relationships usually regarded as social in nature have the structure of configurations of consciousness as well.



### *Abstraction and Concretization*

Before we begin a closer inspection of Hegel's text, let us make a general remark about the structure of the work. Hegel's ultimate aim is to reconstruct the structure of reality. For the structure to be clear, as well as in order to show how the various views erred by taking only parts of it into account, the reconstruction will proceed piece by piece. The whole thing is, however, present in the background. This is the difference between two "perspectives" from the standpoint of which the narrative proceeds: the phenomenological perspective "for consciousness" and the external perspective "for us". The perspective "for us" has in view the relational map of reality, or the structure of "Spirit". The internal perspective, on the other hand, begins by abstracting all relations. All that remains as the result of this complete initial abstraction are points, i.e. what is immediate. One by one, subsequent relations are added to the picture, giving rise to ever more complex shapes and configurations. Phenomenal consciousness thus learns about reality in a way akin to that of a scientist who discovers the workings of reality first by abstracting from various influences and then taking them into account again by concretizing the already established laws (cf. Nowak 1980). And just as for the scientist, the end of his enterprise is to concretize the law so as to embody all the factors abstracted from, so the endpoint for Hegel's journey is when all the relations abstracted from are subsequently incorporated. This is when the two perspectives, "for consciousness" and "for us", will coincide; or, as Hegel figuratively puts it, when the phenomenal consciousness will have become educated.

Hegel emphasizes, however, that at each subsequent stage, the previous stage is not merely abolished but is preserved as a "moment". This intuition can be very nicely accommodated in the above terms. For let us consider a certain stage where a configuration of relations  $C$  is presented. At the next stage, a different configuration of relations,  $C'$ , will be presented. We have said that at the next stage another relation will be added to some point present in  $C$  (it will be either a point, an antithetic relation, or a synthetic relation returning to the point from which the antithetic relation exuded). Thus, although  $C'$  is a different configuration — it "subsumes" the previous configuration — all relations present in  $C$  are present in  $C'$ . We can thus say that the moments of a given configuration are all the configurations which compose it.

*Configurations of consciousness*

Hegel starts with a point which is dubbed “I”. This is the stage of idealistic empiricism. The application of the first step of the dialectic schema gives us the first configuration of consciousness, sense-certainty. The “subject” and the “object” of the sensual consciousness are indeterminate beings (“Sein”).

•I

•This

Sense-certainty is the immediate knowledge of that which is immediate.

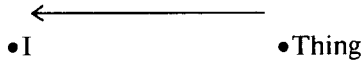
There is a certain inconvenience in viewing sense-certainty in this way because it becomes questionable how we can talk about it being a configuration of a knowing consciousness at all — after all there are no relations between the points. But Hegel takes this to be quite characteristic of this configuration. He says:

But when we look carefully at this *pure being* which constitutes the essence of this certainty..., we see that much more is involved. ...[T]he crucial [difference] is that... pure being at once splits up into... the two ‘Thises’, one ‘This’ as ‘I’, and the other ‘This’ as object. When we reflect on this difference, we find that neither one nor the other is only *immediately* present in sense-certainty, but each is at the same time *mediated*: I have this certainty *through* something else, viz. the thing; and it similarly, is in sense-certainty *through* something else, viz. through the ‘I’. [92]

The configuration can thus be said to be a manifestation of the intuition that a subject and an object are present in cognition. That the two points (or “substances” — the “Thises”, as Hegel says) are in fact a configuration of cognition is, of course, known to “us”.

The fact that in sense-certainty there is no relation between the cognizing and the cognized, that they are independent of one another, is precisely the problem of the configuration. Moreover, it is exactly the problem that confronts Berkeley’s idealism: there is no (substantial) relation between the subject and the object, *esse est percipi*.

The next step of the dialectic is to postulate a relation exuding from the postulated point. The next configuration involves a determinate being, a thing. This coincides with Hegel’s characterization of the thing as existing determinately (Dasein). Thus arising consciousness as perception has one relation from the thing to the I.

