

TAKING THE OTHER TO BE ITSELF:  
THE STRUGGLING SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS'S MOTIVATIONS IN HEGEL'S  
*PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

by

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ABSTRACT

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Hegel develops an account of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in which a self-consciousness fights another in a life-and-death struggle. There are many readings of the motivations for self-consciousness's risking of its own life and aiming at the life of the other in the struggle. I argue that Robert Stern's account of these motivations is problematic because he attributes more rational self-awareness to self-consciousness than it possesses at this stage in the dialectic. John McDowell's reading presents advantages over Stern's, but still leaves us with the problem of how to understand that self-consciousness "in the other sees its own self," as Hegel writes. I argue that Stern's and McDowell's accounts—and others like them—miss an important component behind the motivation for the struggle. This missing component is that self-consciousness takes the other to be itself. I also argue that this missing component helps us to understand other parts of the dialectic in the "Self-Consciousness" chapter, including the "dialectic of desire" and the instability of the lord-bondsman relation.

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## §1: Introduction

This paper advances a reading of G. W. F. Hegel’s account of self-consciousness in his work *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, including a new way to understand the account’s famous master-slave dialectic, also known as the lord-bondsman relation. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel offers an investigation of various conceptions of knowledge. This investigation takes the form of a kind of narrative, in which the protagonist takes the shapes of these various conceptions of knowledge, as it works out its relation to the world. As the limitations of each conception become apparent, the protagonist assumes a different shape. These changes continue through a series of dialectical stages, as problems emerge with the previous stage, driving the dialectic forward. One of the shapes taken by the protagonist is consciousness, in which “what is true for [it] is something other than itself”—i.e., what is true for it is the object outside it.<sup>1</sup> The protagonist then takes the shape of self-consciousness when it realizes that it is “to itself the truth.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, it realizes that the object outside it is not distinct from it, but that when it relates to objects, it is really relating to itself.

In the “Self-Consciousness” chapter of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel details the emergence and development of self-consciousness. One way to think about what is happening in the dialectic of this chapter is that a proto-self is emerging and encountering the world, which it does not take to be separate from it, since it does not yet have a self-concept that allows it to consider itself to be an individual thing among other things. In the chapter, self-consciousness moves through a series of dialectical stages. In several stages of this series, self-consciousness destroys objects it encounters around it in a “dialectic of desire,” struggles in a desperate battle with another self-consciousness—a struggle of life and death—and enters the relation with the other that Hegel calls the lord-bondsman relation.

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<sup>1</sup> §166. Unless otherwise specified, references to the *Phenomenology* refer to A. V. Miller’s translation.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Crucial to Hegel's dialectic in this part of the *Phenomenology* is self-consciousness's encounter with another self-consciousness. There is, however, an important element concerning this encounter that is missing from readings by many commentators.<sup>3</sup> At this stage in the dialectic, there is not yet an other from the perspective of self-consciousness. When self-consciousness sees another<sup>4</sup> self-consciousness, then, what it sees it takes to be itself. Robert Stern, in his work *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*, offers a paradigmatic example of a reading of the "Self-Consciousness" chapter that misses this element of self-consciousness's taking the other to be itself.<sup>5</sup> On Stern's reading, the struggle of life and death arises between two agents, each of whom willingly risks its life to signal to the other that it is more than a mere animal. I will argue that this requires rational self-awareness that self-consciousness does not yet possess at this stage in the dialectic. We misconstrue the motivations for the life-and-death struggle on this reading, then, by an implicit assumption of the nature of self-consciousness as having rational self-awareness. John McDowell offers a reading that presents several advantages over Stern's, but ultimately fails to explain why self-consciousness, as Hegel writes, "in the other sees its own self."

Rather, the notion that self-consciousness takes the self-consciousness it encounters to be itself, I will argue, shows us that the life-and-death struggle primarily concerns self-consciousness trying to demonstrate that it is free from determination by its own particular qualities—i.e., by the things that determine it as the particular thing that it is. Furthermore, this notion of self-consciousness's taking the other to be itself, I claim, will also help us to better understand the account of self-consciousness as it initially develops in the dialectic of desire, and offer us a new way to

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see Judith Shklar's reading in *Freedom and Independence*, Howard Kainz's reading in *Hegel's Phenomenology, Part I*, or Allen Wood's in *Hegel's Ethical Thought*. Kainz's and Wood's readings contain elements that are a bit closer to my own, but still have some significant differences with respect to self-consciousness's motivations in the struggle of life and death.

<sup>4</sup> Since self-consciousness does not have a self/other distinction, there is an other only from a third-person perspective.

<sup>5</sup> Stern does recognize that "when the self-conscious subject is able to 'see itself in the other,' we will have arrived at a decisive turning-point in the journey of consciousness through the *Phenomenology*" (74). However, he does not recognize the self-conscious subject's seeing itself in the other as a motivating force in the struggle of life and death, nor does he read any other parts of the Self-Consciousness chapter in view of this point.

understand the instability of the lord-bondsman relation. My reading, though, will not commit us to self-consciousness being an agent with a robust self-concept or rational self-awareness, and it will not fail to explain how self-consciousness sees its own self in the other.

I will first explicate the beginning part of the Self-Consciousness chapter by tracing Hegel's account of the development of self-consciousness through the stages of the dialectic. Secondly, I will examine Stern's reading of the struggle of life and death, and look at the problems that arise on his reading due to the assumptions he makes about self-consciousness's rational self-awareness. Third, I will present McDowell's reading and outline the advantages that his reading offers us, as well as the primary problem with the reading. I will next present my own reading, discuss how my reading will give us a better sense of self-consciousness's motivations in the struggle, look at the initial development of self-consciousness at the beginning of the chapter, and demonstrate how my reading helps us to understand this part of the dialectic as well. Finally, I will also demonstrate a new way to understand the instability of the lord-bondsman relation based on my reading.

## **§2: Exposition of the Dialectic of Self-Consciousness**

### *§2.1: The Dialectic of Desire*

Self-consciousness, after it appears in Hegel's account, develops through several moments. In the first moment, self-consciousness relates to objects as nothing but what those objects are for it. "What is posited as distinct from me, or as unlike me," Hegel writes, is, by being differentiated from me, "not a distinction for me."<sup>6</sup> The object is not distinct from self-consciousness, but a way for self-consciousness to relate to itself. However, objects encountered by self-consciousness appear to have an "independent life," and it is apparent to self-consciousness that it will be "certain of itself only by

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<sup>6</sup> §164

superseding this other.”<sup>7</sup> The appearance of the object to self-consciousness as having an independent life conflicts with self-consciousness’s notion of itself.

