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True Sacrifice On Hegel's Presentation of Self-Consciousness

Abstract *The paper provides a modest reading of Hegel's treatment of self-consciousness in his Phenomenology of Spirit and tries to present it as an integral part of the overall project of the experience of consciousness leading from understanding to reason. Its immediate objective is, it is argued, to think the independence and dependence, that is the pure and empirical I within the same unity of self-consciousness. This implies a double movement of finding a proper existence for the pure I and at the same time a breaking down of the empirical I's attachment to particularity. It is argued that the Hegelian struggle for recognition intends to show how the access to reason demands the subject's renunciation of its attachment to particularity, that is to sacrifice not only its bare life but every thing indeed, including its particular identity, and yet, to go on living.*

Keywords: *Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, self-consciousness, desire, recognition, master and servant, sacrifice, departicularisation, reason*

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The chapter on self-consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* gave rise to a flood of interpretations that made it one of the most widely commented pieces in the history of modern philosophy. Its success was partly due to the famous Paris lectures of Kojève who, combining Marx and Heidegger, presented it as a core matrix of Hegel's entire thought. Developed further in a myriad of ways by writers from Sartre to Lacan, the figures of desire, recognition, and of master and servant acquired a reputation of indispensable references particularly in French thought in the middle of the 20th century. The discursive frenzy hasn't stopped there, however. A series of new, typically heterodox readings has been presented in recent years by various authors – e.g. by Honneth, McDowell or Brandom, to name but a few – who once again felt the need to rely on Hegel in order to formulate their own philosophical projects. But due to such excessive diversity of interpretations the general picture arising out of it is that of a profound perplexity where, a few common places aside, the outline of Hegel's argument has become increasingly blurred. Since nearly everyone has his or her very own reading of it, it is almost impossible to tell what it “really means”.

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This is not to say that there must be but a single true analysis. In his treatment of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology* Hegel proceeds on a level of such generality that it is bound to lend itself to a vast variety of readings, none of which can be deemed entirely false. And since, at least for Hegel, the truth of an interpretation is not something written in advance, it is possible to claim that all of them may be true at the same time. An excellent example is Kojève himself: his reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology* as a "philosophical anthropology" built around the primordial scene of the struggle for recognition is bluntly incorrect when compared to Hegel's actual argument, up to the point where one may wonder whether Kojève had the same book in mind; however, his reading has proved so productive not only in inventing new philosophical concepts but also in providing better understanding of Hegel's philosophical undertaking in general – so it must be considered true in its own right.

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On the other hand this confusion is rather strange. Hegel is basically a fair author who in no moment wanted to present himself as a person of superior intellect, especially not more clever than his readers. Anyone who bothered to read him closely is bound to notice the enormous effort he put in making himself understood. The diversity of interpretations can also be hardly explained by the inherent difficulty of the matter. To a large extent it seems to follow from very particular agendas that various interpreters wanted to read into it. The best way to proceed, then, is with self-confident naivety. If one wants to know what he really wanted to tell us in his treatment of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the first rule would be to forget that there might be other interpretations and to start afresh. This is in any case the advice given by Hegel himself who later claimed that in order to enter the philosophical discourse one simply needed to give up prejudices.

It may be true that the *Phenomenology* presents some complications in this regard, in particular due the fact that it relies on the polyphony of voices whose implicit references are nowadays often hard to identify. It is also true that in the very composition of the *Phenomenology* Hegel might have modified his initial plan, so that the final result may lack complete coherence. Yet in spite of that we will try to show that it is possible to provide a modest and still rather convincing presentation of Hegel's treatment of self-consciousness in his *Phenomenology*. Its main objective is, we would argue, to think the independence and dependence, the pure and empirical I within the same unity of self-consciousness. This implies a double movement of finding a proper existence for self-consciousness

and of breaking the consciousness's attachment to the particular. Above all, we are going to argue that the struggle for recognition is intended to exemplify how the access to universality of thought can be gained only by renouncing one's attachment to one's particularity, by sacrificing not only one's life but as a matter of fact every-thing – *and still* to go on living.

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Before we start, however, let us make two simple observations. First, if we want to produce an immanent reading of a particular shape of natural consciousness in *Phenomenology of Spirit* we have to keep in mind the general nature of Hegel's project. His purpose was to provide a scientific introduction to science, to develop a subjectively valid justification of knowledge that would enable everyone to rise to the standpoint of science. For a variety of reasons this justification was conceived as a concatenation of the "experiences of consciousness" relying on our inherent pretension to know: every particular shape of natural consciousness is by its very nature engaged in verifying the coherence of its conception of truth (to "test the reality of its knowing" against its "own criteria"), and when found inconsistent or deficient, as it inevitably is, knowledge thus obtained is meant to transform by itself into a new shape. Anyhow, the important thing is that every shape is characterized by the same pretension-to-know, which acquires a more and more complex inner structure; and that every new shape comes into existence as a positive result of the failure of the old one (this is what "experience of consciousness" actually means: a lesson learned). As for the shape in question this means that in our reading of self-consciousness we have to be able to understand it as a prolongation of understanding leading further to reason.

And second, since the *Phenomenology* is designed to be a series of experiences of consciousness under the close supervision of the philosopher Hegel, we have to take into account the simultaneous presence of different standpoints and discourses. It is not only that sometimes we, the readers and would-be-philosophers, are able to see something that cannot be seen by consciousness itself. More importantly, we have to distinguish with great care between the developments and comments that are made from the standpoint of science and their transpositions to the level of concrete experiences; between what belongs to the setting of the conceptual stage of experience and what belongs to the experience proper. It is to his own credit that Hegel was extremely diligent in demarcating the lines separating the two discursive levels. Usually he starts by describing

the conceptual structure of the new shape of consciousness, especially with regard to its object. It is only then that he proceeds to experience proper, whereby he almost never fails to instruct his reader in the most explicit terms about what is going to happen *now*, e.g. by using the phrase “in its experience which we are now to consider” (§173).¹ The awareness that there are two basically different levels in Hegel's discursive strategy can spare us some pointless self-made riddle.