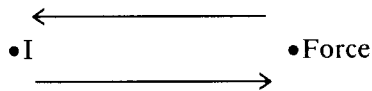


Two moments arise in perception:

...one being the movement of pointing-out or the *act of perceiving*, the other being the same movement as a simple event, or the *object perceived*. In essence the object is the same as the movement... [111]

Hegel forgets here about the “subject” of perception. However, his last comment about the object being the movement deserves some attention as it is supportive of the scheme in terms of which we are trying to understand his claims. In an ontology of relations, the only determinants are relations, thus the thing as well as the “I” are completely characterized by the relation that holds between them, or, to wit, that they hold.

As the configuration of perception is “nothing else than the one-sided extreme of being-for-self” [132], it is no wonder that the last configuration of consciousness involves the completion of this one-sided structure into the symmetric being-for-self. In the configuration of consciousness called “understanding”, the second side is taken into account — the “reciprocating” relation is added.



The object and the subject are thus both structurally determined by the same relations: they are both being-for-self.

*For us*, the object has developed through the movement of consciousness in such a way that consciousness is involved in that development, and the reflection is the same on both sides, or there is only one reflection. [132]

Emphasizing this structural equivalence, Hegel refers to this configuration as the “play of forces”.

What is crucial for the next stage, that of self-consciousness, is the fact that when consciousness comes to understand the world, the difference between itself and the world fades away (this is also why the consciousness is *understanding*). In this configuration, the difference between the “subject” and “object” fades away, for they are structurally the same: they are both *one* being-for-self. It is in this sense that we have to do with a self-consciousness; the difference between the cognizing and the cognized has vanished so that what the “subject” sees is an “object” which is *not different* from the “subject” — which, in fact, *is* the “subject”.

(And that the “is” is that of strict identity will be understood when we reflect on the peculiar symmetry of the structure of being-for-self.)

The two extremes of this syllogism [KP: configuration] the one, of the pure inner world, the other, that of the inner being gazing into this pure inner world, have now coincided, and just as they, *qua* extremes, have vanished, so too the middle term, as something other than these extremes, has also vanished. This curtain [of appearance] hanging before the inner world is therefore drawn away, and we have the inner being [the “I”] gazing into the inner world – the vision of the undifferentiated selfsame being, which repels itself from itself, posits itself as an inner being contains different moments, but for which equally these moments are immediately not different – *self-consciousness*. [165]

### *Configurations of self-consciousness*

The structure of being-for-self, which is the last step of the stage of consciousness, turns out to be a configuration characteristic of self-consciousness. It is a self-consciousness in the sense that it is a consciousness conscious of its consciousness. This is, however, a rather imperfect self-consciousness, for self-consciousness thus conceived does not have the prospect of becoming conscious of itself *as* self-conscious. The self-consciousness becoming self-conscious is indeed the theme of the section on “Self-consciousness”.

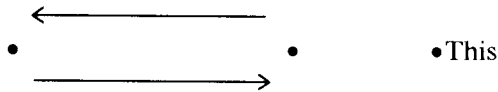
According to the general notion of self-cognition, the self-consciousness has to see itself as self-consciousness in another, and return from it to itself. In order for it to see itself in the other, the other has to be of this very character, be a self-consciousness itself. Hence, the famous slogan “*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness*”. [175]

It is easy to see that the application of the dialectic will allow us to achieve this goal. There are three steps in the application of the dialectic, and three configurations of self-consciousness corresponding to them: desire, master and slave, and mutual recognition. All of the configurations of self-consciousness have three points: two of them involved in the structure of being-for-self will be inherited from the previous stage. This is what Hegel refers to as the “self-duplicated” I. It is thus that the moment of consciousness is preserved in self-consciousness. Hegel does indeed offer such a general characterization at the beginning of the section on self-consciousness:

Consciousness, as self-consciousness, ...has a double object: one is the immediate object, that of sense-certainty and perception, which however for *self-consciousness* has the character of a negative; and the second, viz. *itself*, which is the true essence and is present in the first instance only as opposed to the first object. [167]

The first point in the three point configuration is a genuine being-for-self (“consciousness as self-consciousness”). The second point is essential for the first one in that the first can be a being-for-self only given the second one (which is the mediator of the first). It will be also the character of the second point that will determine the stage at which the self-consciousness is in the “reflection” on itself. If the second point is also a being-for-self, then the first one will be able to see itself in the other as also a being-for-self; thus it will be able to return to itself and become genuinely self-conscious: conscious of its own self-consciousness. This will be indeed the ideal of mutual recognition.