Self-consciousness, then, destroys the object to demonstrate that the object is nothing but what it is for self-consciousness.<sup>8</sup> However, self-consciousness is “the movement in which this antithesis [between itself and the object] is removed, and the identity of itself with itself becomes explicit for it.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, self-consciousness *needs* the object to show that the object is nothing except what it is for self-consciousness—it is only through negating or destroying the object that self-consciousness can prove this, and thereby be what it is as self-consciousness. Self-consciousness, then, must continue to reproduce the object,<sup>10</sup> so that it can repeatedly destroy the object, and thereby go on proving that the object is nothing except what it is for self-consciousness. In so doing, self-consciousness attempts to maintain itself as self-consciousness, as that for which objects are nothing except what they are for it. Through the repetition of this process, however, self-consciousness realizes that the object has its own independence, i.e., is self-standing.<sup>11</sup>

For self-consciousness to reconcile this notion—that the object is self-standing—with the notion self-consciousness has of itself as having no distinction between it and the object, the object to which it relates must negate itself. Hegel writes that self-consciousness “can achieve satisfaction only when the object itself effects the negation within itself.”<sup>12</sup> If the object negates itself, then the object is shown to be nothing except what it is for self-consciousness, but without self-consciousness

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<sup>7</sup> §174

<sup>8</sup> Self-consciousness, by destroying the object, does away with the object as an other to it—something that appears to it as self-standing—thereby preserving its self-conception. Stern has a similar reading of what is happening here (73).

<sup>9</sup> §167

<sup>10</sup> We can understand that self-consciousness is reproducing the object by repeatedly taking an object it encounters as nothing except what it is for self-consciousness.

<sup>11</sup> According to the Miller translation, “experience makes it aware that the object has its own independence” (§175). *Selbstständigkeit* (Hoffmeister 139), which Miller translates as “independence” and Pinkard translates as “self-sufficiency,” we can understand as indicating an object standing on its own, as Inwood suggests in his *Hegel Dictionary* (9). To say that the object is independent of self-consciousness, however, is stronger than Hegel intends, because self-consciousness doesn’t have a self-other distinction. Rather, all that self-consciousness knows is that the object is self-standing. For this reason, I refer to the object as self-standing rather than independent.

<sup>12</sup> §175

having to keep reproducing the object and destroying it. Another self-consciousness is self-standing, as Hegel notes, but can also be self-negating.<sup>13</sup> Self-consciousness must then find another self-consciousness to relate to—i.e., a subject instead of an object—because of the subject’s capability for self-negation.<sup>14</sup> A self-negating self-consciousness will recognize the other, i.e., affirm the self-conception of the other self-consciousness—that objects are nothing except what they are for it—and that it, its own self, is nothing except what it is for the other self-consciousness.

In this way, a self-negating self-consciousness will be superseded (*aufheben*) rather than destroyed. Hegel makes a distinction between natural negation and supersession. Natural negation is wholesale destruction. Hegel explains that “death is the natural negation of consciousness, negation without independence, which thus remains without the required significance of recognition.”<sup>15</sup> Hegel contrasts natural negation with supersession, which is “negation coming from consciousness, which supersedes in such a way as to preserve and maintain what is superseded.”<sup>16</sup> The term Hegel uses is *aufheben*, (“supersede” or “sublate”<sup>17</sup>), which contains oppositional meanings; it means “to destroy,” “to preserve,” and “to raise or lift up.”<sup>18</sup> The self-negating self-consciousness will not be destroyed, then, for a stable outcome, but will be preserved through its negation.

### §2.2: *The Life-and-Death Struggle*

Self-consciousness, then, because of the need to supersede rather than destroy the other, seeks out and encounters another self-consciousness. Each self-consciousness, upon encountering the other, engages in a struggle with the other in which it fights to destroy the other and risks its own life.<sup>19</sup> It is not at first apparent what motivates the self-consciousnesses to fight each other, nor why

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> §188

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Miller translates *aufheben* as “supersede,” and Pinkard as “sublate.”

<sup>18</sup> Inwood 283, 284

<sup>19</sup> §187

they aim to destroy each other—particularly since aiming to entirely destroy the other would not allow the other to be preserved in some fashion, as it would be when superseded. I aim to elucidate this with my reading.

Again, one of the self-consciousnesses must be superseded rather than destroyed in the struggle. The self-consciousness that makes it through the struggle stymies itself if it wholly destroys the other, then, because it eliminates the other as a source of recognition. Self-consciousness wants to be recognized by the superseded other as that for which objects are nothing except what they are for it. For self-consciousness to obtain what it wants, both self-consciousnesses must survive the struggle so that one can continue to give recognition to the other. The two surviving self-consciousnesses enter into the lord-bondsman relation when one of the self-consciousnesses fears for its life in the life-and-death struggle—is “seized with dread”—and out of this fear of death, is superseded via its affirmation of the lord’s self-conception and its denial of its own independence, thereby becoming a dependent self-consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Life, Hegel writes, is “essential to it.”<sup>21</sup>

### §2.3: *The Lord-Bondsman Relation*

In the lord-bondsman relation, the independent self-consciousness is the lord, and the dependent self-consciousness is the bondsman.<sup>22</sup> The independent self-consciousness of the lord has established its<sup>23</sup> self-conception in this arrangement. That which is other to it—the bondsman—is dependent in that it is nothing except what it is for the lord. The lord also now has a mediated relation

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<sup>20</sup> §194. The dependent self-consciousness is dependent because, Hegel writes, it takes the independent self-consciousness “for its essential reality; hence the *truth* for it is the independent consciousness that is *for itself*” (§194).

<sup>21</sup> §189

<sup>22</sup> §190, §192

<sup>23</sup> Note that I refer throughout the paper to self-consciousness as “it.” Miller also translates self-consciousness as “it.” I take it he is following Hegel’s use of the neuter noun *das Selbstbewußtsein*. Miller does, however, refer to the lord and bondsman as “he.” I take it that he is following Hegel’s use of the masculine nouns *der Herr* and *der Knecht*. I continue to refer to the lord and bondsman as “it,” however, because it is not clear that Hegel intends us to do otherwise. Miller’s rendering of the lord and bondsman as “he” implies that there is a distinction between the two agents that amounts to more than the fact that one is an independent self-consciousness and the other is a dependent self-consciousness.

to itself through the bondsman.<sup>24</sup> In the prior stages of the dialectic, self-consciousness related to objects outside it, and to another self-consciousness. Now, the self-consciousness of the lord is related to the bondsman, to objects via the bondsman, and to itself via the bondsman. Hegel writes that the lord has a mediated relation to the bondsman through a thing on which the bondsman is compelled to work, and is related to this thing through the bondsman.<sup>25</sup> The lord enjoys the fruits of the bondsman's labor—enjoys “only the dependent aspect of the thing”—and leaves the bondsman to see to the independent aspect of the object.<sup>26</sup>

### §3: Stern's Analysis of the Struggle of Life and Death

To help us understand how self-consciousness's taking the other to be itself fits into Hegel's picture, I will examine the shortcomings of Stern's analysis of the struggle of life and death and show what his account is missing. To help us understand Stern's position, I will outline the dialectic by which Stern arrives at his reading of the struggle. Stern outlines three ways we can read the emergence of the struggle, the last of which he claims is the best way for us to understand what motivates self-consciousness in the struggle.