But let us now proceed to the thing itself.

The emergence of self-consciousness marks one of the major turning points in the progress of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. At the end of the previous episode, natural consciousness in the shape of understanding tried to explain the pure diversity that remained the last distinction still opposing it to its object. The distinction finally collapsed in the moment it realized that this pure, groundless diversity structurally coincided with the movement of tautological explanation, differentiating what is the same and making the same what is different. Both are but one “making a difference that is no difference”. Consciousness has come to see that, in explaining, “while it seems to be pursuing something else”, it really is “in an immediate conversation with itself, enjoying only itself” (§163). The curtain separating it from the then unknowable is lifted. For the first time the duality of consciousness and its object is overcome and something unprecedented has emerged, namely, “a certainty, that is the same as its truth” (§166). Using the strongest possible words Hegel declares that “with the self-consciousness we have now entered into the native realm of truth” (§167).

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We know, of course, that in Hegel every beginning is always abstract and that the jubilation is soon going to be spoiled. What exactly is lacking? The problem is, according to Hegel, that the self-consciousness is initially, that is as it “first makes its appearance” (§167), nothing but pure self-identity of “I am I”. Yet as it is with Kant's transcendental unity of apperception, or even more so with Fichte's pure I of “Thathandlung” (the I that is “the content of the relation and the relating itself” [§166]), the pure form of “I-ness” existentially depends on the content *given* from outside. It exists only as the movement of “the return from the *otherness*” (§167). Thus, when natural consciousness managed to reduce every determined other to the unity of self-consciousness, it inadvertently

1 The quotations from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* are, for the sake of convenience, given using the paragraph numbers only. We used a combination of Miller's (Hegel 1977) and Pinkard's (Hegel, internet) translations that were occasionally altered without any specific notice.

withdrew the very ground it was standing on. "It thus seems that only the principal moment itself has disappeared, namely, simple *independent existence* for self-consciousness" (§167). And since there is now no such independent other, self-consciousness does not have any existence either: "It is not self-consciousness" (§167).

In Hegel the problem is formulated in terms of the unity of self-consciousness and consciousness. Since self-consciousness actually depends on the given otherness, it always includes the moment of consciousness, and "the whole breadth of the sensuous world is preserved for it" (§167). It is, to speak with Kant, an "I think a manifold of representations". The manifold content is on the other hand grounded in the "I think". What has come to be is therefore the opposition between the consciousness and the self-consciousness, or between the empirical and the pure self-consciousness, which, however, has only "the unity of the self-consciousness with itself" for its true essence. Hegel famously adds:

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This unity must become essential to self-consciousness, which is to say, self-consciousness is *desire* in general. (§167)

As we see, "*Begierde überhaupt*" in its original meaning is simply a manifestation of an inner incongruity between the two moments of self-consciousness, which accordingly generates a striving for its abolishment.² Desire has nothing to do with the animal or the vital, nor is it inherently destructive. On the contrary, it is a desire to make the moment of consciousness *equal* to the moment of self-consciousness. If self-consciousness can be said to desire something *it desires only itself*: it is a desire to *be* self-consciousness, to gain a durable *existence*. The desire the self-consciousness is, is the desire to be self-consciousness.

The situation of self-consciousness is thus best described by Fichte's exposition of the pure I. It too is depended on not-I in order to be something or to exist. No I without a not-I. But since they are in a direct contradiction, the immediate result is the state of utter instability where both I and not-I at the same time presuppose and sublate each other. In a sense, the entire edifice of the *Science of Knowledge* can be described as an enormous endeavour to think this contradiction, to allow the self-consciousness to form a stable relation to the world of objects. According to Hegel, Fichte never really managed to offer a satisfactory solution to

² It may be in that respect more appropriate to speak of *appetition* instead of *desire*. This would be in any case closer to the German meaning and its conceptual affiliation to *Begehrungsvermögen* and *vis appetitiva*.

the contradiction in question.³ Not even turning towards the practical attitude substantially changed the outcome: for while it allowed him to ground the infinite impulse in the I's own activity, the absolute demand that I have to become equal to myself finally ended in what, for Hegel, was a *failure of the infinite progress*. It is therefore an irony that Hegel, as we are going to see, intended to solve Fichte's problem by essentially Fichtean means.⁴

Anyhow, confronted with the inequality of its two sides, self-consciousness exhibits itself "as the movement in which this opposition is sublated, and the equality of itself with itself becomes explicit for it" (§167).⁵ The I desiring to be itself sublates the otherness of the other, giving itself objective certainty of itself. This negative other, the object of the I's activity, is according to Hegel inwardly structured as *life* and is therefore *in itself* a living being. At this point he introduces an extensive digression on the notion of life that used to be one of his key concepts before the Jena period. Its inclusion can be further justified on the ground that it is connected to the phenomena of desiring and of taking the ultimate risk. Yet properly speaking life is not a main subject. It enters the scene only to the extent that the object of every shape of natural consciousness is always a kind of sedimentation of its subjective movement: the object proper to self-consciousness is something that is self-conscious "in itself", a self-consciousness that does not know itself. This is, as it were, life. But otherwise life does not play a significant role, not even within experience. The object's independency is merely an expression of the fact that

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3 See Hegel (2010: 30): "Critical philosophy ... gave to the logical determinations an essentially subjective significance out of fear of the object; ... for that reason, these determinations remained affected by the very object that they avoided, and were left with the remains of a thing-in-itself, an infinite obstacle, as a beyond." – The passage can already be found in the first edition from 1812.