Before that ideal is reached, however, self-consciousness acquires two other shapes. First is self-consciousness as desire. Hegel says that “self-consciousness is Desire in general”. [167] (This will be true throughout in that all configurations of self-consciousness will have the moment of desire.)

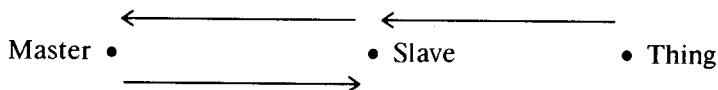


Unsurprisingly, the object of desire is characterized as immediate, i.e. as merely being (“Sein”). The object is also described as having the character of a negative. This seems to resonate the dialectic of mere being (“Sein”) and nothing opening *The Science of Logic*. Here, we can interpret it as saying that although the This, the object of desire, is — it is only as an immediate indeterminate being, one to which the self-consciousness has no relations at all. As such, the This is *nothing* for it. The “object” is thus thought of in the same way as the object of sense-certainty. The difference here is that whereas before it was a consciousness that cognized the immediate, now it is a self-consciousness that cognizes the immediate.<sup>8</sup>

The next step in the application of the dialectic is that there be a relation from the “This” which has been desired to the subconfiguration of consciousness. Hegel describes this configuration as the self-consciousness which is conscious of itself as conscious.<sup>9</sup> It consists of a self-conscious (being-for-self) master who has as his object the slave who in turn is conscious of (really: perceives) a thing.

...there is posited a pure self-consciousness, and a consciousness which is not purely for itself but for another, i.e. is a merely *immediate* consciousness, or consciousness in the shape of thinghood. [189]

The situation can be represented thus:

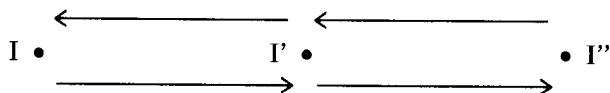


There is an ambiguity here. The consciousness of the master can be thought of as the structure of the being-for-self in the figure above, the slave – as the perceptive subconfiguration. The two consciousnesses are then treated as the whole subconfigurations. And this is indeed how Hegel seems to characterize them in the above passage. But the master and the slave (along with the thing) are treated as points, as indicated above in the picture. Then we see that the slave is a dual consciousness. On one hand, it is merely perceptive consciousness (or consciousness in the form of the thinghood), on the other hand, it is a being-for-self. This is expressed in the following passages:

[The master] is a consciousness existing *for itself* which is mediated with itself through another consciousness, i.e. through a consciousness whose nature it is to be bound up with an existence that is independent, or thinghood in general. [190]  
 ...the other consciousness [slave] sets aside its own being-for-self, and in so doing itself does what the other does to it. [191]

With respect to the master, the slave is a being-for-self, just as is the master. As there is no immediate relation between the master and the thing, “the thing is nothing” [191] for the master – the master desires the thing.

The third configuration is the genuine self-consciousness, which is conscious of itself as not merely conscious but self-conscious. It will be easily predicted by now that the picture looks thus:



This is indeed the interlocking structure of mutual recognition, involving two beings-for-themselves, two self-consciousnesses, which recognize one another as recognizing one another. This is the sense of the concept of the “spiritual unity in its duplication”. [178] The object for I-I' is I'-I'; the object for I''-I' is I'-I. Thus the cognizing self-consciousness (I-I') knows itself as self-conscious because it has negated the other (I'-I'') by having negated I' and I'' (more precisely, I negates I',

I' negates I''), and because it has returned from the other (I''-I') to itself – the other has negated it (I'' negates I', and I' negates I).