#### §3.1: *The Three Readings*

The first way we might understand the life-and-death struggle and how it emerges, Stern claims, is to think that self-consciousness, in the dialectic of desire, presses itself on objects and negates them, before moving on to attempting to force another self-consciousness to bend to its will.<sup>27</sup> On this reading, which Stern takes from Judith Shklar, self-consciousness treats the other self-consciousness as it treated objects in the dialectic of desire—as something on which to impose its will,

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<sup>24</sup> §190

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Shklar writes that “The first move of the erotic ego is to impose its awareness of its own other self upon another ego... The active ego only sees an object to be consumed or used in order to ensure its own existence. The other confronted ego has exactly the same attitude” (28).

though without having to keep on negating the objects as they appear, since the other self-consciousness is self-negating.<sup>28</sup> On this reading, each self-consciousness will then try to force the other to be subservient to its will, resulting in the life-and-death struggle.

The second reading of the struggle also begins with the dialectic of desire. On this reading, self-consciousness attempts to force recognition from the other without reciprocating, and so the struggle for life and death begins.<sup>29</sup> The difference between the first reading and the second, then, is that on the first reading, self-consciousness attempts to make the second self-consciousness bend to its will, and this is the primary source of motivation for the life-and-death struggle. On the second reading, the impetus for the life-and-death struggle is the need for self-consciousness to force recognition from the other without giving it in return, rather than simply trying to force the second self-consciousness to follow its will.

On the third reading—Stern’s own—we can understand the struggle of life and death as having two primary motivations: first, the struggle arises out of an attempt by self-consciousness to obtain recognition from the other by demonstrating to the other that it, self-consciousness, is more than an animal life—that it is a human subject—by putting its life on the line, and secondly, the struggle is a way for self-consciousness to fully test the other as a potential source of recognition.<sup>30</sup> Stern also claims that self-consciousness is motivated to risk its own life in the struggle with the other rather than risking its life, say, with some daredevil feat, because of this need to test the other as a source of recognition.<sup>31</sup>

We can understand the life-and-death struggle in three possible ways, then, according to Stern: as a way for self-consciousness to force the other to conform to its will, as a means to force the other

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<sup>28</sup> 76

<sup>29</sup> 77

<sup>30</sup> 79, 80

<sup>31</sup> 80

to give recognition by threatening the other with death, or as a way to obtain recognition from the other by showing the other that it is a subject, and also as a way of testing the other.

§3.2: *Stern's Position on the Three Readings*

Stern notes that there is a problem with the first reading. On Stern's interpretation of this reading, as we have said, self-consciousness has tried and failed to establish that objects are nothing except what they are for it by destroying the objects. Another self-consciousness can negate itself, though, and so doesn't need to be destroyed to be made to conform to the will of the first self-consciousness. Self-consciousness, then, forces another self-consciousness to conform to its will to show once and for all that objects are nothing except what they are for it. However, Stern claims, this reading seems to overlook recognition as a motivating element.<sup>32</sup> In other words, on Stern's understanding of Shklar's reading, self-consciousness is motivated to initiate the life-and-death struggle, not because it needs recognition from the other, but because it simply wants to replace the objects it destroys with another self-consciousness, thereby effectively demonstrating once and for all that objects are nothing except what they are for self-consciousness.<sup>33</sup> Stern likewise takes the second reading to be inadequate, because it does not offer us a good explanation for why self-consciousness would risk its own life. What Stern is suggesting is this: if obtaining recognition from the other is the reason for the life-and-death struggle, why would self-consciousness be motivated to risk its own life to obtain that recognition?<sup>34</sup> Self-consciousness could force recognition from the other without risk

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<sup>32</sup> 76

<sup>33</sup> We might wonder, though, if self-consciousness can force another being to conform to its will without seeking recognition from that being. On Shklar's reading, recognition *does* enter the picture. She writes that recognition "is a fleeting moment, since [it] occurs in the course of mortal combat. If one hero kills the other the battle must be repeated, since the other has been reduced to a thing" (28). For Shklar, recognition enters the picture only after the struggle of life and death has begun. I take it that Stern's reading of Shklar, then, is that since recognition enters after the struggle has begun, it must not be a motivation for the initiation of the struggle. Self-consciousness must relate to the other on this reading as though the other is a tool or a mere object—at least prior to the beginning of the life-and-death struggle.

<sup>34</sup> Stern writes that this second reading runs into problems because "it misses out another [*sic*] important aspect of Hegel's discussion, which is the significance he gives to the fact that in the life and death struggle, individuals show themselves as willing to forfeit their lives" (77).

to its own life. The third reading, Stern claims, will offer us a better explanation for self-consciousness risking its own life.

If Stern's interpretation of Shklar's reading is correct, and recognition really isn't motivating self-consciousness to initiate the struggle on the first reading, then I agree with Stern's criticism of this reading; recognition plays an important role in the struggle between the two self-consciousnesses.<sup>35</sup> I also agree with Stern's criticism of the second reading—i.e., that it fails to give us an adequate explanation for self-consciousness's motivation to risk its own life. A plausible reading of the life-and-death struggle must explain both why self-consciousness risks its own life, and why it aims at the life of the other.

### §3.3: Problems with Stern's Reading

Stern's reading, however, also fails to adequately explain self-consciousness's risk to itself and its aiming at the life of the other. Our first question concerning Stern's account is this: why is it that putting one's life on the line shows one to be more than an animal life? An animal could put its life on the line, for example, to protect its young. Stern refers to the *Philosophy of Right*, in which Hegel writes that "I have these limbs and my life only *in so far as I so will it*; the animal cannot mutilate or destroy itself, but the human being can."<sup>36</sup> Stern claims that for Hegel, "knowingly and willingly" putting its life on the line is a way for a creature to show that it is not an animal, but human.<sup>37</sup>

If it is a distinctive feature of the human being that the human can willingly mutilate or destroy itself, can it also be a distinguishing feature of a human that it merely willingly *risks* its own destruction? In other words, the question is whether it is sufficient for a human distinguishing itself as such that it risks its own life, as self-consciousness does in the life-and-death struggle, rather than mutilating or destroying itself. Hegel claims that what is distinctive about the human being is the possession of its

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<sup>35</sup> Hegel writes that the self-consciousnesses "*recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another" (§184).

<sup>36</sup> §47

<sup>37</sup> 79

life and body, and that this possession is based on the human willing it as its own. He writes that animals “are indeed in possession of themselves: their soul is in possession of their body.”<sup>38</sup> What makes animals different from humans for Hegel is that animals do not *will* the possession of their lives and bodies, and so “have no right to their life.”<sup>39</sup> How are we to make sense of an animal hurting or destroying itself, *or* risking its life, on Hegel’s view? What would be present in a human act of injuring itself or risking its life would be the willing of that act, according to Hegel.

