

A NOTE ON SOME CONTEMPORARY READINGS OF HEGEL'S MASTER-SERVANT DIALECTIC

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ABSTRACT: Hegel's use of the master-servant relationship in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* sets the stage for the problem of recognition. Since Alexandre Kojève presented his lectures on Hegel, a long philosophical tradition has been isolating the fourth chapter of *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a freestanding essay on anthropology or social philosophy. However, I contend the account of recognition provided in this chapter does not ground Hegel's theory of ethical life. In this paper, I shall defend an allegorical reading of the master-servant dialectic that privileges Hegel's response to Kant. In doing so, I will take issue with McDowell's and Pippin's epistemological readings of this chapter. Both authors have argued that Hegel's strategy entails a critique of Kant's theory of apperception. While McDowell and Pippin have different views about the function of desire and the process constituting self-consciousness, I will object that both McDowell and Pippin fail to acknowledge the relevance of motivation and affectivity for self-consciousness.

KEYWORDS: Hegel; Master-Servant Dialectic; Self-Consciousness; Recognition; Desire; Work; Kant; Apperception; Pippin; McDowell; Honneth

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Hegel's phenomenological discourse takes place at the abstract level of consciousness, yet the fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology* (PhG) is one of the richest in offering practical situations and theoretical principles that are reciprocally intertwined. Under

the influence of Kojève's lectures, many interpreters have been isolating the fourth chapter as a free-standing essay on anthropology or moral philosophy, assuming that the individuals involved act as two independent subjects in the quest for social recognition¹. As noted by Kelly, «though every student of Hegel is deeply enriched by Kojève, this experience is not without its dangers. In the present case, the difficulty seems to me chiefly twofold: the subjectivity of the scenario is largely ignored, and the master-slave relationship is made an unqualified device for clarifying the progress of human history» (Kelly 1998: 173). Taken from a purely social point of view, the master-servant relationship would hardly explain Hegel's argument for the development of self-consciousness. Not only the themes of fight and recognition belong to a well-known historic and philosophical tradition (Bodei 2007), but also very little is done by Hegel to resurrect such old debate in terms of social and political interaction. As Solomon pointed out, «it should strike any reader [...] that, instead of moving straight on to "Spirit" and the nature of society as such, Hegel should spend another one and a half chapters, 150 pages and nearly 250 paragraphs before doing so» (Solomon 1985: 427). Similarly, Flay maintained that what is discovered in the IV chapter is not that some individuals are masters and others servants, but rather that «each and every self-conscious individual both has mastery over life and (...) yet is in bondage to life» (Flay 1984: 86). In a similar fashion, Honneth has pointed out that «[Hegel] was not primarily interested in elucidating an historical event or instance of conflict, but a transcendental fact which should prove to be a prerequisite of all human sociality» (Honneth 2008: 77).

This is not to deny the practical value of the master-servant relationship. The problem is rather to identify the argument that Hegel offers through the allegory (or parable, as Solomon puts it) of the master-servant relationship. To be sure, the allegory is concerned with the origin of self-consciousness in a way that challenges Kant's view of consciousness. Unlike Kant, Hegel does not set any opposition between transcendental ego and inner sense. On Kant's account, transcendental apperception cannot be equated with inner perception or personal awareness. The transcendental ego is the absolute subject of all my possible judgments and this representation of myself cannot be used as the predicate of any other thing. Accordingly, the confusion between apperception and inner sense originates the paralogism of pure reason

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¹ On the French reception of Hegel, see Butler (1987: 61-100). Notably, Kojève's lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* represented a significant turning point. As is well known, for Kojève, the fourth chapter of the PhG displays a historical-social progression as effected in and by the French Revolution, which completes the evolution of the Christian world and inaugurates the third philosophical and atheist world, that of philosophy.

concerning the soul. In Hegel's view, by contrast, self-consciousness is crucially dependent on the transformation of the structure of general awareness. Consciousness has to develop the structure of self-reference that grounds the capacity to take itself as object. This means that, for Hegel, consciousness is not immediately self-directed, but it must achieve its own self-relation. The whole transition from understanding to self-consciousness has precisely the goal of displaying the genesis of self-conscious activity. From this point of view, the master-servant relationship plays a relevant role in that it shows to what extent consciousness has to appropriate itself.

Recently, McDowell and Pippin have offered a reading of the fourth chapter of the PhG with regard to Kant's notion of apperception. However, they have drawn different conclusions. While McDowell has defended an epistemological interpretation that rules out intersubjectivity, Pippin was more interested in the pragmatic aspects of the relationship. In what follows, I will favour an allegorical reading of the master-servant relationship that takes issue with both McDowell and Pippin's readings. More precisely, I shall point out that the master-servant relationship is first and foremost concerned with the explanation of apperception as response to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. With regard to this, I will object that McDowell commits Hegel to the wrong picture of Kant's theory of apperception, and that both McDowell and Pippin fail to acknowledge the relevance of motivation and affectivity for self-consciousness. In my view, Hegel seeks to provide an account of freedom that is essentially based on the appraisal of affectivity and motivation. First, I shall consider McDowell's reading with regard to Hegel's critique of Kant. Then, I shall concentrate on the functions of desire and work in the fourth chapter of PhG.