4 One has to notice that the entire treatment of self-consciousness in *Phenomenology of Spirit* is animated by a Fichtean spirit and often even by Fichte's letters. See Fichte (1982: 233): "The absolute self is absolutely identical with itself: everything therein is one and the same self, and belongs ... to one and the same self; nothing therein is distinguishable, nothing manifold; the self is everything and nothing, since it is nothing *for itself*, and can distinguish no positing or posited within itself. – In virtue of its nature it *strives* (which again can only be said figuratively in regard to a future connection) to maintain itself in this condition."

5 We could imagine it as a purportedly sovereign subject wanting to assess itself as the centre of its world, that is, of the entire world. See in this sense Neuhouser (2009: 39): "This wanting to be completely sovereign with respect to one's own will and belief constitutes for Hegel the defining aim of a self-conscious subject." – The original reference might be Fichte's early characterisation of *freedom*, see Fichte (1971: 88–89): "Trough supreme implementation of these two rights of the conqueror over the sensuality he would now be *free*, i.e. dependent solely on himself, on his pure I. To every: *I will* in his breast should correspond a: *There it is* in the world of appearances."

independent self-consciousness is itself dependent on consciousness – and therein not only the living being but “the whole breadth of the sensuous world is preserved”.

Besides, we have too keep in mind that Hegel's present characterisation of self-consciousness is still so general that it pertains to a level that is even ahead of the split into the theoretical and the practical. It can therefore be equally successful applied to knowing and doing, to knowing as doing. The same can be observed regarding the movement of desire: At least according to a certain common conception of knowledge – once brilliantly called “alimentary philosophy” by Sartre⁶ – both eating and comprehending can be understood within the same model of assimilation.

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It is only after presenting the conceptual outline of the situation that Hegel descends to the standpoint of natural consciousness and its rather simple *experience* “which we are now to consider” (§173). The self-consciousness' striving to be itself, to make its two moments equal, takes the form of a self-conscious being driven to erase the independence of its object. It now *appears as* “desire” (§174), this time understood in its usual meaning that, perhaps, may be rendered as appetite. “Certain of the nullity of this other, it posits for *itself* this nullity as its truth, it destroys the self-sufficient object, and it gives itself the certainty of itself as *true* certainty, as such which for it has become to be in an *objective manner*” (§174). The self-conscious subject makes its object equal to itself by devouring it. Yet it is precisely in the satisfaction of desire that it gets subverted. The object satisfying the desire has ceased to exist, satisfaction is frustrated, and desire reappears. In short, this mode of satisfying desire only introduces the infinite cycle of the ever-unsatisfied desire. And as always in Hegel, the progress in the infinite brings with it a lesson: by the endless cycle of recurring hunger that no amount of eating can satiate, self-consciousness becomes aware in the most concrete way possible that *it is dependent* on something other. “It is in fact something other than the self-consciousness that is the essence of desire; and it is through this experience that this truth comes to be for the self-consciousness itself.” (§175)

There is no need to ask here what makes the other “independent” or “self-sufficient”. It may be that as an instantiation of life the other bears a form of infinity, giving it the capacity of ever lasting regeneration. But this is not the point. The point is that self-consciousness depends on the

6 See Sartre (1970: 4): “What is a table, a rock, a house? A certain assemblage of ‘contents of consciousnesses’, a class of such contents. O digestive philosophy!”

existence of an independent other. Being a negative relation to itself, it only *is* as the movement of returning to itself by sublating the other. "For this act of sublating even to be, there must be this other." (§175) This is why the object of desire proves to be indestructible. The experience of the ever-spoiled satisfaction only makes it evident how self-consciousness is in a contradictory relation to the world of objects. It further renders manifest that a true satisfaction can *never* be attained in this *immediate* way, by relating to an other that exists in the mode of *things*. A thing can either be or not be; it can be *either* independent or dependent, either affirmed or negated, but it *cannot be both* at the same time: something will therefore always be missing for effective satisfaction. Finally, the experience makes it clear that the self-consciousness' contradictory desire can only be satisfied by an other that could be both at the same time, that is, that would be affirmed *and* negated, *affirmed precisely by being negated*. The other must itself have the form of a negative relation to itself: It must be self-consciousness.

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Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness. (§175)

The introduction of *another* self-consciousness may cause some wonder since up to now all the shapes of natural consciousness were solitary. In effect, this underlines the importance of the present development. It can be shown nonetheless to follow rather consistently from the self-consciousness' desire to *be* itself, to make both sides of its unity *equal*. Its inner structure proved to be such that it cannot exist in the realm of objects alone. "A *self-consciousness* exists for a *self-consciousness*. Only thereby does self-consciousness in fact exist." (§177) What Hegel called the "duplication of self-consciousness" (§176) merely explicates the inner conditions of the possibility of existence of self-consciousness and can to this extent be said to be deduced directly out of its concept. Self-consciousness is *essentially a plural concept*; it can exist only as *one of the many* (i.e. at least two, for now), as an I that is we.

But on the other hand this does not imply that the two I's the self-consciousness is immanently split into somehow represent the two sides of the unity of self-consciousness, e.g. in the form of the couple of pure I and empirical self. Both are in effect fully-fledged, structurally identical self-consciousnesses in their own right.⁷ The reduplication is a testimony of

7 This is against McDowell's "heterodox" reading proposed in McDowell 2007. Although McDowell is justified in stressing that the reduplication arises immanently, from the contradictory demands involved in the very concept of self-consciousness, it is Hegel's

the impossibility for the self-conscious subject to establish a stable relation to its object in this direct way, be it in a theoretical or practical attitude, since both of them remain enclosed within the same digestive model. To form a durable relation to the object the self-conscious subject has to *relate to another subject*.