Self-consciousness exists in and for itself in that and by the fact that it exists in and for itself for the other. [178]

And *vice versa*. We are further reminded of what is clear in figures:

in this movement we see repeated the process which presented itself as the play of Forces, but now in consciousness. [184]

The upshot of the play of Forces for us was the fact that the configuration became differenceless. The difference between the subject and the object ceased to exist: they were both being-for-self, and were so in virtue of their being for one another. Thus we entered the sphere of self-consciousness, though one that still was not conscious of itself as a self-consciousness. Here again, the “subject” and the “object” become identical. They both function as mediators for their being conscious of themselves as self-consciousnesses:

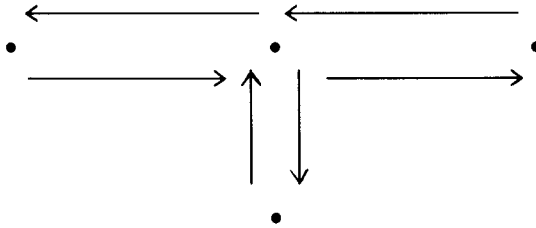
Each is for the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and unites with itself; and each is for itself, and for the other, an immediate [being-for-self], which at the same time is such [- for itself -] only through this mediation. They *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another. [184]

The third configuration thus understood involves two self-consciousnesses: it is a social relationship, in other words.

Before the stage of reason is reached, three other conceptions of self-consciousness are “tried out” by the Spirit. They all represent attempts to comprise what used to be the structure of mutual recognition of *two* self-consciousnesses into *one* reasonable self-consciousness. They can be differentiated by the choice of the point that is to constitute the “center” of the self-consciousness. (*Figuratively*, we can say that one point must be chosen to be the one to which the dialectic schema will attach new relations.)

Self-consciousness which takes as its center the self, i.e. the first (master) point, is stoicism.<sup>10</sup> Skepticism, for which the world is always the other, takes as its center the third point.<sup>11</sup> The Unhappy Consciousness unites these two in their contradiction – it takes itself to be essentially dual: both extreme points are taken to be centers of its self-consciousness.<sup>12</sup> Neither of the configurations can work for various reasons, and the solution is reached in Reason where the middle (slave) point is chosen.

At the stage of reason the duality of self-consciousnesses is overcome. They are integrated. The extreme points are recognized as extremes: they are no more residues of the cognizing and the cognized. The middle point is taken to be the center of self-consciousness (it is in this further sense that the slave is more progressive than the master, because he has the place of the reasonable self-consciousness). “This middle term is the unity directly aware of both and connecting them, and is the consciousness of their unity...”



This new self-consciousness has established itself, on one hand, as self-conscious (in relation to the “master-point”) and, on the other, as understanding the world (in relation to the “thing-point”). Only now can the world be understood by a self-consciousness. (This only means that in the final step of the dialectic, reason will have two subconfigurations as moments: understanding and self-consciousness, as suggested in the above figure.) At the stage of understanding, the world was understood only by a consciousness.

Apprehending itself in this way, it is as if the world had for it only now come into being; previously it did not understand the world; it desired it and worked on it, withdrew from it into itself and abolished it as an existence on its own account, and its own self *qua* consciousness – both as consciousness of the world as essence and as consciousness of its nothingness. [232]

### *Master and Slave*

We have sketched the above “development” of phenomenal consciousness using our representation of the dialectic schema. But Hegel insists that there are smooth transitions between the stages – that one stage involves itself in a dialectical contradiction and thus brings about the next which resolves the contradiction. Let us choose one such stage and see how it “moves” onto the next.

The configuration consists of three points, as all of the shapes of self-consciousness (proper). The first point is the center of the master



consciousness which, as a being-for-self, is a self-consciousness (though not conscious of himself as self-consciousness). The second point is the center of the dual consciousness of the slave. The third point, on the other hand, is the center of a thing — not a consciousness at all, which is responsible for the consciousness of the slave being a (mere) consciousness and not a self-consciousness.