CAUSALITY AND APPERCEPTION

As is well known, the fourth chapter of the PhG sets the stage for the development of self-consciousness. In Hegel's view, self-consciousness represents a crucial advancement with respect to understanding. In the third chapter dedicated to *Force and Understanding*, Hegel has actually explored how understanding raises above perception and posits its own certainty as true. Taken as understanding, consciousness seeks to provide a scientific image of the world that resists the ontological fragmentation brought about by sense-certainty and perception. While sense experience reproduces the world of common sense, which treats universal properties as sensuous instances, understanding discriminates between the essence of objects and their appearances. For Hegel, the world of common sense «is always at its poorest where it fancies itself to be the richest» (§ 131). This has to do with the limits of perception, which cannot provide a stable and universal determination of experience. By contrast, understanding articulates the difference between the intellectual determination of phenomena and

their exterior manifestation. Thus, under the labels of “force” and “expression” understanding provides the first description of the universality of law.

However, a significant flaw marks the activity of understanding. In this attitude, consciousness is able to describe the unfolding of different phenomena, but it lacks the criteria to justify its own intellectual procedure. For example, the fact that electricity has a positive and a negative pole is a physical property of matter when this latter is placed in an electric field, but such description does not justify the existence of the electric field itself (§ 152). The analysis of the phenomena that appear within the electric field explains neither why electricity has such and such features, nor the nature of electricity itself. Understanding ends up introducing other factors, but each of them is “empty” in terms of justificatory content. Hegel’s claim is that understanding is not able to demonstrate the normative character of its knowing, since the activity of understanding is fundamentally opaque. To put it in other words, understanding is not aware of being the source of normativity regulating nature and experience. What understanding attains is a universality that is not self-referential in nature. The ‘movement of knowing’ has not been appropriated by consciousness as its own (§ 166), for understanding fails to conceive of its relation to the object. It follows an opposition between the nature of the object in itself and the universality of the law posited by understanding to explain the nature of the object (being for itself).

Such divide is not explicit for consciousness yet. On the contrary, consciousness establishes the priority of the law with respect to particularity, thereby generating the paradoxical situation of “the inverted world” (§ 157), i.e. the world of law against its sensible copy. Basically, the figure of the inverted world is a *reductio ab absurdum* of the attitude of understanding. Since consciousness cannot articulate the relation between universality (the law) and particularity (the sensible instance of the law), the epistemic task of understanding culminates with its own self-estrangement. At this level, consciousness is no longer a way to be certain of an object, but rather a mode of experiencing the fragmentation and inconsistency of reality. Thus, unlike the previous shapes of consciousness that were centered on the finite relation between consciousness and an external object, the IV chapter takes into account the (potentially) infinite entanglement of consciousness with its own genus, i.e. life.

It is precisely in relation to life that McDowell (2006) frames the problem of self-consciousness. According to McDowell, the fourth chapter works «as an allegorical depiction of an attempt, on the part of a single self-consciousness, to affirm its independence» from the objective mode of life.² In this sense, the struggle concerns

² In McDowell (2006: 43).

above all the splitting and reproduction of the general structure of consciousness³. More precisely, for McDowell “Lordship and Bondage” represents the becoming of empirical consciousness into apperceptive consciousness. In his view, Hegel was committed since *Faith and Knowledge* with the critique of the Kantian apperception. Notably, Hegel criticises Kant’s theory of apperception because it fails to justify how objects can be presented to our senses by conforming to the requirements of the Aesthetic, and *at the same time*, to the rules of the understanding: «The Aesthetic does not, after all, lay down independent conditions for objects to be available to our senses, in a way that leaves it still open whether they are conformable to the activity of apperceptive spontaneity» (McDowell 2006: 35). Interestingly, McDowell defends Hegel’s critique, for he claims that Kant fails to demonstrate objective validity for the categories: «In the second half of the B Deduction Kant contrives to represent the combination of manifolds into the “formal intuitions”, space and time, as the work of apperceptive spontaneity. But he leaves it a separate fact about us, a reflection of the specific character of our sensibility, that what are so unified, in our case, are manifolds that are specifically spatial and temporal» (McDowell 2006: 35).

In other words, McDowell points out a tension between the Aesthetic and the Analytic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: The requirements set for objects to be given to outer perception are not the same as those depending on the rules of apperception. Since understanding imposes its rules only subjectively, Kant can be charged with subjective idealism⁴. Accordingly, Hegel’s strategy serves the purpose of providing a balance between subjectivity and objectivity. This requires «not leaving the spatial and temporal character of our sensibility outside the scope of intellectual freedom»

³ In favour of McDowell’s reading, it must be noted that Hegel employs the notion of *Verdopplung* (§ 176) to indicate that consciousness splits up into two: itself and its other. According to Italo Testa (2010), the term *Verdopplung* refers to the idea of organic differentiation. Duplication identifies the alienation of consciousness from life, indicating the need for a wider unification between substantiality and individuality. Originally, the notion of biological duplication appears in Hegel’s early writings in relation to the biological path of the living being that determines itself as individual against the background of life. In this sense, the term *Verdopplung* addresses the process that shapes and gives rise to a distinct living individuality. Yet, it is debatable whether this is the meaning of *Verdopplung* that applies to the PhG.