We could, then, plausibly accept Stern’s reading of Hegel’s distinction between animal and human—that it lies in the human willingly destroying itself or willingly risking its own life, unlike an animal which could also risk its life or destroy itself, but which cannot will those actions. Nonetheless, we would still have a further problem: what would be the difference in the appearance of the action to the other—i.e., what difference would be apparent to the other between a willed action and an unwilled action carried out by self-consciousness? Self-consciousness, according to Stern, wants to show the other that it is more than a mere animal by risking its own life. However, self-consciousness merely risking its own life will not signal to the other that it is *willingly* risking its own life, because the only difference—the presence of will—will not be visible in the act itself. When we see an animal risking its own life, say a mother bird protecting her young from another animal, it is not apparent to us that it does not willingly do so, any more than it is apparent that a human protecting her offspring does so willingly. We cannot see the presence or absence of will in the action itself. Likewise, the other will not be able to tell that self-consciousness risks its own life willingly in the struggle of life and death.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Philosophy of Right* §47

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Wood suggests in *Hegel’s Ethical Thought* that for the sake of self-consciousness’s self-certainty, “the fundamental problem with non-human objects of desire is that they can contribute to my self-worth only secondarily or indirectly...Even animals, which are living and conscious objects, cannot provide me directly with a sense of my self-worth...The only ‘other’ that can form a conception of me as a free self is another free self” (85). Wood goes on to say that for self-consciousness “to be recognized, [it] must also recognize the other,” because being recognized by the other requires that the other knows that self-consciousness is a self-conscious entity just like it, and that self-consciousness is aware of this

Stern could reply in this way: the actions of self-consciousness are not fully intelligible from our perspective as observers. Self-consciousness's behavior is not fully intelligible to us because it is not a fully-developed rational agent, and so it does not occur to self-consciousness that it acts non-rationally in trying to show the other that it is more than an animal life when evidence of this will not be visible to the other. However, by suggesting that self-consciousness signals to the other that it is more than an animal life by willingly risking its own destruction, are we not assuming that it possesses the ability to rationally assess the value of doing so? Perhaps it is the case that self-consciousness acts out of some compulsion that is non-rational or preconceptual. If this is the case, though, can we still say that self-consciousness *wills* its risk to itself?

The question, then, comes down to what is necessary for the human being willing its own destruction. If it is the case that rationality or awareness of the significance of one's own actions is not necessary to will an action for Hegel, then Stern's position could, I think, be defended. This question is beyond the scope of this paper, and so I will not attempt to fully address it here. However, we have reason to think that rational self-awareness *is* necessary for willing on Hegel's account. As Inwood writes, the will on Hegel's view "is essentially rational," and for Hegel it is the rational nature of the human will that gives rise to the fundamental components that comprise ethical life.<sup>41</sup>

If, indeed, rational self-awareness is necessary to will, there is a further problem with Stern's account. We have reason to think that self-consciousness does not possess this necessary rational self-awareness. For self-consciousness to have developed the robust notion of personhood—with the possession of a rational will—that Hegel discusses in the *Philosophy of Right*, it must have a self-concept

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knowledge (86). According to this reading, then, self-consciousness can only effectively receive recognition from the other if the other is more than an animal or an object, and if self-consciousness also recognizes the other. However, I think that this reading runs into the same problem I articulate—self-consciousness hasn't yet developed the robust sense of self-awareness and the self-other distinction necessary to make distinctions between itself and animal life, let alone know that it must demonstrate that it is more than an animal to the other.

<sup>41</sup> 313

that is more fully developed than this part of the dialectic in the *Phenomenology* suggests. If self-consciousness possesses the rational self-awareness to will, it will also be able to distinguish between animals and humans, and it will know that it is the latter rather than the former. However, self-consciousness has only just emerged in the dialectic, and its sense of itself is primitive. Self-consciousness, at this stage in the dialectic, only understands objects outside it in terms of itself. It does not have a fully-formed distinction between itself as a subject and objects that lie outside it—it sees objects only for what they are for it. It also cannot yet make the distinction between itself and the other. It is not plausible that an agent with such a primitive self-concept can be said to possess rational self-awareness.

Stern's explanation concerning why self-consciousness aims at the life of the other reveals another limitation of his reading. For Stern, self-consciousness aims at the life of the other to test the other, thereby confirming whether the other is worthy of recognition.<sup>42</sup> Here Stern follows Howard Kainz, claiming that self-consciousness threatens the life of the other to see how it responds under duress and judges its worthiness for recognition accordingly.<sup>43</sup> However, this reading does not explain why self-consciousness aims at the *life* of the other. Why could self-consciousness not put the other to the test and thereby determine the other's worthiness for recognition without aiming at the other's life?<sup>44</sup> We could imagine self-consciousness fighting the other, for example, but without aiming to kill

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<sup>42</sup> 80

<sup>43</sup> Kainz writes that the "distinctive characteristic of self-consciousness" is freedom (87). He also writes that self-consciousness "must accordingly set itself to find proof; it must 'test' the alter-ego to adjudicate the presence of freedom. And this test will involve the negation, disregard, and destruction of life" (88).

<sup>44</sup> Why, on Stern's reading, would self-consciousness be motivated to test the other's worthiness for recognition at all? Stern suggests that one way we could understand why self-consciousness fights the other is to obtain recognition from the other without reciprocating (79). He rejects this explanation, claiming that it does not fit the text particularly well (79). If we accept even part of this claim, however—that self-consciousness desires to obtain recognition from the other without reciprocating—it does not make sense for self-consciousness to test the other's worthiness to *receive* recognition if self-consciousness does not intend to reciprocate the recognition received from the other. The alternative explanation is that Stern means that self-consciousness is testing the other's worthiness as a *source* of recognition. This is what I have interpreted Stern to mean because it is the only way Stern's view seems plausible. However, there is ambiguity in what Stern means. He writes of self-consciousness that it will not recognize the other unless it tests the other "to see if [it] is worthy of recognition" (80). There may, then, be a further problem with Stern's view, depending on his intended meaning.

the other.<sup>45</sup> On my view, then, Stern's account does not help us to understand self-consciousness's motivation to aim at the life of the other.

#### §4: McDowell's reading of the Self-Consciousness chapter

John McDowell offers a reading of the two crucial parts of the Self-Consciousness chapter—the life-and-death struggle and the lord-bondsman relation—that gives us a way to avoid some of the problems of Stern's reading. McDowell's reading, in contrast to Stern's offers us a better way to understand the motivations of self-consciousness in the struggle. His claim is that we should interpret the agents involved in the struggle and the lord-bondsman relation as being two aspects of the same self-consciousness as it struggles with its own unintegrated otherness that it takes to be another self-consciousness. Despite the advantages that McDowell's reading offers over Stern's, I will argue that my reading can address the same limitations of Stern's reading that McDowell's does, while also avoiding a major problem that arises on McDowell's reading.

##### §4.1: *An Exposition of McDowell's Reading*

Prior to the emergence of self-consciousness, as we will recall, what is true for consciousness is “something other than itself”—i.e., the object outside it.<sup>46</sup> McDowell sees self-consciousness emerging and encountering objects, the otherness of which it tries to eliminate by eliminating the objects, as I also do on my reading. McDowell's understanding of the Self-Consciousness chapter hinges primarily upon his reading of §167 in the *Phenomenology*. This is where his reading departs from my own. The otherness, McDowell writes, that self-consciousness strives to supersede, is the whole

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<sup>45</sup> Kainz writes that self-consciousness intends to show by risking its life that it has independence and is “not immersed-in the world of objectivity” (88). Kainz claims that self-consciousness must force the other to confront death, because this will prove that the other is independent of existence and deserving of its recognition, though it isn't clear that Stern shares this part of his view. Furthermore, while Kainz's claim here is closer to my own view in part, as shall become clear shortly, this view still does not explain why self-consciousness would want to see if the other deserves recognition, as I note in the previous footnote. On the contrary, what self-consciousness wants is to obtain recognition from the other without reciprocating.