We said above that the consciousness of the slave is dual in a sense, and in just what sense needs some explaining. On one hand, when its relations with the master are abstracted from, it is merely perceptive consciousness (or consciousness “in the form of the thinghood”). On the other hand, if the relation to the thing were abstracted, it would be a being-for-self. If either circumstance actually obtained, we would “regress” in the development. In the first case, we would have mere consciousness as perception, in the second — simple and immediate self-consciousness. These are preserved in the configuration as “moments”; moments, we will remember, are simply substructures of any given configuration. The first “abstraction” expresses the moment of thinghood, of the dependence of the slave on the thing.

[The master] is a consciousness existing *for itself* which is mediated with itself through another consciousness, i.e. through a consciousness whose nature it is to be bound up with an existence that is independent, or thinghood in general. [190]

The other moment is conceived of as a moment of recognition, as it anticipates the form of self-consciousness in the scheme of mutual recognition.

Here... is present th[e] moment of recognition, viz. that the other consciousness [slave] sets aside its own being-for-self, and in so doing itself does what the other does to it. [191]

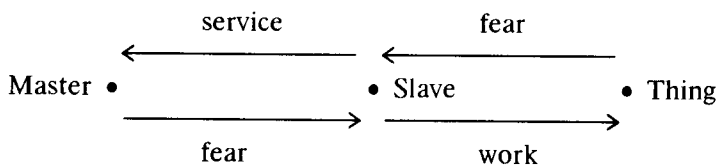
This, of course, is not complete recognition. Mutual recognition is what the master and slave configuration “leads to”.

From what has been presented already, it is possible to see what is lacking for the scheme to be that of mutual recognition. There would have to be another being-for-self in the picture. Thus, only one relation is lacking: that of the slave to the thing. This is what Hegel refers to as the slave *working* on the thing.

The negative relation to the object becomes its *form* and something *permanent*... This *negative* middle term or the formative *activity* is at the same time the *individuality* or pure being-for-self of consciousness which now, in the work outside of it, acquires an element of permanence. [195]

The thing already has a relation to the slave; now the slave only “adds” the lacking relation between itself and the thing. In so doing, he acquires an individuality [Einzelheit]. Hegel often uses this term to describe something that is a being-for-self.

It is thus quite clear why Hegel regards work to be so important. But he says that there are two other factors which are necessary for the slave’s becoming self-conscious. These are the fear of death and service. It is easy to identify these as substructures already existent in the master-slave configuration. The fear of death is the totality of relations directed toward (or against) the slave. The service to the master is the relation of the slave to his master. We can present the trio thus:



“In fearing death”, the slave is negated by “everything”: by the master and by the thing.

If consciousness fashions the thing without the initial absolute fear, it is only an empty self-centered attitude; for its form or negativity is not negativity [*in itself*], and therefore its formative activity cannot give it a consciousness of itself as essence. [196]

The “empty self-centered attitude” is the master-slave configuration without fear. It is a consciousness not negated by anything at all. Hegel’s play on words makes actually clear that servitude is part of such an attitude. He says that this “self-centered attitude” [eitelr eigener Sinn] is the self-will [Eigensinn] “a freedom which is still enmeshed in servitude”. [196] Also the formative activity, work, is involved. However, without the thing’s relation to the consciousness, the “work” relation is merely a skill [196].