⁴ This is also Pippin’s claim (2011), according to which the struggle for recognition is motivated by the internal inadequacies of the Kantian notion of apperception in general: «Without that issue in view, we will not have a sense of *why* the problem of self-consciousness’s unity with itself should emerge here, why such a unity “must become essential to it”, and the discussion of a single self-conscious being certain of its own radical and complete independence (*Selbstständigkeit*) will have to appear unmotivated, simply a new theme» (Pippin 2011: 16 n.13). According to Pippin, Hegel is committed to showing how and to what extent a minimal form of self-relatedness is required in order to keep an animal alive. From this point of view, the three chapters that lead to the struggle between self-consciousnesses do not belong to a separate inquiry. On the contrary, we have something like a sentiment of self from the very beginning of the PhG and we shall see, how the self becomes an object for itself, as ‘a needing to-be-achieved’.

(McDowell 2006: 36). For McDowell, the struggle describes «a failure and then a temporary success at integrating, within a single individual, a consciousness aiming to affirm itself as spontaneously apperceptive, and a consciousness that is conceived as immersed in life in the world» (McDowell 2006: 45). Thus, the two “individuals” engaging the struggle are apperception and sensibility.

Having Kant's apperception in view is fundamental to understand that the master-servant dialectic addresses the effort of consciousness to come into unity with itself. In the following, I will maintain that the struggle is an allegory that concerns the genesis of subjective self-perception, but for reasons and ways that are very different from those provided by McDowell. The main objection to McDowell's reading has to do with his analysis of apperception as a fixed structure that parallels the figure of the master in the allegory. For McDowell, apperception is a power that *integrates* sensibility. He also insists that the point of the master-servant relationship is the conditionality of understanding and its failure in trying to impose itself on sensibility. Accordingly, he rules out the possibility that consciousness encounters another self.

To be sure, Hegel's PhG is concerned with the problem of spontaneity and with the critique of Kantian apperception. Thus, McDowell rightly identifies in the PhG the core of Hegel's dissatisfaction with Kant's theory of apperception. However, McDowell attributes to Hegel a commitment to the wrong picture of Kant's model. At stake in the PhG is not the fact that understanding fails to impose its rules to sensibility, but, quite to the contrary, *the act* by means of which understanding rules sensibility. Unlike McDowell, Hegel acknowledges the relevance of transcendental schematism, thereby he takes issues with the process that yields objectivity. Since *Faith and Knowledge*, Hegel's criticism of Kant is motivated by the fact that the transcendental deduction «loses itself in the mechanical relation of a unity of self-consciousness which stands in antithesis to the manifold».⁵ Hegel's reference can be found in the passage of the *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant claims that the transcendental synthesis of the imagination «is an effect [*Wirkung*] of the understanding on sensibility and its first application (and at the same time the ground of all others) to objects of the intuition that is possible for us» (Kant 1998: 257 B152). This is notably a difficult passage of Kant's text, and Hegel's criticism does not come flawless. Here, I shall point out the most relevant point of Hegel's strategy. According to Kant, the transcendental unity of apperception is the unity through which the «the manifold given in an intuition is united in a concept of the object» (Kant 1998: 250 B140). When Kant explains how the synthesis of the manifold is realised in accordance with a priori concepts, he refers to the role of transcendental imagination. Basically, imagination schematises the

⁵ See Hegel (1977 b: 92).

manifold to yield the content apprehended by the concept. In doing so, imagination affects inner sense, i.e. it temporalizes the content of intuition⁶. It is then in virtue of the activity of transcendental imagination that the manifold of experience is unified and brought to unity according to a priori categories. Accordingly, the nature of imagination is close to both sensibility and understanding.

However, it is only in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that Kant defines the work of transcendental imagination as an “effect” of the power of understanding. While in the first edition Kant mentions three subjective sources of subjective knowledge, i.e. intuition, imagination and understanding (A97-98), in the second edition the role of imagination is mostly reduced to the activity of self-affection. Hegel takes issue precisely with the self-affection of transcendental ego. His claim is not simply that Kant fails to provide the unity between the Transcendental Aesthetic and the Analytic, as McDowell suggests. He contends that such unity – which can only be found in the activity of imagination – undergoes a radical modification between the first and the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Eventually, objectivity is obtained in the first *Critique* through a mechanical relation involving understanding and sensibility, without leaving room for a positive interaction between consciousness and the world. In Hegel’s view, Kant’s schematism conceives of subjective self-reference as a constraint, i.e. as self-affection, rather than a subjective capacity that is spontaneously reactivated through the encounter with the object.⁷

Importantly, Hegel does not charge Kant with subjective idealism *tout court*. His concern is rather about the form of the activity that it is supposed to generate the transcendental unity of consciousness. For Hegel, as long as efficiency underlies the a priori synthesis, there is not much room left for the enactment of consciousness⁸. Accordingly, Hegel’s phenomenological method replaces Kant’s transcendental theory in that the former shows that there cannot be any self-affecting activity unless consciousness interacts with the other, thereby appropriating the structure of its own

⁶ My understanding of Kant’s schematism is greatly indebted to Ferrarin (1995; 2015a: 105-214).

