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THE TRANSITION TO SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE
PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT

Hegel's transitions from one "form of consciousness" to the next in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* are notoriously difficult to understand. But the transitions are also central to his project in the *Phenomenology*. Given that Hegel holds that the failure of one form of consciousness—roughly, a theory about the nature of reality and our knowledge of it—necessarily gives rise to the next, the transitions contain crucial steps of the arguments for those necessity claims.

One of the most significant transitions occurs at the end of the chapter entitled "Force and the Understanding: Appearance and the Supersensible World." Here Hegel considers the form of consciousness known as the "understanding," which views the world as fundamentally constituted by forces (§132-§165). This chapter is the last of the first main subsection of the book, "Consciousness," which centers on various theoretical standpoints according to which the protagonist consciousness contemplates the world external to it (§90-§165). In what is called the "transition to self-consciousness" in the literature, the "Force and the Understanding" chapter gives way to the chapter "The Truth of Self-Certainty" (§166-§230), which falls under the heading of the second main subsection of the book, "Self-Consciousness." The overall standpoint represented by "self-consciousness" is first specified as a position which I will call "naive self-consciousness": a standpoint in which the protagonist consciousness, rather than taking the external world as its object, instead takes itself, as a thinking subject, as its object. And within the same chapter, naive self-consciousness soon develops into the position that Hegel labels "desire." This marks what is sometimes called the

“practical turn”: that is, a turn toward the consideration of various practical standpoints, which is crucial to the development of the rest of the *Phenomenology*.¹

But “Force and the Understanding” is difficult to make sense of. Particularly puzzling is Hegel’s introduction of his idiosyncratic metaphysical concept of “infinity,” which he defines variously as “absolute restlessness of pure self-movement”² and “difference as inner difference.”³ Hegel introduces infinity at the conclusion of his criticism of the understanding, and immediately before presenting naive self-consciousness, so infinity is apparently important to understanding the transition, although its role in the phenomenological progression is unclear. So too is Hegel’s presentation of naive self-consciousness. And the dense exposition of the practical turn to desire, including a short detour through a discussion of “life” at the beginning of “The Truth of Self-Certainty,” further complicates matters.

This obscurity has lent itself to many interpretations, but a dominant approach has been to read the transition to self-consciousness as broadly Kantian in spirit.⁴ The principal idea behind such interpretations is that the failure of the understanding yields the realization that the subject structures or constitutes reality through its own activity of knowing. This realization prompts consciousness to take itself qua subject as the object of phenomenological inquiry. Commentators then offer various accounts of why the turn to self-consciousness leads consciousness, in the practical turn, to consider itself as an agent.

However, most commentators who take this approach have not paid sufficient attention to how the failure of the understanding leads to the

¹ My reading of “naive self-consciousness” and desire as distinct stages of the dialectical progression requires further elaboration and motivation; see p. 30.

² GW 9:100.

³ GW 9:99.

⁴ I take this group of commentators to include Dina Emundts (2012), Joseph Flay, Fred Neuhauser (1986), Terry Pinkard, Robert Pippin, and Jon Stewart. While Robert Brandom’s “pragmatist semantic” reading of the *Phenomenology* differs from other readings in many respects, I take his account of the transition to fall under the umbrella of the Kantian reading, for he also takes the move to self-consciousness to concern the need to investigate the practical conditions on our theoretical activity.

introduction of infinity. As a result, they have failed to properly account for the role that Hegel's discussion of infinity plays in his account of the transition from the understanding to naive self-consciousness, and then from naive self-consciousness to desire.

The goal of this paper, accordingly, is to provide an interpretation of the transition to self-consciousness by paying closer attention to the relationship between the understanding's conception of forces, the structure of infinity, and the standpoints of naive self-consciousness and desire.⁵ I will argue that infinity represents what I call a new "criterion of the object"—that is, a principle specifying the metaphysical structure of the kind of object that a given form of consciousness purports to find in the world—which emerges from the failure of the understanding. As I will show, Hegel argues that the understanding posits that forces are supposed to metaphysically explain or ground the features of particulars, but because the understanding conceives of forces as *external* to particulars, forces fail to do the explanatory work that they are meant to do. In light of this failure, Hegel's discussion of infinity suggests that the protagonist consciousness comes to hold the criterion that its object must be self-determining, or that the ground of the object's particular determinations must be *internal* to that object. The standpoints of naive self-consciousness and desire accordingly emerge because the protagonist consciousness takes itself, first as knowing subject and then as desiring agent, to meet this new criterion.

My reading will thereby illuminate that in this portion of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel introduces the question of what constitutes a fully self-determining object. This reading, I will briefly suggest at the end of the paper, has payoffs for our understanding of the entire *Phenomenology*, for it lays the groundwork to see how

⁵ Ludwig Siep (2014), Stephen Houlgate (2012), and Charles Taylor all suggest accounts that do not fall into the category of Kantian interpretations and put more emphasis on the metaphysical structures exhibited by forces, self-consciousness, and life, but none pursues this approach in detail. Brady Bowman offers a more elaborated account of the relevant metaphysical structures; I consider his account in note 82. Dina Emundts offers what I take to be a Kantian interpretation, but one which provides a more detailed consideration of the metaphysics involved in the transition; see note 48 for further discussion.

the subsequent phenomenological progression takes up this question through its consideration of various conceptions of human freedom.

I begin by presenting and criticizing the dominant reading of the transition, focusing on Robert Pippin's interpretation (Part 1). Next, I characterize the project of the *Phenomenology* and the standpoint of the understanding within this framework (Part 2). I then analyze Hegel's presentation of the failure of the understanding to show how this failure results from the understanding conceiving of forces as external to the particulars they are posited to explain (Part 3). From here, I present Hegel's notion of infinity and argue that it represents a new criterion of the object, according to which the object must be self-determining (Part 4). Bringing this analysis to bear on the transition to self-consciousness and the practical turn, I argue that the protagonist consciousness takes itself, as self-conscious subject and then as practical agent, to possess the relevant self-determining structure (Part 5). Finally, I suggest some payoffs my reading has for interpreting the *Phenomenology* as a whole (Conclusion).

I.

In this section I will present the Kantian reading, taking Robert Pippin's influential account as representative of similar interpretations. Pippin interprets Hegel's discussion of the understanding and the transition to self-consciousness as part of Hegel's project in the *Phenomenology* of determining the conditions for theoretical cognition. At the stage of the understanding, according to Pippin, Hegel is considering how the unity of the sensory manifold is established.⁶ The understanding first (in a rationalist spirit) attempts to infer to the existence of a nonsensible ground of nature and then alternatively (in an empiricist spirit) seeks to describe regularities in nature.⁷

⁶ Pippin, *The Satisfactions of Idealism*, 1989, 132.

⁷ Pippin 1989, 135.

In his interpretation of the transition to self-consciousness, Pippin argues that the failure of the understanding to account for the unity of the sensory manifold stems from its failure to appreciate the role it plays in constituting the nature of things. What the understanding realizes, Pippin writes, is that “the essence of appearances, the origin of the unity and order of appearances, is not some beyond, or some law-like generalization, but the self-conscious activity of the understanding itself.”⁸ More specifically, the understanding realizes that thought itself both unifies and differentiates the manifold through something like Kantian categorial determinations. Accordingly, for Pippin, the transition to self-consciousness marks a shift from a realistic point of view to an idealistic point of view.⁹

Within this framework, Pippin argues that Hegel’s introduction of infinity refers to self-consciousness itself. According to Pippin, Hegel’s description of infinity as the “repulsion of the selfsame, as selfsame, from itself” just refers to the claim that categorial determinations originate in thought itself, or “that in its unifying function, thought also differentiates the modes of its unifying functions.”¹⁰

However, as will become clearer as my discussion progresses, this reading of infinity is too limited. In Hegel’s discussion of life, which follows the introduction of self-consciousness, he describes the “process” of life (roughly, the coming to be, growth, death, and regeneration of individual organisms) as manifesting infinity.¹¹ Pippin’s reading cannot make sense of how infinity is manifested by the non-self-conscious process of life.

Additionally, a related problem arises for Pippin when we consider his account of the practical turn. In more recent work on the topic, he argues that the move to desire represents the insight that the protagonist consciousness, in thinking, undertakes an active unifying process:

⁸ Pippin 1989, 139.

⁹ Pippin 1989, 131.

¹⁰ Pippin 1989, 139.

¹¹ GW 9:105. References are to the Pinkard translation.

[W]e are, just in actively attending to the world, overcoming the indeterminacy, opacity, foreignness, potential confusion, and disconnectedness of what we are presented with by resolving what belongs together with what, tracking objects through changes and so forth.¹²

Consequently, consciousness must understand itself as striving in some way. As represented by the discussion of life, this development immediately leads the protagonist consciousness to consider itself as a living being and to interpret the world in light of the goal of self-preservation.¹³ By way of identifying the argument for this transition, Pippin suggests that the shift could be motivated by Hegel's dissatisfaction with the emptiness of the Kantian "I think."¹⁴

There are several shortcomings of this reading of the move to desire. It is hard to see how a criticism of the emptiness of Kant's "I think" would demonstrate the necessity of considering the self-conscious subject specifically as a being striving to preserve itself. Additionally, there is not much textual basis for the reading, particularly Pippin's claim that self-consciousness immediately considers itself as a living being. This claim rests on Hegel's discussion of life, which, as I discuss in more detail below, makes a broader point about the process of life as a whole, and not about the way that desiring human subjects in particular conceive of themselves.¹⁵

Pippin's trouble, I submit, is representative of a challenge that any reading in this vein will face. This difficulty emerges from the fact that when Hegel discusses life and desire, he does not seem concerned with the conditions for theoretical cognition, but rather the metaphysical structure of life and desire, a structure that he suggests is related to both infinity and the structure of naive self-consciousness.