<sup>46</sup> §166

of the sensuous or sensible world.<sup>47</sup> McDowell thinks that a reading of the Self-Consciousness chapter must take into account this notion of this otherness as all of the sensible world. On McDowell's reading, this otherness of the whole sensible world confronted by self-consciousness cannot very well be understood as another self-consciousness.

Rather, the other encountered in the life-and-death struggle on McDowell's reading is self-consciousness's *own* otherness—an aspect of itself that it takes for an other. On McDowell's reading, we can also understand that in the lord-bondsman relation, as in as the life-and-death struggle, self-consciousness is relating to its own otherness, rather than a separate self-consciousness.

We can look at §167 in the *Phenomenology* to better see the origin of McDowell's reading. In the first part of the section, Hegel writes about the transition from consciousness as the prior shape of knowledge to its present shape as self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is a shape of knowing that is “the knowing of itself” unlike consciousness, which was “the knowing of an other.”<sup>48</sup> Even though the other of consciousness has disappeared, the moments of it have been preserved in self-consciousness. Self-consciousness, Hegel writes, “is the reflection out of the being of the world of sense and perception, and is essentially the return from otherness.”<sup>49</sup> Hegel also says a bit later in the same passage that the sensible world is preserved for self-consciousness.<sup>50</sup>

McDowell claims that the “whole expanse of the sensible world” that is preserved for self-consciousness is “the another self-consciousness of our passage.”<sup>51</sup> If another self-consciousness is another agent, rather than self-consciousness's own otherness that it takes to be another, McDowell argues, then we do not have a good way to understand what Hegel means by saying that the expanse of the sensible world—the moment from the previous shape of knowledge as consciousness—is being

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<sup>47</sup> McDowell 8

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> 8

preserved in the moment of self-consciousness. McDowell writes that “replacing that first moment in the doubled object of self-consciousness with someone else’s self-consciousness” leaves us with the problem of how to reconcile this with “the unfolding of that moment that Hegel seems to be offering in the text up to this point.”<sup>52</sup> By “doubled object,” McDowell here refers to the notion that self-consciousness, as Hegel writes, “has a double object: one is the immediate object, that of sense-certainty and perception” and “*itself*, which is the true *essence*.”<sup>53</sup>

#### §4.2: *The Motivations for the Life-and-Death Struggle on McDowell’s Reading*

If we look at the motivations for self-consciousness in the struggle on McDowell’s reading, we see that the reading appears to provide a solution to the failure of Stern’s reading to give us a good way to understand why self-consciousness risks its own life and why it seeks to destroy the other. McDowell suggests that self-consciousness wants “to affirm its independence, by disavowing any dependence on “its objective mode,” which is the “life that has come to stand in for the otherness of the world” and that “it is the very same self-consciousness that here tries to disavow [its dependence on its objective mode].”<sup>54</sup> On McDowell’s reading, then, we could understand that self-consciousness aims to risk its own life to show that it isn’t tied to an objective existence—a reading that, we shall see, is much like my own.

Though McDowell does not address this point, we could understand that self-consciousness tries to destroy the other on McDowell’s reading because it is its own unintegrated otherness that conflicts with its own self-concept, though it does not recognize this otherness as part of itself. Self-consciousness is that for which objects are nothing except what they are for self-consciousness. The otherness self-consciousness confronts, on McDowell’s reading—its own otherness—defies this aspect of self-consciousness’s self-concept.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> §167

<sup>54</sup> 10

It appears, then, that McDowell's reading can give us a plausible account of both why self-consciousness risks its own life and why it aims to destroy the other, unlike Stern's reading. Furthermore, McDowell's reading helps us to make sense of some particularly cryptic aspects of the beginning of the "Lordship and Bondage" section of the chapter. In this part of the text, Hegel explains that self-consciousness, when it encounters the other, "has come out of itself" and "must supersede this otherness of itself."<sup>55</sup> If McDowell's reading is correct, what self-consciousness takes to be an other is really self-consciousness's own otherness. If this is the case, we could understand this passage to mean that self-consciousness is encountering its own otherness and superseding it.

#### *§4.3: Problems with McDowell's Reading*

Despite its virtues, we may think that McDowell's reading commits us to the notion that self-consciousness be able to distinguish between itself and the other. His reading seems to require that self-consciousness understand an aspect of itself to be an other, and it is difficult to see how self-consciousness could do so unless it is able to distinguish between itself and the other. As we earlier noted, self-consciousness is not yet able to make such a distinction because, as Hegel has told us, self-consciousness is what it is in virtue of having the antithesis between itself and the other removed. If the antithesis is removed between itself and the other, then there is no distinction for it between itself and the other.

McDowell could, I think, address this problem in this way: it is not that self-consciousness is aware of the otherness of itself as an other, but that it simply sees that the otherness of itself conflicts with its own self-concept, in the same way that it understood in the dialectic of desire that the object is self-standing. If we are committed to opposing McDowell's reading with the claim that self-consciousness must be able to distinguish between itself and the other on his reading, then the reading of the dialectic of desire I earlier explicated would also be vulnerable to the same criticism.

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<sup>55</sup> §179, 180

However, even if McDowell's reading does not commit him to a self-consciousness that is able to make a distinction between itself and an other, it still has a disadvantage. If we look back to the beginning of the "Lordship and Bondage" section, we see that in addition to coming out of itself and seeing itself as an other being, Hegel also writes here that self-consciousness "in the other sees its own self."<sup>56</sup> McDowell's claim is that self-consciousness sees in its own otherness a distinct other, or at the very least, that it takes its own otherness to conflict with what it is as self-consciousness—that its own otherness is independent or self-standing in some fashion. How, though, could self-consciousness see its own self in the other, if what McDowell's reading suggests is correct? On McDowell's reading, self-consciousness is taking part of itself to be an other, rather than as Hegel writes, seeing itself in the other.

Perhaps McDowell's reading could be defended with the claim that we can understand self-consciousness, when it "in the other sees its own self," as having arrived at some sense of its own unassimilated otherness. In other words, perhaps self-consciousness understands something of the real state of affairs—that the other is part of it—though this sense is not fully realized. Perhaps it is even this sense of its own unassimilated otherness that drives the dialectic forward. However, this defensive claim would be hard to reconcile with the text. The moment of the struggle ends when one of the self-consciousnesses fears for its life and is superseded, as was earlier noted in §2.2, so it would not be clear how self-consciousness's awareness of its otherness would bring about a forward movement in the dialectic. We could, of course, weaken the defensive claim here by abandoning the notion that self-consciousness's awareness of its own otherness drives the dialectic forward, but still claim that there is a partial awareness that self-consciousness has of its own otherness. However, there is a lack of textual evidence for such an awareness in this moment of the dialectic.