⁷ Without doubt, Hegel does not do justice to Kant’s theory of subjectivity. Hegel’s critique tends to conflate the productivity of pure reason with efficient causality without paying much attention to the problem of the a priori. With regard to the problem of “productivity” in Kant’s systematic philosophy, see Ferrarin (2015a: 134 ff), who also examines Hegel’s main misconception of Kant’s a priori synthesis.

⁸ In turn, the failure to demonstrate the reciprocal relation between understanding and sensibility through imagination undermines the metaphysical project regarding the unity of identity and difference. Any theory that admits or includes a form of efficiency is doomed to fail the speculative point of view that seeks to establish a dialectics between identity and difference. Not by chance, in *The Difference Between Fichte and Schelling’s System of Philosophy* Hegel raises a similar – unfair – objection to Fichte’s *Natural Right* for conceiving of an absolute antithesis between pure drive and natural drive, and thereby allowing the ‘lordship’ of the intellect and the complete ‘bondage’ of the living being. See Hegel (1977a: 148).

self-reference. In this sense, by identifying the two individuals involved in the struggle with apperception, on the one hand, and sensibility, on the other, McDowell reproduces the causal model with which Hegel meant to contend⁹. For Hegel, apperception does not integrate sensibility, nor does it exclusively involve understanding and sensibility. On the contrary, apperception identifies the affective and non-reflective self-reference achieved by consciousness through the encounter with another individual.

Hence, McDowell is right in seeing 'Lordship and Bondage' as in line with the development of understanding and its relation to apperception. On the other hand, McDowell fails to acknowledge to extent to which the allegory reproduces Kant's defective unity of the ego. Since the Kantian I-think revolves around the identity of consciousness obtained through self-affection, the question addressed by Hegel in the PhG is *how* understanding can be reversed in such a way that it is *motivated* – rather than being conditioned – to actualise itself. Accordingly, Hegel's strategy does not rule out, but rather implies the encounter between two distinct individuals. For Hegel, the involvement in the world is not solipsistic (Stern 2012). It substantially depends on the relation with other selves that motivate and influence the affective experience of consciousness. Hegel argues that the structure of apperception can be modelled neither upon efficient causality nor on the basis of the identity of consciousness to itself. He calls into question the overall process of gaining objectivity and offers an alternative model that depends on a learning-based account of self-reference.

Thus, in Hegel's view, the master-servant dialectic is a metaphor for the paradoxical consequences brought about by Kant's model. In a nutshell, what the master-servant allegory shows is the contradiction implicit in the transcendental model of self-affection, for freedom can be obtained only by learning how to relate to oneself through the other. In this sense, the master-servant relationship plays an explanatory role in that it demonstrates that self-consciousness constitutes itself at the level of receptivity or passivity. In order to clarify this aspect, I am going to discuss the relevance of both affectivity and motivation for the genesis of self-consciousness.

⁹ See also Houlgate (2009: 19): «This is not to deny that the master and the slave embody two aspects of self-consciousness — pure apperception and empirical consciousness — that in a truly free self-consciousness belong together. In this sense, there is some truth in McDowell's interpretation. Yet, unlike the unhappy consciousness, which is divided within itself, the master and the slave are two separate self-consciousnesses, whose difference has been made necessary by the experience of self-consciousness itself». See *Owl of Minerva* 41: 1-2 (2009) for the debate between McDowell and Houlgate on McDowell's original paper.

2. DESIRE AND AFFECTIVITY

As I mentioned at the beginning, desire does not represent a digression from understanding and the task of self-knowledge. At this level, consciousness needs to conceptualise its position with respect to life, but this is evident only from the point of view of the philosophical observer. In truth, understanding is not even aware of what it lacks. Driven by understanding, consciousness conceives of itself as independent essence in relation to which nothing counts. In this sense, consciousness is already self-conscious. Yet, it is not able to posit its own being as an object (§ 164), thus it ends up desiring external gratification. With regard to this, desire is not to be confused with appetite. While appetite stems from the subject's drive and seeks the consumption of the thing, desire implies an intentional relation to the object. Since desire introduces a primitive form of self-perception, self-consciousness is originally identified with desire (§ 167).

It is noteworthy that desire does not seem to play any positive role for McDowell: «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» (McDowell 2006: 38). Without doubt, Hegel describes desire in terms of a “negative relation” to the object (§ 175), for understanding regards the independency of the other as nothing with respect to itself. However, this does not entail that consciousness seeks to consume, appropriate or incorporate the other, as McDowell maintains, for this equates desire with appetite or need¹⁰. Instead, Hegel stresses that «desire and the self-certainty obtained in its gratification, are conditioned by the object» (§ 175). Self-consciousness strives to overcome (*aufzuheben*) the other, but it never succeeds, for «there is in fact another than self-consciousness that it is the essence of desire» (§ 175). What Hegel seems to maintain here is that desire is essentially different from the satisfaction of a need. Being thirsty or hungry compels us to reach for water and food, and this need does not appear again until the body has consumed the object. Instead, the nature of desire is abstract and engendered by the persistence of the other. Objects of desire are never actually possessed, but grasped in variations or imaginative adumbrations that reverberates on consciousness and elicit its quest for self-knowledge.