Given what we have said above we can also attempt to understand the following murky passage:

But the formative activity has not only this positive significance that in it the pure being-for-self of the servile consciousness acquires an existence; it also has, in contrast with its first moment, the negative significance of *fear*. For, in fashioning the thing, the slave’s own negativity, his being-for-self, becomes an object for him only through his setting at nought the existing [form] confronting him. But this objective *negative* moment is none other than the alien being before which it has trembled. Now, however, he destroys this alien negative moment, posits himself as a negative in the permanent order of things, and thereby becomes for himself, someone being for self. [196]

The only way in which the slave can become a being-for-self is through negating the object, working on the object, forming the object. But it is the negative relation that the thing had to the slave in the first place (together with the negative relation of the master which was countered by service) that caused the dread of death: the slave was negated all over. Now, however, the thing is not independent any more. In fact, he (the slave) forms it. Thus, it is the slave-made form that now occupies the place of the deadly dread, and the slave does not have to fear any more. To the contrary, now he is for himself: it is precisely the relation that (on its own, without the work) was responsible for the fear which now becomes transformed into the relation that allows the slave to recognize himself in the fruit of his work.

The form does not become something other than himself through being made external to him; for it is precisely this form that is his pure being-for-self, which in this externality is seen by him to be the truth. [196]

It is thus easily understandable what the three necessary conditions for the slave's becoming self-conscious are. What becomes also clear is the reason why Hegel singles out work. For it is only labor that is not yet present in the initial master and slave configuration. When the slave begins working on the thing he becomes self-conscious.

### *Final Comments*

Aside of clearing some Hegelian ground, the hypothesis that the dialectic is nothing else but a rule guiding the process of explication, and that the dialectic movement is nothing else than the application of that rule, has proven rather fruitful. Although there remains an open question about what governs transitions between the successive applications of the rule, the hypothesis has proven both useful in reconstructing the structure of the work (and avoiding the obscure justifications of the transitions) as well as it has allowed to view Hegel's method as presenting a systemic innovation interesting in its own right.

We hope to have also suggested that the framework of an ontology of relations can be a rather profitable tool in trying to understand Hegel's method of system construction. Not only is it capable of reconstructing the dialectic schema but it makes a great deal of sense of Hegel's idiom (including its ambiguities, some of which have been brought to light in the presentation).

It is thus that the question arises how much importance we can attribute to the place of a certain configuration in the scheme. This issue

is not trivial as it is natural to take the place of the master and slave dialectic, for instance, to signify Hegel's commitment to a Marxian axiology. Similarly, the appeal to social relationships in the configuration of mutual recognition can be taken as the evidence of Hegel's insistence that society is a necessary condition for acquiring genuine self-consciousness. If, however, these popular theses are consequences of the underlying metaphysical structure, then stressing their importance (in Hegel's thought) is dependent on one's commitment to the dialectic schema. If those theses are to be taken to have an import over and above being a consequence of the application of an explication schema, the schema itself must be taken to be vital. It must be, in effect, considered to be a metaphysical force underlying the development of history. Although, of course, this is Hegel's own commitment, it becomes questionable whether Hegel's theses can be employed without a metaphysical commitment of a similar caliber.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated the quotations of this form will be from Hegel (1979). The number in brackets refers to paragraph number.

<sup>2</sup> The dialectic thus takes the place of intuitions and "rules of thumb" such as the rule of symmetry, for example.

<sup>3</sup> For an exposition of some basic presuppositions as well as a general philosophical motivation of an ontology of relations, we refer the reader to a discussion of Heidegger's *Being and Time* in "The Structure of Heidegger's Ontological Holism", forthcoming; see also (1993).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. "The Substance of Leibniz's Substance", forthcoming.

<sup>5</sup> This is not always the case. There is an ambiguity in Hegel's use of the term "negation". Sometimes it is used to suggest that there exists a relation between one point and another. Other times, it emphasizes the fact that there is *no* relation between two points. These are the times when Hegel will be speaking of one point "absolutely negating" another, or one point being "nothing" for the other – but sometimes (unfortunately) also as one point negating the other. We will see this ambiguity to be particularly prominent in the configuration of self-consciousness as desire.

<sup>6</sup> Ontological distinctions of the kind we are used to are impossible on Hegel's conception of being. The simple being ("Sein") which would presumably have the word in this context, is very weak indeed: *everything* exists in this sense. The problem, as Hegel puts it, is not whether something exists – because everything does, consequently all philosophical disputes as to the existence of things are empty and futile – but rather in what way it exists, i.e. how it is related to other things and itself.