¹² Pippin 2014, 29.

¹³ Pippin 2014, 30.

¹⁴ Pippin 2014, 33.

¹⁵ See pp. 23-23. I am furthermore sympathetic to a recent criticism of Pippin's reading of the practical turn put forward by Nicolás García Mills, who argues that Pippin's construal of desire fails to account for Hegel's characterization of desire as involving a "practical engagement with the external world of [a] destructive sort" (Mills, 345).

These difficulties for the Kantian reading give us reason to more closely examine Hegel's account of the structures of forces, self-consciousness, life and desire. To anticipate, I will argue that consciousness comes to take itself as object for a different reason than Pippin articulates: not because it takes its activity to structure empirical objects, but because it takes itself to be self-determining. To set the stage for this interpretation, I will now present the project of the *Phenomenology* and the standpoint of the understanding.

II.

The Project of the Phenomenology. Hegel offers the procedure of the *Phenomenology* as a solution to Sextus Empiricus' "problem of the criterion": that is, the threat of an infinite regress that is generated when we attempt to establish the truth of a knowledge claim. Establishing the truth of these claims requires appeal to second-order claims about what knowledge is and how to distinguish it from error. But then we can ask what warrants the relevant second-order claims, and so on *ad infinitum*—preventing us from finding an ultimate justification for our first-order claims.¹⁶

The core insight behind Hegel's solution is to present "forms of consciousness"—that is, theories about what the world is like and how we acquire knowledge of it, attributed to the protagonist consciousness. We, the readers of the *Phenomenology*, then allow these theories to exhibit their own internal inconsistencies and deficiencies; our role is to merely observe the phenomenological progression from one form of consciousness to the next. This procedure is supposed to solve the skeptical challenge because the phenomenologist does not criticize the theory based on independent theoretical presuppositions, which themselves

¹⁶ Cf. Westphal, "Hegel's Solution to the Dilemma of the Criterion," 174.

demand justification; instead, “while consciousness examines its own self, the only thing that remains to us is purely to look on.”¹⁷

I will draw on Kenneth Westphal’s interpretation to further clarify Hegel’s method and my own interpretive approach. According to Westphal, each form of consciousness is defined by a pair of basic principles or criteria: a) an ontological principle that specifies the structure of the kind of object that the protagonist at this stage purports find in the world (I will call this the “criterion of the object”) and b) an epistemological principle that specifies the kind of knowledge by which consciousness purports to know the world. Consciousness then identifies concrete objects in the world that it takes to meet its criterion of the object, and concrete cognitive activities which it takes to meet its epistemological criterion.¹⁸

In the course of a stage of consciousness, the protagonist consciousness attempts to demonstrate how its object meets the relevant ontological principle, and how its own activity meets the relevant epistemological principle. But what consciousness finds in every case until Absolute Knowing, the final standpoint of the book, is that its principles are deficient. Once consciousness uncovers a deficiency, it is forced to alter its criteria.¹⁹

This overview helps clarify my strategy of focusing on the various structures at play in the transition: I will focus on the understanding’s criterion of the object, and how the failure of the understanding gives rise to a new criterion of the object. However, we should keep in mind that for Hegel, how the protagonist consciousness conceives of the object bears on the epistemological principles that consciousness takes up (and vice versa).²⁰

¹⁷ GW 9:59-60.

¹⁸ Westphal, 178.

¹⁹ GW 9:59-60.

²⁰ See Westphal for more discussion of the interaction of the ontological and epistemological principles of each form of consciousness (Westphal, 183).

The Standpoint of the Understanding. I will now explain how the understanding conceives of its object. The understanding takes causal forces as its object, considering a variety of specific philosophical and scientific conceptions of forces (as well as laws of nature) as it progresses. It is difficult to determine exactly what the understanding's criterion for the object is, but I suggest that the criterion plausibly includes three main features.

The first two features of the criterion are expressed by Hegel's claim that the object is the "unconditioned universal."²¹ By "universal," Hegel means, most generally, something that is multiply instantiable, in contrast to concrete particulars. By "unconditioned," he means that the object of the understanding is not determined by any sensible properties. This refers to a contrast between the object of perception, the previous stage of "Consciousness," and the object of the understanding: whereas perception allowed for sensible universals—that is, observable properties—the object of the understanding is not observable; it can be grasped only in thought.²² The understanding then posits that a force meets these criteria.²³ The understanding seemingly holds that a force meets the criteria because, a) a force, such as the force of gravity, is multiply instantiable in contrast to the particular bodies it affects, and b) forces themselves are not perceptible; only their effects are.

The third feature of the criterion of the object is that the object must metaphysically explain, or ground, the determinations of particulars.²⁴ The notion

²¹ GW 9:82.

²² Here I follow Stewart's interpretation (Stewart, 80-81). See also Brandom *A Spirit of Trust*, 171-172. I wish to anticipate an objection which could be made to the main claim I develop later: that the failure of the understanding prompts the protagonist consciousness to take up a new criterion of the object according to which the object must be self-determining. This objection could claim that the understanding's conception of forces *all along* was of forces as self-determining entities, by appealing to this characterization of forces as the "unconditioned universal." According to the objection, since "unconditioned" can be read as "undetermined by anything outside itself," being unconditioned amounts to being *self*-determining. However, my understanding of "unconditioned" as meaning having no sensible qualities or properties does not imply that forces are *absolutely* unconditioned; it leaves open that forces can be determined by other non-sensible grounds.

²³ "Force is [...] the unconditioned universal" (GW 9:84).

²⁴ Two comments are in order. First, I use "explain" here in a more general sense than Hegel's use of it in discussing the activity of "explanation," which I present in the following section. Second, in what

of metaphysical explanation or grounding can be conveyed through a variety of familiar idioms: for example, we can say that if X metaphysically explains Y, then X is *responsible* for Y; Y is *because* X; Y is *in virtue* of X; and so forth. The understanding takes forces of nature as its object because forces are posited to explain the determinations of objects. Gravity, for example, explains the motion of bodies in the sense that gravity is *responsible* for the motion of bodies; it makes it the case that bodies move. Hegel does not state this feature of the criterion outright, but it is suggested by his characterizations of forces and laws throughout the chapter. For example, he refers to laws as the “inner of the things” and the “true background of things,” which both emphasize the role that laws have as an explanatory ground for the determinations of empirical objects.²⁵

This third feature of the understanding’s criterion of the object is most important for our purposes, for it is this feature that Hegel will argue that forces in fact fail to meet.

III.

I will now show that for Hegel, forces, as conceived by the understanding, cannot adequately perform the grounding or explanatory role that they are supposed to play. Furthermore, this explanatory failure of forces results from a feature that Hegel holds is implicit in the understanding’s conception of forces: that forces are external to particulars.

follows, I will use “metaphysically explains” and “grounds” interchangeably, taking it that for the purposes of my discussion, we can assume that grounding and metaphysical explanation are one and the same. This is an assumption which is contested in the contemporary literature on metaphysical explanation and grounding; see e.g. Michael Raven for discussion of the debate between what he calls “unionists” and “separatists” about grounding and explanation; the former hold that grounding is (at least a kind of) metaphysical explanation, while the latter separate ground from explanation (Raven, “Ground,” 326).

²⁵ GW 9:88/PS 86. For complementary discussions of these features, see Stewart, *The Unity of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 79-81; Flay, “Hegel’s ‘Inverted World,’” 665; and Pinkard, *The Sociality of Reason*, 35.

My discussion will focus on one of the final stages of Hegel's criticism of the understanding: his criticism of "Explanation" (§151-§155). According to this criticism, the understanding cannot demonstrate how a force posited as the ground of a law fully explains that law. While my focus will be on Explanation, I will briefly show how my interpretation can help us make sense of the obscure device of the "inverted world" that occurs between "Explanation" and the introduction of infinity.

Explanation. Explanation falls within Hegel's characterization of what he calls the "supersensible" world of laws (§143-§155), which can be read as the second broad stage of the dialectic of "Force and Understanding." Before I present the supersensible world and Explanation, let me briefly characterize the first stage of the dialectic. Here, Hegel considers the "expression" of force into different "matters."²⁶ What Hegel means by "matters" is not entirely clear; it is a concept which carries over from the "Perception" chapter, and seems to refer to empirical properties. This represents a first model according to which forces explain sensible properties, through the relationship which Hegel characterizes as the expression of forces into matters.

Due to a dialectical development I cannot trace here, this conception of forces develops into a second, that of the supersensible world. Here, forces are "driven back," as it were, to a supersensible world, which is conceived of as "a motionless realm of laws" that is "beyond the perceived world."²⁷ As noted above, Hegel states that the supersensible is the "inner of things" or "true background of things."²⁸ The understanding thus conceives of a realm of laws that is the ultimate level of reality and grounds the determinate features of the empirical realm. By describing the

²⁶ GW 9:84.

²⁷ GW 9:91.

²⁸ GW 9:88. The reader may note that at this point in the dialectic, *laws* and not forces are the fundamental explanatory items posited by the understanding; the understanding in fact identifies the play of forces with appearances. It is sufficient for my purposes that at any point in the dialectic, either laws or forces are taken as providing the fundamental explanation of particulars.

realm of laws as “supersensible,” Hegel indicates that it is beyond the reach of perception; we can perceive the empirical expression of the laws—for example, we can see bodies fall, or magnets move—but not the laws themselves. Note that, for most of this discussion, Hegel is not representing a Kantian conception of the supersensible as a ground of things completely cognitively inaccessible to us; while this position is considered by the understanding, it is quickly rejected.²⁹ Hegel then indicates that the understanding takes itself to infer determinate properties of the supersensible from the character of empirical objects.³⁰

Hegel introduces Explanation as the final sub-stage of the understanding’s consideration of the supersensible world (§151-§155).³¹ Here he introduces a new distinction between *Kraft* (“Force”) and *Gesetz* (“Law”) in §152. These terms take on specific meanings in this context, distinct from Hegel’s uses of each in the preceding discussion; I will use the capitalized words to reflect this difference.