In Hegel, desire has the same role as in Proust: it is both the anticipation of grasping an object and the impossibility of possessing that object. Importantly, desire determines a constant mutability of our states and feelings, and this variability interposes between the self and the other. In a state of desire, one is drawn to the other by continuously re-enacting an original lack. In Proust's words: “I could not look upon

¹⁰ This interpretation of desire as consumption is not new. Kojève famously argued that desire is the practical activity of negating objects. For a criticism of Kojève's argument, see Houlgate (2003). On the relevance of desire see also Honneth (2008) and Ferrarin (2015b).

[Gilberte] without that disturbance, without that desire for something more which destroys in us, in the presence of one whom we love, the sensation of loving”. In other words, in desire, consciousness does not seek to consume the other, but rather to position itself in relation to it. Unlike appetite, desire depends on the existence of the other, for consciousness engages with the object and tries its resistance.

As such, the gratification of desire varies depending on the resistance of its object. When confronted with another self, consciousness faces an essence that has gone through the same striving of the original consciousness. Initially, consciousness seeks to prove that the other is not essential (§ 174). However, the other resists the initial dismissal of consciousness and posits itself as essential as well. As long as consciousness strives to affirm itself, it can achieve satisfaction only through a process of symbolic duplication. I would be tempted to claim that the satisfaction of desire is the *objectification* of desire itself – not the annihilation of the object. As Butler has remarked, desire brings to light the reflexivity of consciousness, «the necessity that it becomes other to itself in order to know itself» (Butler 1987: 7). Reflexivity does not correspond to any mental act or to having thoughts about objects. On the contrary, reflexivity identifies the disposition of consciousness to *duplicate* itself, when faced by another. The notion of duplication is symptomatic of the striving of consciousness for self-knowledge. It suggests that consciousness comes to know itself by first projecting its own attitude onto the other. In this sense, the structure of desire elicits the relation of consciousness to itself *as well as* to the other.

With regard to this, Pippin has particularly stressed the unstable and non-positional character of self-consciousness. According to Pippin, self-consciousness is “something to-be-achieved”. Pippin highlights that «self-consciousness, while non-tetic, to use the Sartrean word, or intentional or positional, is not sort of vaguely positional, caught at the corner of our eye, or glimpsed on the horizon. It is not intentional or object-directed at all».¹¹ Pippin argues that self-consciousness is a provisional attempt, on the part of consciousness, to realise a practical achievement. As such, consciousness *is* desire in the sense that it is not intentional, and yet it is constrained by a kind of self-estrangement. The encounter with another living being induces consciousness to withdraw into itself, thereby modifying the structure of self-relation. For Pippin, «everything changes when our desires are not just thwarted or impeded, but challenged and refused. And he [Hegel] then explores how the presence of such an other subject, in altering what could be a possible self-relation, sets a new agenda for the rest of the *Phenomenology*, for the problems of both sapience and agency» (Pippin 2011: 20).

¹¹ See Pippin (2011: 17 n. 15).

On Pippin's account, one cannot deny that right at the beginning of 'Lordship and Bondage', a living being runs into another. As desire, consciousness is necessarily in relation to other subjects. Yet, for Pippin, the encounter with another consciousness has primarily the goal of outlining a problem of practical agency: «The problem of the unity emerges not because of any discovery of a matter of fact divided soul, but in the light of the realization that what counts as an aspect of my agency and what an impediment to it or what is a constraint on freedom, is a different issue under different conditions» (Pippin 2011: 52). Accordingly, Pippin proceeds to describe the master-servant relationship in a neo-pragmatic language influenced by Robert Brandom, i.e. as a commitment-sustaining process.

Against McDowell, Pippin holds that the master-servant relationship has to do with the encounter with another individual. However, in Pippin's view, consciousness is self-constituting in that it takes itself to be an individual committed to a certain project: «In a commitment, one is forced to resolve incompatibilities and sacrifice something; one is not just expressing a desire. To take oneself to be committed is to ascribe to oneself an authority that unavoidably involves an attitude toward another» (Pippin 2011: 73-74). Commitment is not a generic subjective taking, such as that implicit in desire. On the contrary, Pippin differentiates between being committed to a project and expressing a desire, for only the former has authority: «That is, one can take hunger or the desire for food to be much more than an occasion or a stimulus to act, but to be a reason to act, *or not*. And "assuming command", as it were, of such determinations is to take oneself to, authoritatively, *such a determiner* [...]» (Pippin 2011: 73). Thus, Pippin ascribes to commitment a motivational force on the basis of the apparent lack of cogency of desire.