<sup>7</sup> "Consciousness simultaneously *distinguishes* itself from something, and at the same time *relates* itself to it, or, as it is said, this something exists *for* consciousness; and the determinate aspect of this *relating* or of the *being* of something for a consciousness, is *knowing*". [82]

<sup>8</sup> A word is in place. The characterization of the present configuration as self-consciousness cognizing the immediate as opposed to the characterization of sense-certainty as consciousness cognizing the immediate seems absurd. For there is a sense in which only in the configuration of self-consciousness as desire does a *consciousness* (as we have seen it at the last stage of the development of consciousness), a being-for-self, have an immediate object for it – and, if Hegel so wishes, one might say that it "cognizes" the object. But this is precisely the point where Hegel's ontological adherence manifests itself.

Used to a substance metaphysics, looking at the diagrams we see objects. Here we see two separate objects: the complete consciousness and the immediate point "This". It is thus that we are inclined to think of the one as the subject, the other as the object and the relation between them (somewhere) as cognition. But this, according to Hegel, is the wrong way of looking at this picture. For the standard picture of cognition is, for him, nothing but a noting of moments. Cognition itself is a situation – represented by a configuration. The "subject" and the "object" are merely involved in the picture: they are "moments" in it. Where we see two objects, Hegel sees *one* configuration. Saying "the subject cognizes the object" already involves a split between the "subject" and the "object" and some "relation" obtaining between them. But according to the dictum that in a relation ontology everything is determined from without, by the kinds of relations that it does (or does not) stand to other things, the kinds of relations that other things do (or do not) stand to it, there is an ambiguity involved in referring to any given substructure. Even if we identify a point as "the subject-point" its nature will be changing as the configuration of relations (to which it belongs) is changing. It is in attempt to represent the holistic situation that Hegel speaks of the self-consciousness cognizing the immediate in desire and the consciousness cognizing the immediate in sense-certainty. In both cases, he emphasizes that as self-consciousness and consciousness they are "mere" – they are at the first stage of their "dialectic development". Nonetheless, they are self-consciousness (because the configuration of desire is that of self-consciousness; or, to put it crudely, there are three points involved) and consciousness (because the configuration of sense-certainty is one of consciousness: there are two points in it).

<sup>9</sup> This configuration is to be distinguished from the consciousness as understanding, where it is (mere) consciousness that is conscious of itself as conscious.

<sup>10</sup> "In thinking, I *am free*, because I am not in an *other*, but remain simply and solely in communion with myself, and the object, which is for me the *essential* being, is in undivided unity my being-for-myself. It is essential... in thus characterizing this shape of self-consciousness to bear firmly in mind that it is *thinking* consciousness *in general*, that its object is an *immediate* unity of *being-in-itself* and *being-for-self*". [197]

"...Stoicism corresponds to the *Notion* of the *independent* consciousness which appeared as the lord and bondsman relationship..." [202]

<sup>11</sup> "In Skepticism, now, the wholly unessential and non-independent character of the 'other' becomes explicit *for consciousness*; the [abstract] thought becomes the concrete thinking which annihilates the being of the world in all its manifold determinateness, and

the negativity of free self-consciousness comes to know itself in the many and varied forms of life as a real negativity”.

“It is clear that just as Stoicism corresponds to the *Notion* of the *independent* consciousness which appeared as the master and slave relationship, so Skepticism corresponds to its *realization* as a negative attitude towards otherness, to desire and work”. [202]

<sup>12</sup> “This new form is, therefore, one which *knows* that it is the dual consciousness of itself, as self-liberating, unchangeable, and self-identical, and as self-bewildering and self-perverting, and it is the awareness of this self-contradictory nature of itself”.

“In Stoicism, self-consciousness is the simple freedom of itself. In Skepticism, this freedom becomes a reality, negates the other side of determinate existence, but really duplicates *itself*, and now knows itself to be a duality. Consequently, the duplication which formerly was divided between two individuals, the lord and the bondsman, is now lodged in one”. [206]

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