It is interesting to note that it was Fichte who first formulated a similar proposal. He tried to solve the problem of circularity that is involved in self-consciousness by suggesting that it can become aware of its free activity only by an “incentive” or “challenge” coming from another self-consciousness. A self-conscious subject thus presupposes itself in the form of the other self-conscious subject.⁸ But whereas Fichte used the argument to establish universal validity of the rules of right for all self-conscious subjects, Hegel made it constitutive of the *transcendental structure of subjectivity* itself. And if Fichte wanted to account for the infinite check of the thing in itself by introducing a practical attitude, Hegel transferred the problem into the realm of intersubjectivity⁹ that offers incomparably richer and more flexible conceptual tools to solve it.

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II

Previous experience of consciousness has led to its reduplication. While in the first, immediate attempt self-consciousness tried to establish equality of its two sides by simply erasing the independence of the consciousness, now, after the lesson learned, it wants to make them equal in the inverse way, by raising consciousness to the level of self-consciousness. “Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.” (§175)

As usual the exposition starts by delineating a *conceptual portrait* of the new shape of consciousness where there are now two self-consciousnesses

contention that this transcendental problem can be solved only within a *plurality* of self-conscious subjects, ultimately within what Hegel called spirit. In this sense, spirit is a transcendental concept.

8 Hegel's presentation bears striking similarities to Fichte's argumentation in *Foundations of Natural Right*, especially in § 3 where Fichte tries to prove the following theorem (Fichte 2000: 29): “The finite rational being cannot ascribe to itself a free efficacy in the sensible world without also ascribing such efficacy to others, and thus without also presupposing the existence of other finite rational beings outside itself.” The final result of the task “to show how self-consciousness is possible” famously reads (Fichte 2000: 36): “The human being (like all finite beings in general) becomes human being only among human beings ... *if there are to be human beings at all, there must be more than one.*”

9 According to Breazeale this structural move from object to intersubjectivity was already made by Fichte replacing the problem of *Anstoß* with that of *Aufforderung*; see Breazeale 1995: 97, and Žižek 2012: 149.

facing each other. The relation of desire has been transformed into what Hegel – once again after Fichte¹⁰ – calls *recognition*: “Self-consciousness exists only in being recognized.” (§178) The fact that what used to be the object of desire has now become the self-conscious subject in its own merit, and in addition, that this other has become an integral part of the unity of the first, renders the situations infinitely complex indeed. In a rare move, Hegel explicitly calls for caution: the concept under consideration is that of “a multi-sided and multi-meaning intertwining, such that, on the one hand, its moments must be strictly kept apart from each other, and on the other hand, they must at the same time also be taken and known as not distinct” (§178).

The following, extremely dense paragraphs are consequently devoted to the concept of *recognition*. Since its movement is too complex to be properly assessed here, two simple observations should suffice. First, because the two self-consciousnesses are ontologically *indistinguishable*, including *for themselves*, the “sublating” relation to the other is not only negation of the other but at the same time negation of oneself and affirmation of the other as other, or as Hegel puts it in great precision, a “letting the other go free” (§181).¹¹ And second, the movement of recognition of the two self-consciousnesses commands a relation of multilayered reciprocity, consisting in what may be called *specularity* (What does the one, the other does at the same time), *ambidirectionality* (What does the one against itself, it does against the other at the same time), and *ambioriginality* (What does the one against the other, the other does against itself). It is especially this second point demanding absolute reciprocity that Hegel summarized by using a succinct formula: “They *recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each other.*” (§184)

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But once again we must not precipitate the development: no recognition has been established and no experience has taken place yet. In the preceding considerations Hegel the philosopher simply analysed the concept of recognition, delineating the list of necessary conditions that have to be met in order that a successful recognition could happen. It is only “now” (§185) that we proceed to the level of experience. The concrete shape the natural consciousness takes “at first” is that of two

10 For an excellent presentation of Fichte–Hegel connection in respect with recognition, see Fischbach 1999.

11 On Hegel’s uses of this strategic concept of *Entlassung*, see the chapter “Wahrheit als Entlassung. Gleichgültigkeit, die übersehene Revolution Hegels” in Simoniti 2014: 67–78. – For alternative view, combining *Entlassung* with sacrifice, see Frank Ruda in the anonymous Acheronta Movebo 2014.

self-conscious individuals which immediately “exist for themselves in the way ordinary objects do”, as “*independent* shapes absorbed in the *being of life*” (§186). The “enlivenment” of self-conscious subject takes place as a direct reflection of the object’s subjectivation: since the object of desire acquired the form of life and since there is now no ontological difference between the I and its object, the subject is a living being, too. Both self-conscious subjects are furthermore animated by the same striving to present their independence, i.e. to sublimate or annihilate the purportedly independent other. But whereas in the shape of desire the aim of the self-consciousness was, so to speak, to manifest its independence *to itself*, now it has to prove it *to the other*, in order to be *recognized as independent* by the independent other. And since in the present shape “the whole breath” of the objective world happens to include the self-conscious subject as a living thing, its readiness to sublimate the entire realm of things ultimately involves its own life.

The *presentation* of itself as the pure abstraction of self-consciousness consists in showing itself as the pure negation of its objective mode, or in showing that it is not attached to any specific *determinate being*, not at all bound to the universal individuality of determinate being, that it is not attached to life. (§187)

Self-consciousness is supposed to manifest its independence to the other by displaying its readiness to give its life. This can, however, be done only by actually risking and eventually giving it. The self-conscious subject is consequently *driven to live dangerously*, to look for a situation where its life is exposed to the risk of dying, or to put it in radical terms, to actively search for death. It is its own death it is after, not so much the death of the other – the other being, as it were, a mere instrument of its suicide.¹² In effect, the essentially self-destructive drive manifests itself in an outward aggressiveness against the other only because the doing of the one must simultaneously be the doing of the other. Although there definitely are some connections – the movement of recognition is but a prolongation of desire – the struggle for life and death can therefore hardly be read in the Hobbesian terms. It is not so much about possession or domination, and it is not provoked by any previous infringement.¹³ It rather follows

¹² See Hegel (1987: 203): “To the being-for-itself as consciousness it appears this that it is after the *death* of an other, but it is after its own, a suicide – in exposing himself to *danger*.”