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<sup>56</sup> §179

I argue that there is a better way to understand this part of the Self-Consciousness chapter that will not contradict this notion of self-consciousness seeing itself in the other. Furthermore, we can still make sense of the otherness of the sensible world that is preserved for self-consciousness on my reading, and also make sense of the cryptic passages from the beginning of the Lordship and Bondage section that McDowell's reading seemed to explain.

I argue that we can understand this preserved otherness in terms of self-consciousness's taking the other to be itself, rather than self-consciousness's taking its own otherness for an other. On my reading, when self-consciousness encounters the other, what it sees it takes to be itself, because it doesn't yet have a self-other distinction. The otherness that it confronts—the preserved otherness Hegel refers to—is a result of this process of taking the other to be itself. When self-consciousness takes the other to be itself, it wants to demonstrate that it is not bound to life, because self-consciousness is what it is in virtue of having the antithesis between itself and the object removed. It is the otherness of the object that conflicts with its own self-concept. Self-consciousness sees evidence of its own determining qualities exhibited in the other, and it is these qualities that set up an antithesis between it and the object. It is this otherness of the object, understood by self-consciousness via this evidence of its own determining qualities that is the preserved otherness of the whole sensible world.

My reading will also help us to understand how self-consciousness “in the other sees its own self.” It sees its own self in the other because it takes the other to be itself. It also comes out of itself and must supersede the otherness of itself not because the other is really its own otherness, but because it takes the other to be itself. I will next establish in greater detail how we should understand the motivations for self-consciousness in the struggle of life-and-death on my reading before developing further the notion of how we can understand self-consciousness's taking the other to be itself.

## §5: Another Way to Understand Self-Consciousness Risking Its Life

### §5.1: *Self-Consciousness is Not Bound to Life*

Allen Wood offers an elucidation that helps us better understand self-consciousness's risking its own life that does not require going outside the *Phenomenology* or making assumptions about self-consciousness's self-knowledge or rationality as Stern's reading does. His reading also allows us to build a bit more on McDowell's reading of self-consciousness's motivations in the struggle. Wood suggests that part of the reason self-consciousness risks its own death is to demonstrate its freedom from life.<sup>57</sup> Hegel writes that each self-consciousness tries to show that it is "fettered to no determinate *existence*" and that "it is not shackled to life."<sup>58</sup>

For us to accept Wood's explanation, that self-consciousness risks its life to show that it is not bound to life, rather than Stern's reading that self-consciousness risks its life to show that it is more than an animal subject, we need to know *why* it is important for self-consciousness to show that it is not bound to life. As we have said, Hegel has written that self-consciousness wants to show that it is free from a "determinate existence." To be determinate is to be a particular thing among other things. If self-consciousness is connected to life, then it has a *particular* life—i.e., one life and not some other one. Having a particular life means that it has a determinate existence—*this* existence and not *that* one. Having a determinate existence also means that self-consciousness contains elements that are dependent on that which is around it. Being determined as one thing and not something else means that the object in question is defined by what it is not—i.e., by the objects around it. It depends on these other objects, then, because it is what it is by virtue of not being these other objects. If self-consciousness depends on other objects, and is therefore determinate, it is also limited because it is not all that there is. This limitation conflicts with its own self-conception, that it is "to itself the truth."

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<sup>57</sup> 86

<sup>58</sup> Pinkard §187

### §5.2: *Self-Consciousness's Determining Qualities*

If self-consciousness has qualities that determine it, it is these qualities that will set self-consciousness apart from the object and give self-consciousness a determinate existence. For example, suppose I pick up a book with a blue cover of a certain size. It is these qualities—the color and size of the book—among many others, that determine that the book I pick up is *this* book, and not some other. Hegel writes that self-consciousness is what it is by virtue of having the antithesis removed between it and the object.<sup>59</sup> This means that self-consciousness sees itself as not determined by the object outside it. Therefore, self-consciousness seeing evidence of its own determining qualities will conflict with what it fundamentally is as self-consciousness. Seeing its own determining qualities will reinforce the antithesis between self-consciousness and the object by making the two distinct, and will therefore determine self-consciousness. If, for example, self-consciousness sees that it has a particular appearance, then this will determine self-consciousness as something different from other objects around it—say, a certain book or table. What self-consciousness strives for by risking its own life in the struggle of life and death, then, is to demonstrate that it has no qualities that give it a determinate existence. If it takes no account for its own life, this will show that it is not bound to a particular life, or to any other qualities of that life that would determine it.

### §5.3: *Kainz's Reading*

Howard Kainz has a reading of self-consciousness's risking its own life that is similar in some respects to my own. He writes that “the only way that a self-consciousness can show that it is something independent, existing for-itself—is to somehow demonstrate that it is not immersed in the objectivity “closest” to it—i.e., its own immediate bodily existence.”<sup>60</sup> It cannot, however, directly show that it is not immersed in this objectivity of this bodily existence, Kainz notes. This is because it

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<sup>59</sup> §167

<sup>60</sup> 88

“does not yet comprehend itself in definite form, and thus cannot “lay hold” on itself to remove itself.”<sup>61</sup> so it must show that it is not immersed in objectivity indirectly by “removing the signs of its immersion in its immediate sensuous existence.”<sup>62</sup>

I agree with Kainz that self-consciousness does not yet understand itself as having a “definite form,” if by this we understand that self-consciousness does not yet take itself to be distinct from other objects as I earlier noted in this paper. Nonetheless, I think that a reading such as Kainz’s has a notable omission. Kainz suggests that self-consciousness wants to demonstrate its separation from the objectivity of its own bodily existence because its bodily existence is the objectivity that is most immediate to it. Kainz does not, however, give us a good way to understand why having objectivity is a problem for self-consciousness. While he does say that self-consciousness wants to show that it is “existing-for-itself,” we still need to understand why this presents a problem.

If we understand self-consciousness as wanting to demonstrate that it is not determined by those qualities that make it the distinct thing that it is—that mark it as something other than the things around it—we can understand why self-consciousness wants to risk its own life. Doing so allows it to take no account of the evidence of it as having *this* life, as being *this* thing, rather than some other.

#### **§6: Why Does Self-Consciousness Aim at the Life of the Other?**

We find ourselves with a further question: if it is the case that self-consciousness wishes to show that it is not bound to life as our reading of Wood suggests, why does self-consciousness also aim at the life of the other? Risking its own life is sufficient to demonstrate that it is free from a determinate existence. Furthermore, aiming at the life of the other would appear to sabotage self-consciousness’s attempt to demonstrate its freedom from life if the other is destroyed, since if the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

other is destroyed, self-consciousness will not be able to demonstrate to the other that it is not bound to life.

Hegel writes that each self-consciousness aims at the life of the other because “its essential being is present to it in the form of an ‘other,’ it is outside of itself and must rid itself of its self-externality.”<sup>63</sup> Part of what self-consciousness aims at in aiming at the life of the other, then, is some aspect of itself, and not just to test the other, as Stern claims. Self-consciousness sees the other, and because it takes the other to be itself, it tries to destroy its self that is external to it.