As Hugo Havranek has argued, with this distinction, Hegel is apparently distinguishing between a metaphysical ground (“Force”) and a corresponding correlation between properties (“Law”).³² Hegel writes that a Force is a simple “abstraction” which “itself draws into itself the differences between what attracts and what is attracted,” while in a Law “differences are expressed as self-sufficient moments.”³³ This characterization is made more concrete by Hegel’s example of gravity:

²⁹ GW 9:89-90.

³⁰ See Brandom for greater discussion of the importance of inference at this stage of the dialectic (Brandom, 170-176).

³¹ Treating these sections as a unified position called “Explanation” is a controversial interpretive choice. Hegel introduces the term “Explanation” in §154; Stewart, for example, has accordingly taken Explanation to be a new stage of the understanding that is represented only in §154-§155 and that succeeds a distinct position represented in §151-§153 (Stewart, 94). However, there are good textual reasons to take “Explanation” to refer to a unified position represented from §151-§155, including Hegel’s summary of “Explanation” in §163, which recapitulates his discussion throughout §151-§155.

³² Havranek, 8-10. Note that while I previously stated that the understanding takes “causal forces” as its object, and I take Hegel to posit a causal relation between forces and particulars, Hegel does not characterize the relationship between Force and Law as a causal relationship; rather, he writes that Force “expresses” itself as Law. I take the relationship of grounding as I am using it to be broad enough to capture this notion of expression.

³³ GW 9:93.

In the movement of falling, Force is the simple, or gravity, for which the Law is that the magnitudes of the distinct moments of the motion, or the time elapsed and the space traversed, relate themselves to each other as root and square.³⁴

It is most likely that Hegel has in mind the law of falling bodies, which states that the distance travelled by a falling body is proportionally related to the square of the elapsed time:

$$d = \frac{1}{2} gt^2$$

In this example, the relevant Law is the above relationship, while the Force is the force of gravity, which is taken to be the ground of the relationship.³⁵

This conception of Force and Law exemplifies the understanding's conception of the object that I have articulated. As I argued previously, the understanding holds that forces metaphysically explain particulars. Here, Hegel is positing Laws as a kind of intermediary between Forces and material bodies (the relevant particulars). Forces metaphysically explain Laws, which describe regularities that bodies exhibit.³⁶

Within this context, the main task of "Explanation" is to demonstrate the "necessity" of the connection between Force and Law.³⁷ Hegel does not clearly

³⁴ GW 9:93. Similarly, he writes that "simple electricity" is a Force, while the expression of the relationship between positive and negative electricity is a Law (GW 9:93). It's unclear which corresponding Law Hegel has in mind; Coulomb's law is a possible candidate.

³⁵ Havranek, 8-10. See Havranek for further argument for this interpretation of Force and Law, against interpretations offered by Watkins ("Kraft und Gesetz") and Emundts ("Consciousness and the Criterion of Knowledge in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*," 2017) (Havranek, 2-10). Watkins argues that Hegel's discussion of Force and Law concerns the relationship between universal and particular laws (Watkins, 239). Emundts argues that Force is the single term often contained in the lefthand side of an equation representing a law, and Law is the plurality of terms on the righthand side (Emundts 2017, 247).

³⁶ Hegel does not in fact speak of "bodies" (*Körper*) in "Force and the Understanding," but I have identified bodies as the relevant particulars because of Hegel's focus in this section on the law of falling bodies, which maps on to his discussion in the *Philosophy of Nature*, where "bodies" are under explicit discussion. Additionally, just prior to Explanation, Hegel refers to the law of universal gravitation in relation to stones and celestial bodies (GW 9:92). With regard to Hegel's example of electricity in this section, it is plausible he also ascribes to the understanding a model of a Force (electricity) which grounds a Law that in turn describes the behavior of charged bodies.

³⁷ This goal is first specified with respect to the law of universal gravitation: "the pure concept of the law as universal attraction must be grasped in its true significance so that within it, as absolutely

explain why this becomes the understanding's goal, but I offer the following reconstruction. As discussed, the Force is posited as the metaphysical explanation of the Law: the Force is meant to ground the character of the Law, or make it the case that the Law is such that it is. The corresponding thought seems to be that, because the Force is supposed to metaphysically explain the Law, there should be a necessary connection between the Force and the relationship expressed by the Law. This captures a familiar intuition about laws of nature that underpins contemporary "governing" conceptions of laws of nature: that if a law explains its instances, it must make it the case that its instances obtain, and this relationship of "making it the case" can be further spelled out in terms of a law necessitating that its instances obtain. A final step can be understood as stemming from an assumed relation between the metaphysical and epistemic aspects of explanation. The thought here is that, if the Force makes the Law necessary, it should be possible for us to grasp or show how the Force necessitates the Law: the necessary connection should be intelligible to us.

We can now consider Hegel's criticism of Explanation. He argues that the understanding is met with the "indifference" (*Gleichgültigkeit*) between a Force and its Law.³⁸ By "indifference," Hegel means the lack of a necessary connection between two elements.³⁹ Returning to the example of the law of falling bodies, Hegel states that the understanding cannot overcome the "indifference" between the relata of the law: that is, "time and space" are indifferent to each other.⁴⁰ This claim suggests that the understanding cannot demonstrate why the force of gravity necessarily causes motion in which any given relationship holds: in this case, that the distance travelled by a body is proportional to the square of the elapsed time.

simple, the differences, which are present in the law as such, themselves return again into the inner as simple unity. This simple unity is the inner necessity of the law" (GW 9:93). Showing that "differences present in law" return to the "inner world" is the same, for Hegel, as demonstrating the "necessity" between a Law and the Force that grounds it.

³⁸ GW 9:93.

³⁹ Havranek 8, 13. Emundts has a similar interpretation of "indifference" (Emundts 2017, 71); see also Heidegger (Heidegger, 122). Kreines discusses a similar use of the term in the *Logic* (Kreines, *Reason in the World*, 38ff).

⁴⁰ GW 9:94.

For example, the understanding cannot show why it is the time expression that is squared, rather than the distance expression, or why the time expression is squared instead of cubed.

Further evidence that Hegel is concerned with this criticism comes from the *Philosophy of Nature*, where Hegel provides his own demonstration of the law of falling bodies. He attempts to show why the time element of the law of falling bodies must be squared by appealing to features of gravity, space, and time.⁴¹ I will explain some elements of this account below. For our present purposes, however, the important point is that Hegel offers such a demonstration in the *Philosophy of Nature*, which provides additional evidence that this is the kind of demonstration that he thinks the understanding fails to provide.

Thus, Hegel argues that in Explanation, the understanding fails to show how a Force necessarily yields a specific Law. For Hegel, this shows that the understanding fails to demonstrate how Forces meet the criterion of the object, because it cannot show how they explain the specific content of a Law, and so the determinations of bodies as described by that Law.⁴²

This analysis raises the question of why it is not open to the understanding to employ the kind of strategy that Hegel represents in the *Philosophy of Nature*. The answer, I will argue, is that Hegel holds that the understanding is implicitly committed to a misconception of forces.

The Understanding's Conception of Forces. I will now show that Hegel attributes the failure of the understanding to an implicit feature of the understanding's conception of forces: that forces are external to particulars. At the stage of Explanation in particular, Hegel ascribes to the understanding a broadly

⁴¹ *Enc.* II §267R. Citations are to the Petry translation.

⁴² For the sake of brevity, I omit full discussion of Hegel's criticism of a final step of the process of "Explanation." In brief: at this stage, the understanding attempts to explain the necessary connection between Force and Law by stipulating that a given Force is just "that which gives rise to such and such a Law," for example, by defining electricity as just that which gives rise to positive and negative charges. The criticism is that such explanations are tautologous (GW 9:94-95).

Newtonian conception of forces as external to material bodies that he explicitly criticizes in the *Philosophy of Nature*.

I must first explain what I mean by an “implicit” feature of the understanding’s conception of forces. Westphal has argued that not only does each form of consciousness hold an explicit criterion of the object and a corresponding conception of how the object meets that criterion, but also that there are “features of an object itself that are closely related to those features of that object explicitly captured by consciousness’s conception of objects, but which are not themselves explicitly captured by that conception.”⁴³ These features, Westphal argues, are “the first ones consciousness confronts in discovering the inadequacy of its conception of objects.”⁴⁴ Hegel does not explicitly present this part of his methodology, but it helps explain how the dialectic progresses in general.⁴⁵

We can now consider how the understanding implicitly conceives of forces as “external” to particulars. I will first discuss the idea of the externality at a fairly general level, with respect to the overall progression of the “Force and the Understanding.” Then, I will more carefully present the conception of externality suggested in “Explanation.” My account here will necessarily be somewhat reconstructive; Hegel does not clearly spell out the relevant conception of externality in “Explanation” itself. However, this account can be pieced together by examining the complementary discussion in the *Philosophy of Nature*. Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* of course has distinct aims and methodological constraints from the *Phenomenology*; nevertheless, judicious consideration of Hegel’s more detailed discussion in the *Encyclopedia* can help illuminate Hegel’s discussion in the *Phenomenology*.

⁴³ Westphal, 180.

⁴⁴ Westphal, 180.