¹³ This is an important structural difference sharply distinguishing Hegel’s treatment of the struggle for life and death in earlier Jena fragments from the one in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the Jena presentations the struggle for recognition typically resulted out of an inevitable conflict of possessive drives and was typically resolved

out of the immanent need to prove to the other that “for self-consciousness, the essence is not *being*, not the *immediate* way it appears in, not its immersion into the expanse of life” (§187). The fight is fought in order to be recognized as “pure *being-for-itself*” (§187).

So, the two self-conscious living beings engage in a life and death struggle. We can figure them as two fearless, proud subjects clashing against each other in the attempt to elicit the other's recognition, and showing an equal determined will, they continue fighting to the end until one or, characteristically, both of them die. In this they have effectively established the certainty they were struggling for – yet, as Hegel goes on to remark, “this is not the case for those who passed the test in this struggle” (§188). They cannot bear witness of their independence for they are no more. The first result is therefore that, on the one hand, there are dead fighters who proved their absolute freedom (“negation without self-standing”) and some bystanders, on the other, who may effectively recognize the dead fighters but are not recognized themselves (“self-standing without absolute negativity”). In any case there is no *mutual* recognition. The situation is in that respect structurally identical to the one of the desire where the object had to be both affirmed and negated in the same time, both to be and not to be. And just as the ensuing infinite progress made desire finally realize that it was something other that was the essence of self-consciousness; in the same way the piling up of dead corpses – useless, as it is, since failing to produce recognition – makes the spectators comprehend that *life is essential* to self-consciousness.

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In this experience self-consciousness learns that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness. (§189)

This is crucial. According to Hegel, the struggle for death does *not* lead directly to the shape of master and servant. At first, the immediate self-consciousness rather sticks *exclusively* to its “pure being-for-itself”, and since to that effect it *has nothing to lose*, it can experience *no fear* and can only persist in fighting. Only the dull counting of futile deaths makes the survivors understand that *there is more* in self-consciousness. “The

by introducing an institution of a higher order. If in the Jena fragments the entire landscape has an unmistakably Hobbesian touch, basically providing an alternative version of the *origin of the state*, in *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel gives it a pronounced Fichtean turn and builds it into the transcendental structure of subjectivity. Interpretations that mainly rely on the Jena fragments, for instance Honneth 1994, may therefore very well prove to be interesting in their own right, but they can hardly serve as a guiding line for understanding Hegel's treatment of recognition in *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

dissolution of that simple unity is the result of the first experience.” (§189) It has now become aware that “both moments are essential” (§189). To be (recognized), both pure being-for-itself *and* life, both independence *and* dependence have to be thought in unity. And only after the acknowledgment of this lesson, the life and dead struggle can be engaged *again* – now leading to a *different* outcome where the simple-minded self-consciousness may still be ready to persist indefinitely while the other, informed by previous experience, *recedes* and accepts the subordinate standing of an object. “The former is the *master*, the latter is the *servant*.” (§189)

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Taking into account the abstract level of Hegel's treatment, concrete historical references are here evidently out of place.¹⁴ Hegel has no intention to describe any conjectural stage in the development of human history, and although it may be said, as Hyppolite did, that in the subsequent master/servant dialectic the servant is revealed to be the master of the master, it is hardly adequate to read this development as a part of the emancipatory narrative.¹⁵ What counts for Hegel is the *relation of*

14 There have been recurring attempts to locate the scene of master and servant historically, i.e. to read it, mainly, as a depiction of prehistoric slavery or else of feudal bondage. To our knowledge, the argument for slavery was best presented in Ottmann 1981, while a strong case for mediaeval bondage was recently made in Cole 2004 and again in Cole 2014. It was already emphasized that according to our understanding Hegel wanted to present the general relation of domination and subordination, and that it is misplaced to search for a determinate historical reference. Yet, if obliged to choose, we would strongly opt for slavery. A proper justification would require special examination, so let us make just two factual observations. First, contrary to the first impression, the use of *Knecht* and *Knechtschaft* does not warrant any specific conclusion to mediaeval age. According to the monumental Grimm German dictionary *Knecht* and *Knechtschaft* were in fact fairly common words for slave and slavery. The Luther Bible does not use *Sklave* at all, and all instances that – beyond any doubt – refer to slave are consistently rendered by *Knecht* in Luther's translation. Hegel himself did not use the word *Sklave* at any point in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As for KNECHTSCHAFT, the Grimm dictionary reads: “*eigentlich*: in die knechtschaft führen, verkaufen, das joch der knechtschaft tragen, *doch ist auch hier das gelehrtere* sclaverei *jetzt* [i.e. around 1860] *entschieden vorherrschend*” (emphasis added). If Grimm can be relied upon, *Sklaverei* is basically a more specific and more modern word for *Knechtschaft*. This seems to be consistent with Hegel's use of the expressions as well, both synchronically and diachronically. And second, if we bothered to ask Hegel what *he* thinks the proper historical references are we would soon find out that in several places he is quite explicit in associating his treatment of master and servant to slavery. See for instance the remark to § 57 in *Philosophy of Right*, or the addition to § 349 in the first edition of *Encyclopaedia*, or finally the following addition to § 432 (Hegel 1978: 59): “In order to avoid eventual misunderstandings of the point of view just presented [i.e. the mastery and servitude], it also has to be observed that the struggle for recognition in the extreme form in which it is here presented can occur only in the *state of nature*.”