Nevertheless, the notion of commitment presupposes what the transition to self-consciousness is supposed to justify. Far from explaining how self-consciousness is constituted, the commitment-sustaining game implies that consciousness has already developed the capacity to refer to itself as agent. But this is exactly what the phenomenological path seeks to demonstrate. After all, the fourth chapter is committed to present the "complex movement" regarding the cognition «of what consciousness knows in knowing itself» (§ 165). Such movement does certainly entail that consciousness takes its certainty to be authoritative: «They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being for themselves to truth, both in the case of the other and in their own case» (§ 187). Yet, such self-ascription of authority is evident only from the view of the observing, the philosophical "we". In reality,

consciousness demands nothing but the satisfaction of its desire¹². In other words, the experiencing subject has not yet developed that structure that only allows the capacity for the ascription of authority. This is due to the fact that consciousness is entirely conditioned by desire, which posits a relation to another without consciously ascribing any authority either to oneself or to the other. As Honneth points out: «Within the framework of desire, the subject can grasp neither its reality-producing activity nor its own genus-character, because reality in its living totality remains untouched by the activity through which the subject merely satisfies its individual needs» (Honneth 2008: 85).

Against Honneth, Pippin argues that «all Hegel needs on that level is the assumption of simple finitude and scarcity, and the extreme possibility of a contesting subject who pushes the conflict “to the death”, beyond merely natural attachments» (Pippin 2011: 74, n. 21). However, if “the assumption of simple finitude” is all that we need to describe the encounter with other selves, it is hard to see where exactly Pippin locates the difference between desire and the commitment-sustaining game. Since Pippin intends desire as non-intentional, he reads the master-servant dialectic as the overcoming of desire itself. Quite to the contrary, in my view, the development of desire in the master-servant dialectic explains how consciousness achieves self-reference without necessarily engaging any commitment-sustaining game. What Hegel seeks to describe is the experience that allows consciousness to first posit a relation to itself through the other. Such experience is first captured by desire in that it provides the motivational factor that pushes consciousness forward. Yet, the fight is not due to the commitment of each consciousness to affirm one’s own authority, as Pippin claims. By contrast, Hegel states that the two individuals «appearing immediately on the scene [...] are for one another like ordinary objects, *independent* shapes, individuals submerged in the being of *Life*. [...] They have not accomplished the movement of absolute abstraction, of rooting out all immediate being [...]; in other words, they have not yet exposed themselves to each other in the form of pure-being-for-self or as self-consciousness» (§ 186). The subjects involved in the fight are *objects* of desire, for not only do they lack any self-ascribed authority, but also their only capacity of self-

¹² Pinkard’s interpretation shares significant similarities with Pippin’s view. Like Pippin, Pinkard maintains that the master-servant relationship displays a clash between two agents having contrasting perspectives or points of views (Pinkard 1994: 53-63). Yet, Pinkard does not go as far as to separate desire from subjective commitment: «The subject understands himself as a point of view on the world, specifically, as an independent agent whose knowledge of things consists in fitting them into its practical field; although he can neither determine which desires he may have nor what might satisfy those desires, he nonetheless understands his *independence* to lie in his *subjective taking* certain things as to count or not to count as authoritative for him, with the standards for his doing so being whether they fit into his desires and projects» (Pinkard 1994: 56).

reference is grounded in the passive absorption of the other's movements and gestures. It is this element of passive repetition that frustrates desire, thereby triggering the fight.

At the same time, this situation is an allegorical illustration of Kant's apperception. As I mentioned in the beginning, the major issue with the Kantian model – according to Hegel – lies in the “mechanical character” of self-consciousness. Kantian apperception lacks any organic liveliness as the subjective connection to self-perception is removed. Now, the two individuals that face each other in the fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology* cannot mutually recognise until they develop the authentic structure of self-consciousness. They risk their lives precisely because the only available dimension of self-consciousness – the transcendental one – legitimate their beliefs of being independent from life: «For just as life is the natural setting of consciousness, independence without absolute negativity, so death is the natural negation of consciousness, negation without independence, which thus remains without the required significance of recognition» (§ 188). In this light, the fight outlines the pathological situation brought about by Kant's theory of apperception. As long as the structure of consciousness is governed by transcendental requirements, its experience of the other is governed by the mechanical quest for satisfaction. Each consciousness engages in the struggle in that each one seeks to prove its independency by risking its life.

Yet, this does not entail that each individual is self-ascribing whatsoever project. In order to be able to self-ascribe a commitment, consciousness should possess that permanent and non-reflective self-reference that is the outcome of work. Accordingly, the argument provided by the struggle aims to answer the following question: How is it possible for consciousness to gain a positive form of self-reference? To this end, it is worth noticing that 'Lordship and Bondage' is, above all, an affective path. This is a point denied by both McDowell and Pippin. Ultimately, they do not include an analysis of self-consciousness in terms of affects. While, for McDowell, the struggle is entirely epistemological; for Pippin, the kind of self-relation we need to establish in our actions is not emotional or motivational, but a kind of normative ownership.