⁴⁵ To give an example: Perception fails in part because it does not conceive of substances as possessing causal powers that explain how their properties hang together. Its conception of the object does not explicitly refer to this lack of causal efficacy; rather, the failure of perception reveals that this feature was implicit (and needs to be rejected, hence the move to “Force and the Understanding.”)

Most generally, externality can be thought of as some kind of ontological separateness; in the case of “Force and the Understanding,” specifically, the ground of some particular is ontologically distinct from that particular. Throughout “Force and the Understanding,” there is a general paradigm according to which forces are conceived as external to the particulars which they are meant to explain, although the detailed conception of forces and the relevant explicandum changes throughout the chapter. As mentioned above, we first have forces which are meant to explain “matters” (*Materien*) or properties. I submit that Hegel here characterizes the understanding as conceiving of force and its explicanda (that is, the matters) as external to each other. This is suggested by the following quotation: “The force as such, or as driven back into itself, is thereby for itself as an excluding One, for which the unfolding of the matters is another stably existing essence” (GW 9:84). In the next broad section of the text, forces are conceived as constituting a supersensible world which grounds “appearances.” Here, the externality of forces is closely related to the understanding’s explicit conception of forces as constituting a “supersensible realm” which is the “background of things.” While not explicit, this metaphysical distinction between the supersensible and the sensible seemingly entails a conception of forces as external to the “appearances” which belong to the domain of the sensible.

I will now look more closely at “Explanation,” where the model of the supersensible world gets further specified. Recall that here, Hegel’s model is of a Force, the Law which it grounds, and the material bodies described by the relevant Law. To consider more carefully Hegel’s characterization of the externality of forces, we must distinguish two ways in which forces could be external to bodies. First, forces could be external to bodies in the sense that the property of exerting a force or forces is not essential to a given body; it is not just in virtue of being material that a body exerts forces. I will use the term “the non-essentiality of forces” to refer to this conception of forces. Second, forces could be external to bodies in the sense that they are external causes; a force associated with a given body acts only on other bodies, not that very body. In what follows I will continue

to distinguish between these two types of externality, but will use the phrases “the externality of forces” as shorthand to refer to the view that forces both are non-essential to bodies and serve as external causes.

In a passage from the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel suggests a criticism of forces conceived as external to bodies in each of these ways. While this passage is external to the “Explanation” section, it sheds light on Hegel’s criticism there. In this passage, he criticizes the understanding because it “degrades” a force, such as magnetism, “into something lifeless,” because magnetism “is only predicated of another existence, and no cognizance is taken of the immanent life of this existence, nor of how it has its indigenous (*einheimisch*) and distinctive self-production and exposition.”⁴⁶ Here Hegel contrasts two conceptions of magnetism: one which “predicates” magnetism of another “existence”—or magnetized body—and one which grasps the “immanent life” and self-producing character of that body. The first conception of magnetism posits it as something external in both senses discussed above. The claim that magnetism is merely “predicated” of a body, in contrast with a view which sees magnetism as the “immanent life” of the body, suggests a) that magnetism is not conceived of as essential to that body and b) that the body can be affected only by magnetic forces that are external to it.

This evidence can be supplemented by turning to the *Philosophy of Nature*, specifically the end of the “Mathematics” chapter and the “Mechanics” section of the “Physics” chapter. Here Hegel attributes both kinds of externality to a Newtonian conception of forces. First, Hegel criticizes the “conceptless reflection” that “thinks of what it calls forces, as being implanted in matter, and therefore as originally external to it.”⁴⁷ This quotation expresses a criticism of a view on which forces are not essential to matter.⁴⁸ Second, he argues that this conception of forces

⁴⁶ GW 9:39.

⁴⁷ *Enc.* II §261R. In the following discussion, I will speak interchangeably of “matter” and “bodies.” At the beginning of the “Mechanics” section, Hegel states that the concept of a body is a “superficial determination” of the concept of matter (*Enc.* II §263), but then proceeds to use the terms more or less interchangeably in this section.

⁴⁸ We can note that Hegel accuses Kant of the same mistake. While he compliments Kant’s construction of matter, acknowledging that Kant held that “matter had to be derived” from attraction

results in the mistaken view of bodies as inert: he says it is an axiom of “ordinary physical mechanics” that “a body can only be set in motion or come to rest through an external cause.”⁴⁹ The important point for our purposes is just that Hegel criticizes Newtonianism for conceiving of forces both as non-essential to matter and as external causes which affect matter. This makes it plausible that he would be criticizing such a view of forces in the “Force and the Understanding.”⁵⁰

But what is moreover crucial to grasp is that Hegel continues in the “Mechanics” section to argue that the Newtonian conception of forces as external to matter must be overcome in order to provide a proper deduction of the law of falling bodies. In other words, Hegel shows how adopting his preferred conception of forces helps overcome the “indifference” problem as he presents it in the *Phenomenology*.

I will offer only a brief sketch of this argument.⁵¹ Hegel’s deduction draws on a complex argument that spans the “Mathematics” chapter and the “Mechanics”

and repulsion, Kant yet “assumed it [matter] to be complete in itself, and therefore that which is to be attracted and repelled is already fully constituted matter” (*Enc. II* §262R). I will not attempt to explicate or defend this criticism, but merely note that it shows that Hegel believes Kant is committed to the non-essentiality of forces.

Insofar as I take Kant to be among Hegel’s targets in “Force and the Understanding,” my interpretation bears some resemblance to that offered by Emundts (*Erfahren und Erkennen*, 2012), who takes Kant to be Hegel’s chief target in this chapter. However, Emundts attributes a different criticism to Hegel. Emundts reads Hegel’s discussion of Force and Law as a criticism of Kant’s Analogies of Experience. She says that Hegel claims that because of the way that Kant aims to ground laws in the first and second analogies, Kant must be committed to the claim that any given law holds necessarily and cannot be subject to exceptions (Emundts 2012, 259). What the understanding learns, however, is that individual laws are not exceptionless, and it is only through the whole complex of laws that anything is completely determined (Emundts 2012, 261).

In this connection, Emundts further argues that Hegel says that laws, properly understood, have the structure of “infinity” because they display a higher-order identity of unity and difference: determinate laws appear to be independent of each other, but in fact are only true taken as a totality of laws, and so constitute a unity (Emundts 2012, 281ff). On my reading, in contrast, Hegel’s main target is the view that forces are external to matter, and “infinity,” as I discuss below, refers to the structure of something self-determining. Aside from these differences, Emundts’ reading differs from mine in the deeper respect that her interpretation falls into the paradigm of the Kantian reading that I reject. As she puts it, she takes the transition to self-consciousness to mark the realization, by consciousness, that “the truth is a product of the activity of knowing subjects” (Emundts, 302).

⁴⁹ *Enc. II* §264R.

⁵⁰ See Edward Halper, “Hegel’s Critique of Newton,” for a helpful discussion of Hegel’s critique of the law of inertia.

⁵¹ My account is influenced by Stephen Houlgate’s discussion. See also Halper.

section of the “Physics” chapter. Throughout this argument, he attempts to provide a series of derivations in which he begins with an analysis of the metaphysical structure of space and time and then argues that the structures of space and time metaphysically necessitate the existence of motion, which in turn necessitates the existence of matter. Finally, from the existence of matter, Hegel argues for the metaphysical necessity of gravity and free fall.⁵²

Most important for our purposes is the fact that Hegel characterizes gravity as “internal” to matter. Hegel describes his view of gravity in the following remark:

The primary essence of matter is that it has weight. This is not an external property which may be separated from it. Gravity constitutes the substantiality of matter.⁵³

Hegel thus expresses that gravity constitutes the essence of a body. He also continues to argue that free fall is “the manifestation of the body’s own gravity; within the body it is therefore immanent.”⁵⁴ As Houlgate writes, this is contrasted with motion by impact, in which another body serves as an external cause of the body’s motion.⁵⁵ Thus, for Hegel, gravity is “internal” to the body in two senses that correspond to the two senses of externality that I outlined above: a) it constitutes the essence of a body, and b) it functions as an internal cause of the body’s movement in free fall. (I will henceforth refer to forces being “internal” to bodies as shorthand for the conjunction of both kinds of internality.⁵⁶)

Hegel then argues that because gravity is taken to be the essence of a body, which manifests itself as free fall, and because of the tight metaphysical connection that he has previously drawn between space and time, motion, and matter, we can conclude that free fall is ultimately generated by the nature of space and time

⁵² *Enc. II* §260, 261; Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel* (2005), 130-144.

⁵³ *Enc. II* §262R.

⁵⁴ *Enc. II* §267.

⁵⁵ Houlgate 2005, 140.

⁵⁶ It should be noted that in the *Philosophy of Nature* Hegel criticizes the notion of “force” as a “reflectional determination” of the understanding (*Enc. II* §261R), and in his articulations of his conception of gravity as internal to matter he does not refer to gravity as a force. However, for ease of exposition I will continue to refer to Hegel’s conception of forces as internal to matter to refer to his view that what we think of through the commonplace notion of “force,” e.g. gravity, ought to be conceived as internal to matter.

themselves. In other words, when a body moves in virtue of its own nature, as Hegel thinks it does in free fall, this motion is due to the nature of space and time. Accordingly, he holds, the quantitative relation between space travelled and time elapsed in free fall must be determined by the nature of the space and time. He provides another complex argument, which I will not discuss here, as to why the features of the structure of space and time explain why the time element of the law is squared.⁵⁷

We can now step back from the details of this discussion. The crucial point for our purposes is that according to Hegel, the conception of gravity as internal to bodies is necessary to establish that free fall is generated by the nature of space and time. This conclusion, in turn, licenses the derivation of the law that he provides. In other words, Hegel holds that a Newtonian conception of forces as external to bodies prevents a proper grasp of the law of falling bodies, namely a grasp of the necessity of the relation between space and time in the equation. This provides strong evidence that Hegel is making essentially the same move in the “Force and the Understanding” when he criticizes Explanation for its inability to show how the relationship expressed by the Law of falling bodies follows necessarily from the Force of gravity. In turn, this confirms that Hegel’s basic criticism of Explanation is that forces, conceived of as external to bodies, cannot do the requisite explanatory work that—according to the understanding’s own criterion of its object—they are supposed to do.