15 For a convincing formulation, see Gadamer 1973: 231.

domination between two self-conscious subjects, the manner it is exemplified in each of them, and the consequences their inequality has for knowing.¹⁶ For this reason the relation in question is examined in *two distinct runs*, first from the standpoint of master and then from the standpoint of servant.

The *master* seems to believe that in her person the problem of self-consciousness has been resolved, that she is not only “the concept” of being-for-itself, but exists for herself as “mediated through another consciousness” (§190). She has seemingly established a stable relation to both the thing and the other self-consciousness. Having proved to be “self-standing”, she rules over the servant; for according to her it is the latter’s attachment to being that holds her in bondage: “it is the chain which the servant could not break free from in the struggle” (§190). At the same time she apparently succeeded where the desire inevitably failed; for by putting the servant between herself and the thing, it is the servant who now confronts the independent side of the thing, leaving to her the dependent side solely: the servant “merely *works on it*” while the master gets “the *enjoyment of it*” (§190).

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We have to remind ourselves, however, that this is the *master’s interpretation* of the situation (“We only saw what servitude is in relation to mastery”, §194). Hegel goes on to rapidly expose it as a self-indulging, stultifying fantasy. For first, while the concept of recognition demands reciprocal equality, master is recognized by the servant only, that is by someone she does not recognize herself. “As a result the recognition that has arisen is one-sided and unequal” (§191) – which is to say, it is *no recognition*. And second, since the other consciousness is the place where the first one obtains its objective existence, or its truth, it follows that by denigrating the servant it is itself that it has inflicted the damage to. “The *truth* of the independent consciousness is accordingly the servile consciousness of the servant.” (§193)¹⁷ Moreover, the master undergoes no further development: she learns nothing, makes no experience and does not transform into a new shape. In short, and this is truly remarkable, master remains a dead end in the progress of the *Phenomenology*.¹⁸

16 For that reason we prefer to use the master/servant couple instead of the once usual master/slave or lord/bondsman.

17 The obvious reference is again Fichte, see Fichte (1867: 33): “Rousseau says: A man often considers himself the lord of others, who is yet more a slave than they. He might with still greater justice have said: He who considers himself the lord of others is himself a slave.”

18 Kojève is right to speak of an “existential impasse” with regard to the master.

What about the *servant*? Hegel warns us in advance that her situation, too, is going to turn into opposite of what it immediately is. However, in order to understand how, and why, we have to show extreme caution about what exactly made her into servant in the first place. According to a common reading the (future) servant proved to be too attached to being and thus incapable to insist in struggle all the way down: servant is the one who, contrary to master, at a point gave up, ceded on her desire. Yet this is, not to forget, *the master's interpretation of the servant's situation!* As for the servant, there might be *something else* that happened in the struggle. Facing death, this absolute master, the self-conscious subject evidently felt fear for its whole existence. According to Hegel, however, in this experience it took *a certain positive lesson* as well.

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In this experience it had inwardly fallen into dissolution, trembled in its depths, and all that was fixed within it has been shaken loose. However, this pure universal movement, this absolute liquefying of everything stable, is the simple essence of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, *pure being-for-itself*, which thereby is in this consciousness. (§195)

The total inner dissolution provoked by the feeling of ultimate fear made it *experience the essence of self-consciousness*; it made it realize that in its *absolute negativity* there is nothing that would be fixed and stable, *nothing that would exist in the way of things*. To be self-consciousness accordingly means *not* to be attached to *anything* pertaining to the realm of determinate being. It is only on the *positive* ground of *this* lesson that the self-conscious subject, *already aware* of equal essentiality of life, was now able to make this further, *truly heroic act* of freely giving up the struggle, and even though, having thus lost its freedom, there are now no causes making life worth living left, to go on living! In this gesture – a true stroke of genius invented by Schiller¹⁹ – wherein self-consciousness is ready to give up its sovereignty, not out of fear or weakness that is unable to resist the physically mightier opponent, but as an expression of its own

19 In the short “On the Sublime” there is a paradox uncunningly similar to the situation under consideration. On the one hand man is a *being which wills*; as essentially free, in everything he does he asserts his own will. On the other hand, the power of nature is such that there inevitably are some things *which he merely must and does not will*, ultimately to die. On how Schiller, brilliantly, solved this paradox, see Schiller (internet): “He ought, however, to be Man without exceptions, therefore, in no case suffer something *against* his will. Can he therefore no longer oppose to the physical forces a proportional physical force, so nothing else remains left to him, in order to suffer no violence, than: *to annul altogether a relation*, which is so disadvantageous to him and *to annihilate as a concept* the violence, which he must in fact suffer. To annihilate violence as a concept, however, is called nothing other, than to voluntarily subject oneself to the same. The culture, which makes him apt thereto, is called the moral.”

considered free will, there is finally the situation where independence and dependence, affirmation and negation coincide.

Reading in this light the relative position of master and servant assume somewhat unfamiliar traits: it is the master who turns out to be the one who has never cut off her attachment to some "specific determinate being" (§187). Master is of course prepared to sacrifice herself for the things she stands for. She would rather die than live without what makes her *identity*, or to put it simply, without her *honour*.²⁰ Since dishonoured life is less than nothing to her, she is willing to give everything for it, including her life. However, this very formula reveals that there is *something* she is *not prepared to sacrifice*, and this is precisely her *particular identity*, her *honour*. To paraphrase Proctor, she is willing to sell her soul, but in no case would she give up her name. There is therefore still something in her that exists in the mode of *things*, something fixed and stable, "some particular determinate being ... reserved for herself" (§505). For her it is not hard to die for it, it is hard to live without it.²¹ Consequently, a *true sacrifice* consists in giving up actually *everything*, including this particular thing, one's honour, or name, and *nonetheless* living on.