If we understand Hegel to mean, as I have earlier suggested, that self-consciousness risks its own death because it wants to show that it is free from a determinate existence, and is not bound to life, then we can also understand why it aims at the life of the other. By aiming at the other’s life, it destroys that which is itself and is external to it, i.e., that which exists as the other. That which exists as the other has a particular existence, and therefore exhibits a connection to life that is outside of self-consciousness. In order to show that it is free from this particular existence, self-consciousness must destroy its particular life that is visible to it as the other.<sup>64</sup>

Self-consciousness, then, tries to rid itself of its self-externality by destroying the evidence of its particularity that it sees exhibited in the other—and therefore aims to destroy the other. We can get a further sense of the motivation self-consciousness has to destroy the other if we examine Hegel’s terminology in which he refers to self-consciousness aiming at the life of the other. In the passage we

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<sup>63</sup> §187

<sup>64</sup> Wood has a related though somewhat different reading. He writes that self-consciousness recognizes the other as itself because “at this stage we are abstracting from all our particular properties, and so simply as free self-consciousnesses we are exactly alike... This sort of equality or identity, instead of creating a common interest between us, leads immediately to a struggle, for our characteristic conduct as desiring beings confronted with an other is simply to ‘negate’ or ‘do away with’ the other. Each of us wants recognition from the other, but sees no reason to recognize the other. My recognition would only attest to the other’s independent existence (or ‘immediacy’), and that would be a threat to my self-certainty” (86). I agree with Wood that self-consciousness recognizes the other as itself and responds by aiming at the life of the other because the other threatens its self-certainty. What I want to suggest, though, is that what threatens self-consciousness’s self-certainty is the evidence of self-consciousness’s own particularity reflected back by the other, and that this is what motivates self-consciousness to try to destroy the other.

have noted, self-consciousness aims to “sublate that being-external-to-himself.”<sup>65</sup> Here *außer sich*, which Pinkard renders as “external-to-himself,” can also be understood as “beside oneself.”<sup>66</sup> Pinkard notes in a previous passage that Hegel makes a play on both meanings of the term with his use of *außer sich*.<sup>67</sup> In addition to showing that there is some element of self-consciousness external to itself, we can see that Hegel is also introducing the idea of self-consciousness being frenzied or distraught. There is something disturbing to self-consciousness about seeing an aspect of itself external to itself.

One thing motivating this distress in self-consciousness is that the other reflects something about self-consciousness back to it—something that is distressing and disturbing to it. Again, if we understand that self-consciousness wants to affirm that it is without determining qualities, we can better understand why self-consciousness is distraught. Self-consciousness presents itself as having no determining qualities, and yet sees the other as itself—as a determinate existence with qualities that determine it as such. Self-consciousness is caught in the conflict between itself as without determining qualities and itself as having determining qualities—a distressing state of existence which it tries to resolve by destroying the evidence of its determining qualities that it sees in the other.

Of course, if self-consciousness succeeds in destroying the other, this would eliminate the other as its source of recognition. Despite this possibility for self-sabotage, self-consciousness is driven by the desire to eliminate the evidence of its determining qualities in the other. However, for the struggle to have a stable outcome, i.e., for self-consciousness to successfully obtain recognition from the other and still eliminate the evidence of its own determining qualities that it sees in the other, self-

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<sup>65</sup> Pinkard §187

<sup>66</sup> In §179, Pinkard translates Hegel as saying that “For self-consciousness, there is another self-consciousness; self-consciousness is *outside of itself*.” In a footnote, Pinkard notes that *außer sich*, which he renders here as “outside of itself,” “usually means ‘to be beside oneself (to be swept up in rage, or hilarity, and so on); but Hegel also clearly wants to play on the literal meaning of the term, so that he is also saying ‘It has come *outside of itself*,’ or self-consciousness exists as an ‘external object’ to itself?” (109n7).

<sup>67</sup> Pinkard notes in his footnote to §179 that Hegel’s use of *außer sich* has “the overtones of saying that ‘self-consciousness has come to be *anxious* about itself” (109n7). While this usage precedes §187, I think that we can also better understand what is happening in §187 if we see the usage of *außer sich* here as also suggesting that self-consciousness is anxious or distraught.

consciousness must, as Hegel writes, supersede the otherness of itself. Rather than bringing about the natural negation of the other, self-consciousness must supersede the other, so that the other is negated while also being preserved. If the other is superseded rather than being destroyed, it can still function as a source of recognition for self-consciousness.

### §7: Earlier Parallels

We can again examine the beginning of the “Lordship and Bondage” section, just prior to the emergence of the life-and-death struggle in the dialectic, in the context of my reading. We see here more signs of the tension between the need self-consciousness has to affirm its lack of determining qualities and the evidence it sees of its own determining qualities. As a prelude to the struggle of life and death, self-consciousness encounters another self-consciousness. Self-consciousness then loses itself, because “it finds itself as an *other* being,” Hegel writes, and it has superseded the other, because it sees the other as itself rather than seeing the other as “an essential being.”<sup>68</sup>

#### §7.1: *Self-Consciousness Finds Itself as an Other Being*

One way we can understand what Hegel means here, by self-consciousness finding itself as an other being, is that self-consciousness sees evidence of its determining qualities in the other, which conflicts with its desire to present itself as without these qualities. Because of self-consciousness’s taking the other to be itself, Hegel writes in the next paragraph that self-consciousness “must supersede this otherness of itself.”<sup>69</sup> This need self-consciousness has to supersede the otherness of itself is what motivates the struggle of life and death on my reading. It supersedes the otherness of itself because it takes the other to be itself. This supersession of the other is also what Hegel is referring to when he writes about self-consciousness trying to “rid itself of its self-externality” several paragraphs later, when describing the struggle of life and death.<sup>70</sup> Again, we can better understand this

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<sup>68</sup> §179

<sup>69</sup> §180

<sup>70</sup> §187

passage if we understand self-consciousness's taking the other to be itself, rather than, as McDowell suggests, we think that self-consciousness is taking itself to be an other.

Self-consciousness supersedes the other, Hegel writes, "to become certain of *itself* as the essential being" and thereby supersedes itself, because "this other is itself."<sup>71</sup> What Hegel refers to here is self-consciousness's need to eliminate the determining qualities which are visible to it in the other, "the other" which "is itself." It does this to obtain certainty that it is an "essential being" that is not tied to a particular or determinate existence.

#### §7.2: *A Parallel in the Dialectic of Desire*

We can look even earlier in the "Self-Consciousness" chapter, to the dialectic of desire, to see a parallel to the basic tension in the text that I have elucidated here. There is a similarity between the relation of self-consciousness to the other in the struggle of life and death, and the relation of self-consciousness to the object in the dialectic of desire. In the dialectic of desire, the object appears to self-consciousness to be self-standing.<sup>72</sup> As self-consciousness, objects are nothing except what they are for it. This conflicts with the appearance of the object as self-standing, so self-consciousness is compelled to destroy the object. In the struggle of life and death, self-consciousness sees evidence of its own determining qualities in the other. This leads it to aim at destroying the other, because what it is as self-consciousness requires that it be free from the determining qualities it sees reflected in the other.