Thus, Hegel criticizes the understanding’s conception of its object as an explanatory ground that is external to that which is supposed to be explained. This, I will argue, prompts consciousness to form a new criterion of the object, captured by the language of “infinity.” However, before moving on, I will briefly

⁵⁷ *Enc. II* §267R; Houlgate, 140-144. See Heidegger for discussion of Hegel’s articulation of the mutual dependence between movement, on the one hand, and space and time, on the other, in Hegel’s Jena lectures on the philosophy of nature. (Heidegger, 122)

sketch how my analysis can shed light on the stage of the dialectic known as the “inverted world,” which directly precedes the emergence of infinity.⁵⁸

The Inverted World. According to Hegel, the inverted world is posited as a "second supersensible world" that is ruled by the "principle of flux and alteration."⁵⁹ He illustrates the law of the inverted world as follows:

What in the law of the first world is sweet is, in this inverted in-itself, sour; what is black in the former is white in the latter. What in the law of the first world is the north pole in the magnet, is in its other supersensible in-itself, namely, in the earth, the south pole, whereas what was there the south pole is here the north pole. Likewise, what in the first law of electricity is the oxygen pole becomes in its other supersensible essence the hydrogen pole; and conversely, what is the hydrogen pole here comes the oxygen pole there.⁶⁰

As I read it, the inverted world represents a final attempt by the understanding to locate a law-like ground of the determinations of particulars, by positing that everything we interact with in the empirical world has a supersensible counterpart that explains its potential for change. This would be akin to an inverted realm of Platonic Forms that ground, not the qualities that a thing actually possesses, but the possibility of it acquiring opposite qualities: for example, a hot thing becoming cold.

I submit that with this, Hegel extends his critique of a conception of forces as external to particulars. In referring back to his criticism of the inverted world, he states that the understanding at this stage erroneously “distributes to two worlds, or to two substantial elements, the difference in itself.”⁶¹ This reference to “two worlds” and “two substantial elements” indicates that Hegel is claiming that at the stage of the inverted world, the understanding posits the ground of something’s determinations as external to it. Similarly, in introducing infinity from his

⁵⁸ Many interpretations of this stage of the dialectic have been offered. Flay, Pinkard, and Stern all interpret it as a *reductio ad absurdum* for the understanding (Flay 677, Pinkard 42, Stern 63). I follow Siep in rejecting this reading, and emphasizing the way that the discussion of the inverted world gives rise to infinity (Siep 2014, 85-86).

⁵⁹ GW 9:97.

⁶⁰ GW 9:97.

⁶¹GW 9:101.

discussion of the inverted world, Hegel claims that “from the representation of inversion [...] the sensuous representation of the attachment of the differences in diverse elements of stable existence must be detached.”⁶² Again, this quotation reinforces the idea that Hegel is concerned here with the externality of the ground of something’s determinations.⁶³

Hegel’s discussion of the inverted world thus provides additional evidence that his core criticism of the understanding is that it posits forces as external to particulars. I will now show that this criticism of the understanding explains Hegel’s presentation of infinity.

IV.

Hegel’s introduction of the concept of infinity in §160-§162 has posed a great challenge to interpreters. He calls infinity “the simple essence of life, the soul of the world, the universal bloodstream, which is omnipresent, neither dulled nor interrupted by any difference, which is instead itself both every difference as well as their sublatedness.”⁶⁴ Infinity, he says, first becomes apparent to the protagonist consciousness with the emergence of self-consciousness.⁶⁵ Furthermore, it is apparent to the phenomenological observer that infinity is manifested by life.⁶⁶

I will argue that we can make sense of the discussion of infinity if we take infinity to represent the emergence of a new criterion of the object: that the object must be a self-determining entity, or an entity whose essence produces its

⁶² GW 9:98.

⁶³ My interpretation of these quotations sets my reading apart from Gadamer’s. Gadamer, as I do, understands the inverted world as “an inversion of Plato’s world in which motion and alteration were supposed to be naught” (Gadamer, 44). However, he describes the inverted world as “a world in which everything moves because everything contains the origin of change in itself” (Gadamer, 45). Given the quotations considered in this paragraph, I believe this characterization cannot be right, because Hegel criticizes the understanding for continuing to posit the ground of a thing’s determinations as external to it. My interpretation is compatible with that offered by Siep, who glosses Hegel’s conclusion from the inverted world as follows: “since the supersensible world constitutes the truth, the reality, the ‘core’ of the sensible world, the two cannot be separated” (Siep 2014, 83).

⁶⁴ GW 9:99.

⁶⁵ GW 9:100.

⁶⁶ GW 9:105.

determinations. This new criterion, I will argue, emerges directly from the failure of the understanding because it represents a structure in which the ground of an entity's determinations is internal to that thing.

We can begin with some of Hegel's (slightly) less extravagant presentations of infinity. Hegel defines infinity as an "absolute restlessness of pure self-movement"⁶⁷ and "difference as inner difference."⁶⁸ And he writes:

It is itself self-equality, for the differences are tautological; they are differences that are none at all. This self-equal essence relates itself only to itself. It relates itself to itself so that this is an other essence to which the relation directs itself, and the relating to itself is in fact estranging [*das Entzweien*], or it is that very self-equality which is inner difference.⁶⁹

In this passage, Hegel describes the structure of an entity that consists of an "essence" and particular determinations, where the essence and determinations are related in two important ways. First, the essence can be identified with each of those determinations. This feature is suggested by the claim that the "differences are tautological" and are "differences that are none at all." Second, as suggested by the characterization of infinity as "self-movement," the essence *produces* the determinations. This feature is also suggested by the description of infinity as an essence which "relates itself only to itself" through an act of "estranging." This description conveys the idea of something that undergoes change by producing particular determinations which are, as it were, distinct from it, but yet can be identified with it.

Hegel is thus describing the structure of a self-determining entity: an entity that is responsible for producing its own determinations.⁷⁰ Importantly, in contrast to the understanding's model of forces, an infinite entity⁷¹ contains an internal

⁶⁷ GW 9:100.

⁶⁸ GW 9:99.

⁶⁹ GW 9:99.

⁷⁰ I take this to be complementary with Houlgate's definition of infinity: he defines infinity as "the single, autonomous process of generating and undermining differences and thereby integrating them into a unity, or 'pure self-movement'" (Houlgate, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* [2012], 79).

⁷¹ Note that Hegel speaks only of "the infinite," not of an infinite "entity," but I use this formulation for ease of exposition.

ground of change within itself, in the two senses distinguished in the previous section. First, on this picture, the ground of the entity's determinations is internal to it in the sense that the ground is the essence of the entity. Second, on this model the object does not have an external cause of its determinations; the cause is internal to it. Hegel's use of the term "infinity," present throughout his corpus, is of course quite different from any conventional use of the term. I propose that he uses it to indicate the idea of a lack of limitations: an infinite entity, in being self-determining, is not determined or limited by things external to it.⁷² We can note that the relevant notion of the infinite producing its determinations here is quite strong: it is a notion of the entity *completely* producing its determinations; for if the infinite did not itself completely produce its determinations, then it would remain subject to determination by entities external to it.⁷³

But this characterization remains highly abstract. To develop it, we can look ahead in the dialectic, to the discussion of "life," which occurs immediately after the introduction of desire in the "Truth of Self-Certainty" chapter (§168-§172). Here Hegel describes "life" as the entire process of individual organisms coming to be, developing, producing new living things, dying, and so forth, and characterizes life as infinite. There are several complexities here. First, Hegel describes life as infinite only for us, the phenomenological observers, a point I return to in the next

⁷² We can note the general affinity between this interpretation of infinity and Hegel's presentation of "true" infinity in the *Logic*, which he describes as the "self-sublation" of the infinite and the finite "in one process" (GW 21:125). Furthermore, in the *Logic* Hegel explicitly links "infinity" and the idea of self-determination; for example, he writes of "infinite self-determining" (GW 21:151). For discussion of the structure of infinity in Hegel's logic, as well as consideration of Hegel's argument that infinity is manifest in subjectivity, see Horstmann, 2003.

⁷³ It might be asked whether this conception of infinity entails that there can be only one "infinite," because if there were more than one infinite entity, these entities would have to be related to each other, but then the relationship of one infinite entity to another would constitute a limitation of that entity, and so render it finite. This would put pressure on my approach in this section, which is to outline a general conception of infinity that I claim Hegel attributes to Life, but then importantly will also be taken to characterize self-consciousness. However, I believe that it is not implied by the very concept of infinity that there can be only one infinite. This is because it is left open by the conception of infinity that there could be multiple infinite entities which don't interact, and so do not determine or limit each other. This being said, as I will discuss in the following section, there is reason to think that at this stage of the dialectic, the protagonist consciousness recognizes only one infinite entity (viz., itself).

section.⁷⁴ More generally, it is difficult to ascertain the exact role of the discussion of life in the dialectic. Hegel states that life is the “object” of desire,⁷⁵ but here it is not the case that life is the principal object of phenomenological inquiry; life is rather the object of desire in the sense that it is the object of desire’s pursuit. But putting aside these complexities, Hegel’s presentation of life is illuminating because with it, Hegel provides the most detailed suggestion of what he means by “infinity.”