This is striking, if one considers that the *Phenomenology* is first and foremost concerned with the feelings affecting consciousness. With regard to this, Pahl (2011) has pointed out that despair affects the whole structure of the PhG, for Hegel himself announced in the Introduction (§ 78) that the PhG is a path of doubt and despair (*Verzweiflung*). The initial steps of consciousness are notably described as a source of distress, because consciousness has to dismantle its natural knowledge and its alleged truth. However, «despair ruins the subject without ever completely annihilating it. [...] While despair ruins the original unity, it also prevents the shreds from settling into a

shape completely of their own».¹³ Not by chance, the root of the German word *Verzweiflung* is 'doubt' (*Zweifel*). Self-doubt plays a crucial role in the course of the struggle:

In that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations. But this pure universal movement, the absolute melting-away of everything stable, is the simple, essential nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, pure being-for-self, which consequently is implicit in this consciousness. (§ 194)

In the shape of radical loss exemplified by the servant, consciousness experiences the fragility of desire. Such universal instability is what Hegel calls the “simple, essential nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, pure being-for-itself”. It is significant that Hegel emphasises the absolute “melting and shaking” of all foundations. At this level, consciousness has lost its originary certainty and makes experience of the world in a new shape. In this regard, an important question concerns the relation between desire and affect. As I argued before, desire highlights a primitive form of self-perception while indicating the attitude of consciousness towards another. At the same time, it is worth noticing that desire cannot be immediately ascribed to affectivity. Indeed, not all affects described in the fourth chapter are marked by desire.

For instance, Hegel stresses the dimension of fear (*Furcht*), dwelling on the feeling of the servant, who «has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations» (§ 194). Fear is not to be confused with anxiety (*Angst*), for «if it [the servant] has not experienced absolute fear but only some lesser dread, the negative being has remained for it something external, its substance has not been infected by it through and through» (§ 196). Whereas anxiety frightens and prevents from doing any action, fear prompts a reaction, i.e. it induces consciousness to work. Furthermore, fear «infects consciousness through and through» (§ 196). What differentiates fear from anxiety is desire. It is because desire lies at the core of fear that consciousness turns itself to work.

In other words, desire is relevant to distinguish between different forms of other-oriented attitudes. Anxiety is a feeling that lacks any positive relation to the other. Accordingly, the self is encapsulated in its own struggle without any connection whatsoever to the external world. By contrast, fear is a feeling that is other-directed: In fear, we are afraid of a distinct other and we actively engage in a form of action that may prevent it from hurting us. It is in virtue of fear that one consciousness becomes servant and stick to life. From this point of view, Hegel offers a multi-layered account of subjectivity, including understanding, desire and affectivity. While desire identifies

¹³ See Pahl (2011:143-4).

the capacity of understanding to refer to itself, affectivity is explored by Hegel to explain how consciousness contextualises its place in the world. Thus, affects map the cognitive experience of the subject in that they are not opposed to understanding. On the contrary, they make explicit the different attitudes that characterise consciousness in virtue of its subjective certainty. One may say that, for Hegel, affects – rather than commitments – highlight the subjective perspective of consciousness as essential feature of its actions. Yet, it is work and not desire that grounds the self-relation of consciousness. In fact, work provides the level of conscious integration of feelings that is necessary for the subject to achieve self-reference.

3. WORK AND MOTIVATION

Despair and self-doubt are not absolute for the servant, who gets rid of its attachment to life by working. Work is crucial for «what desire failed to achieve, he succeeds in doing, viz. to have done with the thing altogether, and to achieve satisfaction in the enjoyment of it» (§ 190). As showed by Russon (1997), work is a form of *hexis* that enables consciousness to build the expressive capacity to communicate with others. Russon holds that the master-servant relationship exhibits the dialectic between *physis* and *hexis*. What the relationship between the master and the slave accomplishes is the development of the “slave” body, which is anchored in the *physis*, i.e. in the sphere of desire, towards the *hexis-physis* body of the master, i.e. a self-consciously chosen practice or habit. In other words, the master-slave dialectic frames the constitution of the habituated body that learns to educate his desire.

Russon’s interpretation is remarkable not only because it brings to light the relevance of the body in the PhG, but also because it is based on the idea that habit is not a blind and automatic power: «This self (that is, what the master-self is on its own account) does not possess (in Greek, *echein*, the root of *hexis*) its habit in a thoroughgoing way; it is something it has received from without, rather than something it has developed through itself» (Russon 1997: 70). In this light, work stands for a set of habitual activities that ground self-conscious practices. According to Russon, the servant achieves freedom by changing «the status of its body from unconscious-means-for-satisfaction-of-the-will to self-conscious-means-for-expression-of-the-will» (Russon 1997: 73). Unlike desire, which induces consciousness to relate to oneself only negatively, a course of habituated action enables consciousness to express itself, thereby authorising the relationship with the master.