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The true sacrifice of being-for-itself is thus solely that in which it surrenders itself as completely as in death, yet in this renunciation it no less preserves itself. (§506)

According to Hegel it is the realm of the universal, the freedom of thought that such true sacrifice leads to. This is why he finds it convenient at this moment to quote from the Bible: "The fear of the Lord is indeed the beginning of wisdom." (§195) For in order to enter the realm of the universal one has to give up special attachment to any particular content, to renounce the privilege of claiming, for instance, that a proposition is true simply because I would like it so very much to be true. In fact, in order to think one has to take the order of universal reason to be one's own particular order, and consequently, to abandon any particular

20 Brandom reads the entire development of self-consciousness in terms of the constitution of personal identity; see Brandom (2011: 28): "The answer we are given in *Self-Consciousness* is that one identifies with what one is willing to *risk* and *sacrifice* for." If for Brandom the basic question is about how one *becomes* this particular subject one is, for us it is, exactly the opposite, about how one *loses* one's attachment to one's particular identity and becomes a universal subject.

21 It is interesting to note how poets and thinkers filled entire books with lines professed from the standpoint of the master. Its motto – "To die a prince – or live a slave –/ Thy choice is most ignoble brave!" – incidentally by Byron, has been formulated time and again, including by Prešeren. Only Brecht, Hegelian enough to know what true sacrifice is, was able to speak for servant as he, for instance in *The Decision*, formulated the lines often quoted by Žižek.

opinion, no matter how much cherished, when the order of the universal passes a verdict against it. In this sense, only the servant of the universal can be said to think.²² The master on the other hand was not prepared to make such sacrifice. She remained stubborn, chained to the particular content that she fancied to be hers. "Since the entire contents of her natural consciousness have not been shaken to the core, she is still attached *in herself* to determinate being; her having mind of her own is merely *stubbornness*, a freedom that remains bogged down within the bonds of servitude." (§196) Master can have opinions, even "interesting ideas", but think she cannot.²³

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True, at this point Hegel introduced the theme of *labour* which, as "desire held in check", is able to stave off the vanishing object and transform it into something permanent. It is "through labour" that the "servile consciousness" manages to "objectify itself", comes to see "the independent being as *its own self*" and finally "comes to itself" (§195). These and similar formulations have, hardly surprising, provided some support to the attempts to read the master/servant relation in terms of a historic tale of the labour's emancipation. It is impossible to deny that for Hegel formative labour has a pronounced liberating aspect. However, if it is formative, it is more so of its subject than of its object. Its primary function is rather to exemplify the reality check, i.e. the physical pain, self-restraint and perseverance that is in general characteristic of labour, but is equally needed for thinking.²⁴ As there is a "digestive philosophy" describing cognitive process in terms of desire, there is a kind of "manual philosophy" describing it in terms of labour. Accordingly Hegel does not speak so much about the concept of labour, but rather about the labour of concept,

22 Honneth came close to our position when in his reading of the master/servant relation he stressed the parallel to "Kant's definition of 'respect' (*Achtung*)" in which Kant sees "a demolition (*Abbruch*) or negation of self-love"; see Honnet 2008: 88. However, whereas for Honneth this "demolition of self-love" reveals the presence of the moral topics, we read it in relation to the universality of reason. According to Kant, it is the universal law of reason that commands a total surrender to its jurisdiction, regardless of what the particular intentions and inclinations of the subject might be. What causes the subject's pain (*Demütigung*) is precisely the fact that he has to forsake what is particular to him.

23 In this light, the most appropriate reference for master and servant could well turn to be Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste et son maître*. Hegel knew the novel: he commented on it in *Who thinks abstractly?* that was written in about the same time as the *Phenomenology*.

24 On this ground the "Arbeit" was often rendered as "labour" instead of the usual "work". – The formative aspect of the servant's labour which grinds off her stubbornness and helps her to reach the realm of thought was, in a slightly different context, underlined in Pippin 2011b: 83–94.

about thinking as labour. Even the emancipation of the servant that seems to happen in manual labour could be understood in terms of the effort of thought. "Through this rediscovery of itself by itself the servile consciousness acquires *a mind of its own*, and it does it precisely in the labour wherein it seemed to be merely *foreign mind*." (§196) It is only by thinking the thoughts of others that one learns to think thoughts of one's own.

In any case, the final result of the master/servant relation is a new shape of consciousness that we may call *thinker*. In order to formulate this new shape nothing else is needed but to "take together what is already there". In the formative activity of labour the servile consciousness becomes an object to itself, and in the figure of master it becomes the pure I. As soon as the two moments are put together, "a new shape of self-consciousness comes to be", the consciousness "which *thinks*". "For *to think* does not mean to be an *abstract* I, but an I which at the same time has the significance of being-*in-itself*" (§197).

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The servant has learned to think.

III

At his point we could jump to the conclusion that the empirical and pure I, the particular and universal consciousness have become one, and proceed immediately to reason. In fact, this is exactly what Hegel did in the abridged *Encyclopaedia* exposition.²⁵ Here, however, he felt he had to go in greater detail and give a separate presentation of the *realization* of true sacrifice.