### **§8: The Instability of the Lord-Bondsman Relation**

A natural question that follows from the reading that I am offering concerns how my reading accounts for the emergence of the lord-bondsman relation as a move forward in the dialectical progression. How does the lord-bondsman relation solve the problem of the lord being bound to a

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<sup>71</sup> §180

<sup>72</sup> §174

determinate existence? If the lord is tied to a determinate existence, then the same problem would arise for it that arose earlier in the dialectic—it would see evidence of its own particularity because its relation to objects will cause it to have a determinate existence—that it is *this* thing and not some other. Furthermore, the end of the struggle of life and death happens when one self-consciousness, the bondsman, yields to the other out of fear. Rather than destroying the evidence of its determining qualities, surely now the lord has preserved this evidence in its mediated self-relation with the bondsman. If this is the case, then self-consciousness has ensured that what it wanted to prevent will continue—that it will continue to see evidence of its own determining qualities made visible to it by the presence of the bondsman.

*§8.1: The Lord-Bondsman Relation as a Dialectical Advance*

The bondsman solves the problem of the lord being tied to a determinate existence by mediating the relation between the lord and the independently existing, particular objects on which the bondsman works. Hegel writes that “the lord puts himself into relation with both of these moments, to a thing as such, the object of desire, and to the consciousness for which thinghood is the essential characteristic.”<sup>73</sup> What I take Hegel to mean here is that the relation of the lord to the “thing as such” is mediated via the bondsman, and that “the consciousness for which thinghood is the essential characteristic” is the bondsman to which the lord is also in a relation. The bondsman works on the thing, and the lord enjoys only the dependent aspects of the thing, leaving the independent aspect of the thing for the bondsman. The lord is then free from the determining aspect of self-standing objects because the bondsman mediates the lord’s relation to that aspect of those objects.

As for the second problem—that the determining qualities of the lord will be visible to the lord in the bondsman—it *is* the case that the bondsman will continue to be visible to the lord because the lord receives recognition from the bondsman. “In both of these moments,” Hegel writes, “the

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<sup>73</sup> §190

lord achieves his recognition through another consciousness.”<sup>74</sup> “Both of these moments” refers to the relation of the lord to “a thing as such” and “to the consciousness for which thinghood is the essential characteristic.”<sup>75</sup> I take Hegel to be referring by these two moments to the lord’s mediated relation to the thing on which the bondsman works, and to the lord’s relation to the bondsman. If the lord receives recognition from the bondsman, the bondsman must be visible to the lord.

*§8.2: The Origin of the Instability of the Lord-Bondsman Relation*

We also see further evidence in the text that if the bondsman is visible to the lord, then the lord’s own determining qualities will be reflected back by the bondsman. As we have noted, the lord receives recognition from the bondsman. Hegel notes that the bondsman is the “unessential” consciousness because it works on the thing, and because it is dependent on a “specific existence.”<sup>76</sup> Self-consciousness, in the struggle of life and death, wants to show that it is not bound by life or connected to any specific existence, i.e., that it does not have determining qualities, as we have earlier noted. It appears that the bondsman has a specific existence, and therefore has determining qualities. To the lord, then, the determining qualities of the bondsman will be visible if the bondsman is visible. Self-consciousness took the other to be itself in the struggle of life and death and so could not abide seeing evidence of its own determining qualities that it saw in the other, as we have earlier said. The desire of self-consciousness to eliminate evidence of its own determining qualities in the lord-bondsman relation must fail, then, since the bondsman is dependent on a determinate existence, and the bondsman is visible to the lord because of the lord’s need for recognition from the bondsman.

The lord-bondsman relation is usually understood<sup>77</sup> to become unstable because the bondsman is “transformed into a truly independent consciousness.”<sup>78</sup> The bondsman develops its

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<sup>74</sup> §191

<sup>75</sup> §190

<sup>76</sup> §191

<sup>77</sup> See e.g., Stern 83-85

<sup>78</sup> §193

own sense of itself through its labor that conflicts with its role in the lord-bondsman relation. My reading, however, offers us a new way to understand the relation's instability—a way that takes into account the overlooked aspect of self-consciousness's taking the other to be itself. On my reading, the relation is unsatisfying to the lord because the lord's determining qualities are visible, reflected back to the lord by the bondsman's dependence on a determinate existence.

Hegel writes that “the truth of the independent consciousness is accordingly the servile consciousness of the bondsman.”<sup>79</sup> One aspect of why the lord-bondsman relation is unsatisfying to the lord is because its self-conception is being affirmed by something that lacks the independence it wants to ascribe to itself—its self-concept is being affirmed by a “servile consciousness” or what Hegel also calls “consciousness in the form of thinghood.”<sup>80</sup> What I intend to point out here is that an aspect of why it poses a problem for the lord that the bondsman is a servile consciousness is that the bondsman has a determinate existence, and that these determinate qualities will be reflected back onto the lord.

## §9: Conclusion

The Self-Consciousness chapter is an important part of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, and I have endeavored to show that we can read the dialectic in this chapter in the light of self-consciousness's taking the other to be itself. I have given a brief explication of part of the development of self-consciousness in the Self-Consciousness chapter—the dialectic of desire, the life-and-death struggle, and the lord-bondsman relation. I have also examined several readings of the life-and-death struggle outlined by Stern, as well as Stern's own reading. I have agreed with Stern that the first two readings he examines are inadequate, though I also have showed that Stern's own account is missing the important element of self-consciousness's taking the other to be itself. This missing element, I have

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<sup>79</sup> §193

<sup>80</sup> §189

claimed will allow us to give a suitable account of the motivations for self-consciousness in the life-and-death struggle that Stern's account lacks. I have also showed that McDowell's reading of this chapter presents some advantages over Stern's, but that it still leaves us with the problem of how to understand Hegel's claim that self-consciousness sees the other as itself.

I have claimed, then, that McDowell's reading is something of an intermediate position between Stern's and my own. I have also built upon the readings of Wood and Kainz—which I also have explicated—to establish my own reading. I have argued that the crucial aspect of self-consciousness's taking the other to be itself is the notion that self-consciousness is trying to destroy some aspect of itself that it sees in the other during the life-and-death encounter. On my reading, self-consciousness sees evidence in the other of its own determining qualities. Self-consciousness wants to show that it is free from determination by asserting its lack of determining qualities. In the face of the evidence of its own determining qualities that it sees in the other, it is motivated to destroy this aspect of itself in the other by destroying the other. In this way, we can make sense of self-consciousness's seeing the other as itself.

I have also examined the question of how to understand the lord-bondsman relation as a dialectical advance on my reading. On my view, the mediating aspect of the bondsman is meant to free the lord from the determining aspects of objects. I have also argued that my reading allows us to better understand the instability of the lord-bondsman relation. The bondsman serves as a constant source of unwanted evidence to the lord of the lord's own determining qualities. This will be the case, I have claimed, because the lord receives recognition from the bondsman, and therefore the bondsman must be visible to the lord. However, I have argued that we can understand the bondsman's visibility to the lord as contributing to the instability of the lord-bondsman relation because of the lord's determining qualities that are reflected back onto the lord by the bondsman, during the unfolding of the lord-bondsman relation.

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