To be sure, the structure of habit is such that neither our inner sense nor our body are conditioned. The rules that we follow in habit are those that we have given ourselves in the originary act of learning, but we no longer need to recall them to perform the habitual action. Thus, the self constantly refers to itself without having

itself as content of thought. This is the form of self-reference that is required for self-consciousness in the PhG. Yet, while habit comprises the set of bodily skills that make possible intentional actions, work is an acquired knowledge that includes – but it is not restricted to – habit. In Hegel’s view, self-consciousness is essentially an achievement involving attention and motivation. The subject cannot actualise her freedom by simply internalising a course of action. While habituated action provides the element of persistence, i.e. the duration achieved by practicing a skill that consolidates our sense of existence in the world, consciousness has still to come to terms with itself, i.e. with its originary fear. In order to overcome fear, what is required is that consciousness is motivated to take a course of action upon itself. This allows consciousness to change its dispositions and to see itself as source of action. The structure of work precisely points out the necessity of grounding the activity of the subject on a state of motivation. This requires a radical transformation of habit into a cultivated disposition, i.e. a knowing-how infused with attention and motivation.

In this sense, work educates desire and allows consciousness to engage with the world in a way that makes relevant the contribution of the self to the shared genus of life. It is worth noticing that Hegel does not propose any restraints of human natural inclinations and feelings. The purpose of work is not that of limiting the spontaneity of consciousness. On the contrary, work shapes and forms desire in that it provides consciousness with its permanent and stable self-relation:

Desire has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object and thereby its unalloyed feeling of self. But that is the reason why this satisfaction is itself only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence. Work, on the other hand, is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off; in other words, work cultivates and educates [*oder sie bildet*]. (§ 195)

Work is “desire held in check”, i.e. it is a formative activity that “cultivates and educates”. However, it is not evident whether cultivation refers to the self or to the object.¹⁴ What Hegel suggests is that consciousness *learns* to refer to itself through the relation to the object. By means of work, consciousness no longer needs to prove its independency in the eyes of another, since its self-perception, implicit in desire, is now explicated and developed through the very activity that shapes and gives form to the object. For Hegel, Kant’s account of spontaneity fails to acknowledge the dynamic relationship between the self and the world. By contrast, Hegel holds that consciousness is set free by making experience of the world. Through the experience of

¹⁴ On the formative character of work see also Habermas (1967). I am indebted to Brian O’Connor for pointing out to me the ambiguity of the line “Die Arbeit hingegen ist gehemmte Begierde, aufgehaltenes Verschwinden, oder *sie bildet*” (§ 195), where the activity of work may be as much directed to the object of work as to the subject.

the other, consciousness learns to refer itself, i.e. it recognises that its own self-relation is as much an achievement as its own independence. To the extent that consciousness is able to refer to itself, it develops the capacity to think too, for «to *think* does not mean to think as *an abstract I*, but as an I which has at the same time the significance of intrinsic being (*Ansichsein*), of having itself for object, or of relating itself to objective being in such a way that its significance is the being-for-self of the consciousness for which it is [an object]» (§ 197).

As a way of conclusion, it is true that, for Hegel, self-consciousness is something-to-be-achieved. Contrary to Kant's schematism, the master-servant allegory shows that the concept is not the result of transcendental self-affection, but the permanent relation to oneself built upon the interaction with the other. This strongly contrasts with Kant's theory of transcendental subjectivity. For Kant, apperception is the consciousness of the identity of the self and, at the same, the consciousness of the synthesis of the manifold of appearances according to a priori rules¹⁵. Such a synthesis is not *act* of consciousness, but the experience of the continuity of the "I" through different representations that are transcendently unified. For Kant, the "I" can never be given as an object. Still, transcendental apperception essentially lies in the continuity of the activity of synthesis that provides the "I" with self-identity and coherence. Hegel reverses the Kantian model in so far as he posits the necessity that consciousness takes itself as object through its experience of the other, which involves desire and affectivity. Accordingly, apperception corresponds – for Hegel – to the stable and affective form of self-perception that is eventually achieved by consciousness by mastering habitual and formative activities.

CONCLUSIONS

The relevance of the PhG and especially of the master-servant allegory is that it includes elements that belong to the lived and affective experience of consciousness. I have argued that Hegel develops the structure of self-consciousness alongside his critique of Kant's apperception. Hegel's argument is that the structure of recognition

¹⁵ Kant (1998: 233 A 108): «The original and necessary consciousness of the identity of oneself is at the same time a consciousness of an equally necessary unity of the synthesis of all appearances in accordance with concepts, i.e., in accordance with rules that not only make them necessarily reproducible, but also thereby determine an object for their intuition, i.e., the concept of something in which they are necessarily connected; for the mind could not possibly think of the identity of itself in the manifoldness of its representations, and indeed think this a priori, *if it did not have before its eyes the identity of its action*, which subjects all synthesis of apprehension (which is empirical) to a transcendental unity, and first makes possible their connection in accordance with a priori rules» [Italics is mine].

regards the gradual acquisition of a primary form of self-relation, which contrasts to the self-affection of transcendental schematism. In my reading, I have taken issue with both McDowell and Pippin's readings. While McDowell rules out the dimension of other selves, Pippin emphasises the pragmatic aspect of the struggle without acknowledging the difference between desire and commitment. On the contrary, I have argued that self-consciousness is an achievement involving the interaction with other selves as well as the transition from desire to habitual and practical self-reference.

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