Hegel writes that the “self-repose” of life is “an absolutely restless infinity [...] *self-sufficiency* [*Selbstständigkeit*] itself into which the differences of the movement have been dissolved.”⁷⁶ First, we can note that, based on this quotation, it is plausible to read Hegel as identifying infinity and “self-sufficiency.” In this context, “self-sufficiency” refers to an entity’s capacity to completely determine or explain itself, and so remain independent of determination by external entities. Hegel’s identifying infinity with self-sufficiency thus confirms that for Hegel, something that exhibits infinity has the capacity to determine itself.

Second, Hegel’s attribution of infinity to life can make our understanding of infinity more concrete. Hegel indicates that life as a process bears a certain relationship to individual living beings. Describing life, he writes, “This very fluidity, as self-equal self-sufficiency, is their stable existence, or it is their substance in which they are thus differentiated members and parts, where each is existing-for-itself.”⁷⁷ Neuhouser provides a helpful gloss of this passage. He writes that life counts as a self-identical “unity of distinguished moments,” in Hegel’s terms, because it “preserves itself as what it is only through the activity, interaction, and ultimate passing away of its distinct individual members.”⁷⁸ This

⁷⁴ Hegel indicates that the infinity of life is only “for us” in the following passage; “As self-sufficient as consciousness is, its object is in-itself just as self-sufficient. Self-consciousness, which is utterly for itself and which immediately marks its object with the character of the negative, or is initially desire, will instead thus learn from experience about this object’s self-sufficiency.” As I argue below, Hegel identifies infinity and “self-sufficiency”; thus, he here indicates that the protagonist does not recognize life as infinite, but will instead have to learn this.

⁷⁵ GW 9:104.

⁷⁶ GW 9:105, original emphasis.

⁷⁷ GW 9:105.

⁷⁸ Neuhouser, “Desire, Recognition, and the Relation between Bondsman and Lord” (2009), 41, citing GW 9:105.

interpretation highlights the way that life, for Hegel, exhibits the structure of infinity as I have analyzed it. On this picture, it is in the essence of life as a whole to produce individual living things, which themselves change and pass away. The individual living things are thus the “determinations” of life that are produced by the essence of life, and are distinct from that essence and yet can be identified with it.

Hegel’s reference to self-sufficiency in the quoted passage indicates that he holds that life as a whole, by exhibiting this structure, exhibits the capacity for self-determination.⁷⁹ Hegel’s discussion of life thus makes his conception of infinity more concrete, and demonstrates that Hegel identifies infinity with self-sufficiency. But why take infinity to represent a new criterion of the object?

First, as I discuss in greater detail below, there is explicit evidence that naive self-consciousness emerges because consciousness takes itself to exhibit the structure of infinity: in §163, Hegel writes, “As infinity is finally an object for consciousness, and consciousness is aware of it [infinity] as what it [infinity] is, so is consciousness self-consciousness.”⁸⁰ More generally, it makes sense to take infinity to represent a new criterion of the object due to its position in the dialectical progression; it directly follows Hegel’s discussion of the final stage of the understanding (the inverted world), and directly precedes the introduction of self-consciousness. Furthermore, my analysis shows why the criterion of the object represented by infinity would emerge from the failure of the understanding. As I noted above, on the model represented by infinity, the ground of an entity’s

⁷⁹ See also Heidegger on Hegel’s emphasis on life’s “self-subsisting independence” (Heidegger, 143). Siep similarly notes that for Hegel, life is “an ‘autopoietic’ process of self-formation” which “shapes and forms [...] even as it dissolves these shapes and forms in processes of self-sustenance and the reproduction of the species” (Siep 2014, 89). Houlgate notes that life exhibits infinity, according to Hegel, but explains this as referring to the relationship between a body and its organs (Houlgate 2012, 85). Hegel’s focus, however, is more plausibly on the relationship between life as a process and individual living things; he describes “life as a process” which consists of a “movement” of “shapes,” which he then identifies with “life as living things” (GW 9:1060. For additional discussions of life, see also Bowman, 154ff and Emundts 2012, 323ff.

⁸⁰ GW 9:100; Here the Miller translation leads us astray, for it indicates that *consciousness* is what is finally an object for consciousness (Miller, 101). The text in German is “*indem sie endlich für das Bewußtein Gegenstand ist, als das, was sie ist, so ist das Bewußtein Selbstbewußtein,*” where the antecedent of *sie* is unambiguously *Die Unendlichkeit*.

determinations is internal to that entity. In contrast, the understanding conceives of forces as non-essential to matter and as external causes—which, Hegel argues, is responsible for the failure of forces to be fully explanatory. This failure accordingly drives consciousness to formulate a new criterion of the object: one according to which the ground of an entity’s determinations must be internal to that entity.

Together, these points strongly support the claim Hegel’s discussion of infinity represents the emergence of a new criterion of the object. The criterion can be put as follows:

To be infinite, some entity x must have the following structure:

- a) x must consist of an essence and determinations, which are distinct from the essence but can be identified with it;
- b) The essence of x must produce its determinations.⁸¹

This completes my presentation of the criterion of the object represented by infinity. We can now turn to examine the transition to self-consciousness.⁸²

⁸¹ It is important to note that Hegel indicates that the distinction between essence and determinations, or universal or particular, amounts to an artificial abstraction. Hegel writes the following:

What was supposed to be self-equality is thus already instead one of the estranged moments rather than being the absolute essence itself. ‘The self-equal estranges itself’ means just that it, as already estranged, thereby sublates itself, and sublates itself as otherness. The unity, about which it is commonly said that difference cannot come out of it, is in fact itself only one moment of estrangement; it is the abstraction of simplicity, which stands in contrast to difference. (GW 9:100)

By this, Hegel apparently means to indicate that identifying a stable or “self-equal” pole of an infinite structure is a kind of abstraction, and the pole itself is part of a continuous process of “estrangement” and cannot be understood in isolation from that process. However, for ease of exposition I will continue to speak of the structure of infinity in the way outlined in the main text.

⁸² It is worth comparing my interpretation of infinity and its role in the transition to broadly similar considerations that are offered by Brady Bowman (see Bowman, “Hegels Übergang zum Selbstbewußtsein in der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*,” 157-159, 163-165). Bowman discusses how the Hegelian notion of “identity” is exhibited in the structures of forces and laws, the inverted world, self-consciousness, and life. According to his analysis of identity, it is “an asymmetrical relation” between a universal aspect and its determinate moments (157-159, 163-165). As I have analyzed infinity, this corresponds more or less to the first part of the concept. However, in this section I also argued for a claim about the concept of infinity that Bowman does not make about the concept of identity: that it is important to the structure of infinity that the essence or universal aspect of an entity produces that entity’s determinate moments. Bowman does note that in the case of Explanation, force is posited as the ground of the relationship expressed by a law, and in the case of the inverted world the realm of natural law is supposed to ground the motions of appearances (Bowman, 164). But he does not

V.

The Transition to Self-Consciousness. Based on the above analysis, we should expect that the protagonist consciousness comes to take itself as object because it believes that it is infinite. And, as noted above, Hegel writes: “As infinity is finally an object for consciousness, and consciousness is aware of it as what it is, so is consciousness self-consciousness.”⁸³ This quotation suggests that when the protagonist consciousness becomes aware of infinity, it reaches the stage of self-consciousness: that is, it comes to take itself as its object.

Before I move on, let me comment on the place of “naive self-consciousness” and desire within the broader dialectic. Strictly speaking, “naive self-consciousness” is not itself a full configuration of consciousness, because in Hegel’s presentation of it, it does not have a corresponding “enactment” in the world, by which we see a contradiction in the configuration. Nevertheless, Hegel presents what I call “naive self-consciousness” as a distinct “moment” by which “the concept of self-consciousness is brought to completion” (GW 9:108). In a recapitulation preceding the introduction of the dialectic of recognition, Hegel lists “the pure I without differences” as a “moment” distinct from the moment of desire. The phrase the “pure I without differences” echoes exactly Hegel’s description of self-consciousness in §164-167, which I will turn to presently. This shows that there is the need for an account, first of how a move to this conception of self-consciousness is effected, and then for the move from this conception of self-consciousness to desire.

I will now offer an interpretation of Hegel’s characterization of naive self-consciousness, and show how it serves as a plausible candidate for meeting the criterion represented by infinity. To recall, I say “serves as a candidate” because,

include this feature in his analysis of “identity” or discuss it when it comes to life or self-consciousness. This element of infinity, I will argue, is important for understanding why the stages of naive self-consciousness and desire emerge.

⁸³ GW 9:100.

according to the overall methodology of the *Phenomenology*, naive self-consciousness cannot fully meet this criterion, otherwise the transition to desire would not be effected. Hegel describes naive self-consciousness as follows:

I distinguish myself from myself, and in doing so, what is immediately for me is this: What is distinguished is not distinguished. I, the like pole [*das Gleichnamige*], repel myself away from myself; but what is distinguished, what is posited as not the same as me, is, while it is differentiated, immediately no difference for me.⁸⁴

With language such as “distinguishing itself from itself” and “repel myself away from myself,” Hegel indicates that naive self-consciousness exhibits the structure of infinity. The basic structure that he describes is the “I” which “posits” moments that are different from it, but that it also identifies with itself.

To more carefully understand the structure of the “I” that Hegel is describing, we can note that Hegel’s language strongly evokes Fichte’s account of self-positing, an appropriation of Kant’s theory of the “I think” that must be able to accompany each of our representations. I will briefly sketch a Fichtean reading of naive self-consciousness, drawing on Fred Neuhouser’s interpretation. I will then explain how on this account, naive self-consciousness apparently meets the criterion of the object represented by infinity.