So, the servant has now become a thinker, a philosopher even. "Whether on the throne or in fetters" (§198) he now claims to be free from all dependencies of the individual existence for he can always withdraw into the realm of thought. "In thinking I am free." (§197) Yet it is this very disconnection between what I think and my individual existence that

25 The presentation of self-consciousness in the *Encyclopaedia* is understandably much more schematic. Not only are there entire episodes missing, but even the details of the argument are often simplified or adapted. For instance, in the *Encyclopaedia* version it is very hard to claim that the servant gave up its independence out of sacrifice. Therefore, whereas in the *Phenomenology* the actual serving is presented as a realization of the position already achieved, in the *Encyclopaedia* it is the very service that makes the servant lose its attachment to the particular. But the details aside, the condensed *Encyclopaedia* presentation remains structurally identical to the original one and is in agreement with our interpretation. See e.g. § 435 (§ 357 in the original edition) of the *Encyclopaedia* (Hegel 1978: 67): "The servant, on the contrary, works off the singularity and egoism of its will in the service of the master, sublates the inner immediacy of desire, and in this privation and fear of the Lord makes, – and it is the beginning of wisdom, – the transition to *universal self-consciousness*."

affects and invalidates what I think. Or put differently, the self-consciousness has given up its independent particular existence and consented to serve the master; but in doing so it may have still retained something for itself, its so-called inner independence. This was precisely the idea of stoicism, whose freedom not only turned out to be imaginary but, more importantly, whose *thinking* has thereby been exempted of the process of departicularisation. The next step consists accordingly in *realizing* the true sacrifice, in drawing its consequences, in making the thinker actually lead a dependent life, including in the realm that really counts, in thinking. After it has given up the independence of existence it has now to confirm it by giving up the independence of thought – in the sense of having not only to do or say what the other says, but to do and say it *sincerely*, with *inner* conviction, i.e. to *think* what the other says.

848 For Hegel it is the great achievement of Christian attitude in its characteristic *catholic* mode to *realize* this kind of *total surrender* of one's particular self. For it commands the believer to give up his "own decision" of what to believe by consenting to dogmas; to renounce the "property and enjoyment" by paying the tithe and tormenting the body; and finally, to "*positively* engage in doing something incomprehensible" by worshipping his God in Latin, a language he does not understand. In this way the catholic rule achieved something remarkable indeed, namely to make the self-conscious self give away what constitutes its utmost inner freedom. In short, it succeeded to make self make itself selfless.

It has the certainty of having truly divested itself if its *I*, and of having made its immediate self-consciousness into a *thing*, into an objective being. – Only through this *actual* sacrifice could it confirm this self-renunciation; for only therein does the *deception* vanish which lies in the *inner* recognition. (§229)

Now that there is nothing left in the individual that would pertain to it *in particular* – Hegel emphasizes that "the individual has renounced to itself" (§231) and "surrendered *its* will as an *individual* will" (§230) – "its will" has "*for itself* become the universal will" (§230). This particular self-consciousness has hereby become universal reason.

This is of course not the end of the story. If, now, both sides of the unity of self-consciousness may indeed have become equal, the self-conscious subject has yet to find an existence that would be at the level of its concept. We have to remind ourselves that still no recognition has taken place, at least not according to the official formula "they recognize themselves as mutually recognizing each other". In fact, it is only at the end of the section

on conscience, after the admission of guilt – *I am the one!* (§667) – and after another gesture of “renunciation of itself”, that a “reciprocal recognition which is the *absolute spirit*” (§670) is finally reached.

On this path Hegel regularly proceeds awry. Whenever there is an inequality, he tries to match the two sides not by raising the lower but by generously lowering the higher. It is always up to the subject to swallow its pride, to show humility and patience, to renounce to itself, to expose itself, to acknowledge its deficiency, to accept its inner split. In the chapter on conscience, for instance, conscience is not a moral subject equipped with a more thorough knowledge of the situation; it is rather a subject that, fully aware of all its deficiency, is able to *assume it, and yet* to act. In this sense no gap in the order of being is large enough that the subject would not be able to take it up. The wounds of the spirit, though, heal without leaving scars behind. In the exposition of self-consciousness we have thus seen that in the genesis of reason there is necessarily a moment of *violence* and *social domination* involved.²⁶ Any knowledge is to that effect caught in the web of power. And Hegel would agree: there is no pure knowledge in *that* sense. However, as the state often originates in violence without thereby necessarily resting on violence, in the same sense, for Hegel, being affected by power relation does not mean in itself that reason is any less reasonable.

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In any case, in the present paper we wanted to show that one major line in the development of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology* consists in a movement of progressive departicularisation. Hegel's lesson is not that we have to be prepared to risk our lives in order to obtain a particular identity of our own, but quite the contrary, that we must abandon our fixation to any particular in order to gain access to the true universal of thinking. In the opening pages of the *Science of Logic* Hegel accused Fichte that his characterisation of pure knowing as I acts “as a perpetual remainder of the subjective I whose limitation should be forgotten”. Since the initial shape of self-consciousness bears profoundly Fichtean marks, its dialectic could perhaps be explained in terms of wiping out this remainder of the subjective I. Or alternatively, it could be described as an attempt to “de-potentialize the subjective I” once undertaken by Schelling in order to clear the way for – reason.

26 Hegel's lesson in his presentation of self-consciousness would be that not only practical attitude and intersubjectivity, but also power relations are on equal ground conditions of the possibility of knowing. In this sense, social domination is a transcendental category.

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Zdravko Kobe

Istinsko žrtvovanje. O Hegelovom prikazu samosvesti

Rezime

Članak pruža sažetu interpretaciju Hegelovog tretmana samosvesti u *Fenomenologiji duha*, koju će predstaviti kao integralni deo sveukupnog iskustva svesti koje vodi od razuma do uma. Neposredni cilj teksta je misliti samostalnost i nesamostalnost, čisto i empirijsko *ja*, kroz jedinstvo samosvesti. Ovo podrazumeva dvostruko kretanje pronalaženja odgovarajuće egzistencije za čisto *ja* i raskidanje veza između empirijskog *ja* i partikularnosti. Naročito se osvrćemo na hegelijansku borbu za priznanje, koja namerava da pokaže kako udeo uma zahteva od subjekta raskidanje veza sa sopstvenom partikularnošću – subjekat žrtvuje ne samo svoj goli život već daleko više od toga, svoj partikularni identitet, ali i pored toga nastavlja da živi.

Ključne reči: Hegel, *Fenomenologija duha*, samosvest, želja, priznanje, gospodar i rob, žrtvovanje, departikularizacija, um