Fichte, following Karl Reinhold, begins with the claim that all consciousness of an object involves the subject both distinguishing a representation from itself and regarding that representation as belonging to it.⁸⁵ The aim of Fichte’s account of self-positing is to characterize the kind of self-awareness that enables a subject to recognize a representation as its own. For Fichte, self-positing is the act whereby the subject produces an implicit, nonrepresentational self-awareness that accompanies each representation: the “I” posits an “I think” that accompanies each representation. Fichte holds that such self-awareness is immediate, non-discursive,

⁸⁴ GW 9:101.

⁸⁵ Neuhouser, *Fichte’s Theory of Subjectivity* (1990), 70-71.

and internal to the activity of consciousness, somewhat analogous to the kind of immediate awareness that an agent has of their own acting.⁸⁶

Hegel's description of self-consciousness plausibly represents this conception of the self-positing subject. On this interpretation, Hegel's description of the subject repelling itself from itself represents the notion of self-positing, or the production of the particular "I think" that accompanies a representation and thereby explains how the subject takes the representation as its own. When Hegel writes "I distinguish myself from myself," and yet "what is distinguished is not distinguished," he refers to the subject's distinguishing the individual "I think" from itself, and yet identifying itself with this state.⁸⁷

On the Fichtean model, Hegel's account of naive self-consciousness appears to meet part (a) of the criterion for the object because the "I" constitutes the essence of the self-conscious being, and an individual instance of the "I think", together with a given representation, constitutes a determinate moment. The "I" is distinct from each "I think"—representation combination, and yet it can be identified with these determinations. The notion of "positing" illustrates the way in which part (b) is apparently satisfied: it is the activity of the "I" itself that grounds each determinate "I think." The subject, as the whole complex of the "I" and each determinate "I think"—representation combination, is thus self-determining because the "I" serves as a ground of the subject's determinations that is internal to the subject itself.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Neuhouser 1990, 83-86. Cf. Fichte, SW, I, 463, 471-4 and GA, IV.2, 30. For further discussion of Fichte's theory of self-positing, see also Bykova, "Fichte's Doctrine of the Self-Positing Subject."

⁸⁷That Hegel has something like Fichtean self-positing in mind is further suggested by his description of this stage as the "motionless tautology of 'I am I'" (GW 9:104). One might at this point object that Hegel's account of self-consciousness must differ from Fichte's because Hegel posits the identity of self and object, whereas Fichte posits an identity that is sought but not achieved. However, while Hegel's ultimate goal is to establish a unity of self and object, it is important that at this stage in the dialectic he does not represent a fully unity, for—as I explain the next section—it is precisely because the "I think" is dependent on an external object that the transition to desire is effected. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this objection.

⁸⁸In the *Logic*, Hegel explicitly characterizes self-consciousness as infinite: "Self-consciousness is thus the nearest example of the presence of infinity" (GW 21:145).

Heidegger similarly recognizes the affinity between Hegel's description of self-consciousness and Fichte's doctrine of self-positing:

Or, to express it in the style of Fichte—but Fichte understood on the basis of the Hegelian inquiry—we can say that by saying I, I is posited as I: I = I. I is just the difference which has to

While only a brief sketch, my interpretation shows how naive self-consciousness serves as a plausible candidate to meet the criterion of the object represented by infinity.⁸⁹ But we might ask at this point why the protagonist consciousness takes itself as the infinite at this point, and why what comes on the scene is neither a) forces, conceived as internal to particulars, or b) Life.⁹⁰ After all, as discussed above, Hegel states that life is infinite, but only for us. And the problem of internal forces is especially pressing, for as we have seen, in the *Philosophy of Nature* Hegel presents a conception of forces which seemingly overcomes the problem of “indifference” he discusses in “Explanation.” In the *Phenomenology* itself he suggests that internal forces are infinite when he writes, after introducing infinity at the end of “Force and the Understanding,” that “through infinity, we see that the law has been perfected in its own self into necessity, and we see all moments of appearance incorporated into the inner.”⁹¹ So we can ask: why are these insights about forces and life only available to us at this stage in the dialectic, and why must the protagonist consciousness necessarily take itself as its object?

We can attempt to answer this question by noting a passage which directly precedes Hegel’s claim that consciousness is self-consciousness. Here, Hegel

be made, solely in order basically not to be a difference. Since this inner difference has the character of an I [*ichlich*] and since the I posits itself, it differentiates itself at the same time from the not-I. (Heidegger 124-125)

Heidegger also emphasizes that for Hegel, the self-positing subject exhibits the structure of infinity, which he glosses in Hegelian language: “this unity, which differentiates itself and in the difference is itself the un-differentiated” (Heidegger 124). However, Heidegger argues that in the *Phenomenology*, self-consciousness is logically prior to infinity, writing that in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel presents a “subjective” grounding of infinity—“the grounding of infinity in the subject and as subject”—while the *Logic* provides a “logical” grounding. In contrast, on my reading, the structure of infinity emerges from the failure of the understanding, and only then is self-consciousness taken as a first instantiation of this structure. I here agree with Sinnerbrink’s interpretation and critique of Heidegger (Sinnerbrink, 144).

⁸⁹ One might object at this point that there is an external ground of the subject’s determinations: viz., the object that is represented. I think that this observation in fact motivates the practical turn; see the following section.

⁹⁰ GW 9:105.

⁹¹ GW 9:99.

attributes infinity to the object of the understanding, but states that this observation is available only to us:

What is an object in sensuous covering for the understanding is now there for us in its essential shape as the pure concept. This grasping of the difference as it is in truth, or the grasping of infinity as such, is for us, or in itself. The exposition of this concept belongs to science. However, consciousness as it immediately has this concept again comes on the scene as its own form or as a new shape of consciousness that does not recognize its essence in what has gone before but instead regards it as something wholly different.⁹²

Hegel here indicates that *we* can grasp “infinity as such,” or, what I take to be equivalent, “the concept,” in what the understanding took to be “an object in sensuous covering.” The protagonist, however, “does not recognize its essence in what has gone before but instead regards it as something wholly different.”

Hegel does not offer an explanation of *why* the protagonist consciousness does not recognize infinity in objects external to it, but suggests a potential line of reply in the formulation “consciousness as it *immediately* has this concept.” What is noteworthy here is the mention of immediacy, which is echoed by a following emphasis on “certainty” at the beginning of the aptly titled “The Truth of Self-Certainty.” By “certainty,” Hegel seems to mean something like the immediate awareness that the protagonist consciousness has of its own self-positing activity. With this emphasis on immediacy, Hegel suggests that the protagonist has direct awareness of its own infinite or self-determining structure, in a way that it is not aware of the potentially infinite structure of other entities.

While I believe this is part of the story, it can be supplemented by a deeper answer that is not directly indicated by Hegel.⁹³ This can be seen by noting a feature of the criterion represented by infinity, and a feature of naive self-consciousness. The relevant feature of infinity is that it apparently *excludes* any external determination: it is a conception of self-determination as pure

⁹² GW 9:101.

⁹³ I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the following proposal.

independence. And the relevant feature of naive self-consciousness is that self-consciousness, in engaging in its self-positing activity, initially sees itself as conditioning the objects that it represents by making them its own. That is, the “I” takes itself to overcome the otherness of the “not I” in this act of self-positing. Thus, from the point of view of the protagonist consciousness, any object outside of it that could *ex hypothesi* be infinite cannot in fact be infinite, because it is already conditioned by the protagonist consciousness; the protagonist effectively “crowds out” other potentially infinite entities. However, as we will see shortly, the protagonist soon realizes that objects external to it yet condition its representations, which initiates the turn to desire. In this and the ensuing dialectic, the protagonist consciousness will have to learn by encountering resistance from entities external to it—first the objects of desire, and then other self-conscious subjects—that its criterion of infinity as pure independence is untenable; it will get reformulated in a way as to allow relations between itself and entities (both objects and subjects) external to it. Before turning to consider how desire initiates this progression, I will briefly compare my reading of the transition to self-consciousness to Pippin’s.

My interpretation resembles Pippin’s insofar as I take naive self-consciousness to represent Fichte’s self-positing subject, which is heavily indebted to Kant’s account of self-consciousness. But my interpretation diverges in two ways. First, while I take Hegel to represent the self-positing subject, I don’t take him to be implying that consciousness is committed to a Kantian or Fichtean idealism, according to which the subject structures or grounds its objects. Second, and more importantly, my interpretation provides a different account of the motivation for the transition from Pippin’s. On my reading, the protagonist consciousness, at this stage of the dialectic, is not interested in its own self-conscious activity primarily as a means to answer questions about its theoretical cognition of empirical objects. Rather, it is interested in self-consciousness because it exemplifies a certain kind of structure: namely, a self-determining structure.

There is an important objection that might be made on behalf of Pippin, which I will now consider to clarify my own position on the issue of idealism and the transition. Such an objection would say that an idealist reading of the transition to self-consciousness is supported by Hegel's discussion in §165, the final paragraph of "Force and the Understanding." Here, Hegel writes that "the understanding experiences only itself."⁹⁴ He goes on to describe how the "mediating middle" of the "curtain" of appearances now vanishes from its place between the understanding and the supersensible "inner." This discussion can be read as stating that consciousness, after the failure of the understanding's conception of laws, sees that features of consciousness itself is responsible for its cognition of the empirical world, and so takes itself to be the "purely inner," or the true ground of appearances.⁹⁵

On my view, however, this evidence indicates only that Hegel takes a Kantian idealist insight to be *implicit* at the transition, but this insight is not a commitment explicitly held by the protagonist consciousness itself. It is only in the "Reason" chapter, where Hegel discusses both the unity of apperception and the categories, that consciousness explicitly takes up an idealist standpoint.⁹⁶

In support of this reading, we can first note that Hegel begins this paragraph with "We see that...", which indicates that he is making a point about what we, the phenomenologists, can see at this stage of the dialectic. He also says at the end of §164 that only we, the phenomenologists, can see at this point that "self-consciousness alone" is the "truth" of the previous stages of consciousness: "This truth is here only for us."⁹⁷ These claims both tell against an interpretation according to which the protagonist consciousness itself takes up an idealist insight at this point in the dialectic.

⁹⁴ GW 9:102.

⁹⁵ I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to engage this objection.

⁹⁶ GW 9:132-137.

⁹⁷ GW 9:102.

Further support for this reading comes from the way that Hegel contrasts the positions of consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason. In §164, he goes on to state that “self-consciousness has first come to be for itself but not yet as unity with consciousness itself.”⁹⁸ This language of the “unity” of self-consciousness and consciousness anticipates language that Hegel uses in §233, at the beginning of the “Reason” chapter, where Hegel states that at the stage of reason, the viewpoints of consciousness and self-consciousness have “reduced down to one truth.”⁹⁹ What Hegel means by this, I suggest, can be explained by a contrast that he makes in surrounding passages in §232 and §233. The standpoint of consciousness, he says, takes as its object items that it holds to exist independently of it and to have natures that are not determined by it.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, the standpoint of self-consciousness takes its own activity as its primary object, and considers external objects only insofar as it relates to them in its practical activity:

Until now it [self-consciousness] has occupied itself only with its self-sufficiency and its freedom in order to save and preserve itself for itself at the cost of the world or its own actuality, both of which appeared to it as the negative of its own essence.”¹⁰¹

Hegel further states that self-consciousness “did not understand the world” and puts a clear emphasis on the effort of self-consciousness to negate external objects: “It desired and worked on it, withdrew itself from it, took an inward turn back into itself away from it, and erased the world for itself and itself as consciousness.”¹⁰² This characterization indicates that on Hegel’s view, self-consciousness does not take a theoretical interest in external objects at all, but rather seeks to overcome them through its practical activity. It is only at the stage of reason, Hegel indicates, that external objects are truly of concern again: “In its continuing

⁹⁸ GW 9:102.

⁹⁹ GW 9:133.

¹⁰⁰ “The essence, or the true, had the determinateness for consciousness of *being*.” (GW 9:133)

¹⁰¹ GW 9:132.

¹⁰² GW 9:132.

existence, this world interests it in the way it previously was only interested in the world's disappearance."¹⁰³

When Hegel says that reason captures the truth of both consciousness and self-consciousness, then, I submit that he means that the idealist position represented by reason brings the two standpoints together insofar as it considers its own activity (the focus of self-consciousness) to ground the being of objects (the focus of consciousness). Thus, Hegel's discussion provides further evidence that self-consciousness is not supposed to represent an explicitly idealist position, but rather a position in which consciousness is concerned purely with its own self-determining structure.

This concludes my account of the transition from the understanding to naive self-consciousness. I will now show how my reading has the resources to explain the move to desire.

The Practical Turn. Hegel announces the practical turn with the claim that "self-consciousness is desire *überhaupt*."¹⁰⁴ The basic standpoint of desire is that of a being that seeks out and consumes objects of its desire, namely other living organisms. Hegel does not describe desire as "infinite," but does characterize it as "self-sufficient,"¹⁰⁵ and, as we have seen in his discussion of life, he identifies infinity and self-sufficiency. The desiring subject apparently meets the criterion represented by infinity because the subject's self constitutes the essence of the subject, which gives rise to the subject's determinations—its desires and the actions that it takes.

To account for the progression from naive self-consciousness to desire, however, there must be a deficiency in the position of naive self-consciousness.¹⁰⁶ I

¹⁰³ GW 9:132.

¹⁰⁴ GW 9:104.

¹⁰⁵ GW 9:105.

¹⁰⁶ As noted above, naive self-consciousness is not a proper configuration of consciousness; we do not get an enactment of the standpoint in the world by which a contradiction in its self-conception emerges. Nevertheless, we do need an account of how, from naive self-consciousness, the standpoint of

think this deficiency emerges when we consider that naive self-consciousness does not produce its determinations on its own: while the “I”’s self-positing is responsible for producing the “I think” and thereby making its representations its own, empirical objects supply the content of specific representations and therefore partially determine each individual “I think” state. Fichte emphasizes this point in characterizing the self-positing subject, claiming that self-positing cannot by itself constitute a state of consciousness; there must be representations given through sensible intuition, produced by an object separate from the subject.¹⁰⁷ The “I” represented by the standpoint of naive self-consciousness contributes to producing its determinations, but these determinations still rely on the presence of external objects. The “I” thus fails to be fully self-determining.

In contrast, when the desiring subject succeeds in obtaining or consuming its object, it makes the object its own. What was formerly an external object conditioning the subject now belongs to the subject, and there is no longer anything external to the subject conditioning it. Thus, the move to desire is plausibly motivated by the failure of naive self-consciousness to be fully self-determining and the consequent need for the subject to overcome objects external to it. Hegel emphasizes just this theme of active overcoming in the following summary of the standpoint of desire:

Self-consciousness is therefore only certain of itself through the sublation of this other, which, to itself, exhibits itself as self-sufficient life. Self-consciousness is desire. Certain of the nullity of this other, it posits for itself this nullity as its truth, it destroys the self-sufficient object, and it as a result gives itself the certainty of itself as true certainty, as the certainty which, to itself, has come to be in an objective manner.¹⁰⁸

Here Hegel describes desire affirming its own “certainty” by pursuing other living organisms. This suggests that the key development from naive self-consciousness

desire is developed. I suggest that the best way to make sense of the development of the standpoint of desire is precisely by attending to the deficiency in the conception of naive self-consciousness which I present here.

¹⁰⁷ Neuhausser 1990, 79.

¹⁰⁸ GW 9:107.

to desire is that the desiring subject establishes its independence from external objects by making them its own, in contrast to the comparatively passive naive self-consciousness, which is conditioned by objects external to it.¹⁰⁹

The difference between my reading of the practical turn and Pippin's is now fully in view. My reading resembles Pippin's insofar as we both emphasize that the desiring subject is conceived of as more active than naive self-consciousness. However, as with the case of naive self-consciousness, we interpret the significance of this contrast differently. For Pippin, the active nature of the desiring subject is significant insofar as it purports to explain how we make the world intelligible to ourselves—namely, by actively overcoming its indeterminacy and disconnectedness.¹¹⁰ On my reading, the active nature of the desiring subject is important because it shows that the desiring subject is more fully self-determining than naive self-consciousness, thereby serving as a better candidate to meet the criterion of the object represented by infinity.

My interpretation has the advantage that it shows more clearly why the specific standpoint of desire follows naive self-consciousness, while also making sense of the importance of Hegel's notion of infinity to this progression. Looking backward in the progression, the strength of my reading of the practical turn provides further confirmation of my reading of the transition to naive self-consciousness, since it shows how my approach can make sense of both transitions in a cohesive way.

¹⁰⁹ Desire, however, fails when consciousness realizes that its determining itself to act depends on the continual presence of objects, because after the subject consumes one object it requires the existence of some new object in order to act from desire again. As Hegel puts it: "Desire and the self-certainty obtained in its gratification are conditioned by the object" (GW 9:107/PS 109.)

Neuhouser and Mills each similarly argue that self-consciousness seeks to maintain its "self-sufficient" (Neuhouser 2009, 40) or "self-relating" (Mills, 355) character through the destructive activity of desire. In my discussion, I have reconstructed an argument, not found in either account, as to *why* self-consciousness seeks to demonstrate its self-determining status.

¹¹⁰ Pippin 2014, 29.

Conclusion. I have argued for an interpretation of the transition to self-consciousness according to which naive self-consciousness emerges because consciousness takes itself to exhibit the requisite self-determining structure. As a parting thought, I suggest that my emphasis on self-determination provides the resources to give a reading of the progression from self-consciousness to spirit. Desire gives way to the famous master-slave dialectic, which concerns various attempts by self-consciousness to prove its freedom—a notion that, for Hegel, is centrally related to self-determination. The rest of “The Truth of Self-Certainty” and “Reason” then portray a series of progressively more complex models of the human subject, where, I submit, each model represents a thinking subject or practical agent that is more fully self-determining than the previous one. After the failure of these attempts, we arrive at spirit, a move that represents the insight that consciousness has been mistaken in attempting to identify the individual agent as the locus of self-determination; consciousness accordingly now takes social wholes as its object. That Hegel wishes to emphasize the self-determining nature of spirit is suggested by his description of spirit as the “self-supporting, absolute, real essence.”¹¹¹

My account of the transition to self-consciousness thereby promises to shed light on the meaning of Hegel’s famous announcement of the results of the *Phenomenology* in the Preface: that “everything hangs on grasping and expressing the true, not only as substance, but just as much as subject.”¹¹² As he explains this claim: “The living substance is the being that is in truth subject; or, what amounts to the same thing, is in truth actual only insofar as it is the movement of self-positing or that it is the mediation of itself and its becoming-other-to-itself.”¹¹³ If my analysis is correct, then Hegel’s argument for the transition to self-consciousness provides the initial basis for this claim, by showing, through the failure of the understanding, that consciousness must progress beyond taking as its

¹¹¹ GW 9:239. See also GW 9:22.

¹¹² GW 9:18.

¹¹³ GW 9:18.

object lifeless “substance,” including forces as the understanding conceives of them. Rather, consciousness must take as its object something that has the capacity for “self-positing”—which, in this context, is equivalent to the capacity for self-determination—a capacity that is paradigmatic of the self-conscious subject.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ [Acknowledgements redacted.]

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