

The Historicity of the Master/Slave Dialectic in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Introduction

Hegel's insightful analysis of the development of self-consciousness in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* revolves around the crucial beginning to "Self-Consciousness," in which he details the master/slave dialectic. Unlike preceding German Idealists, Hegel does not assume that the conscious agent is self-conscious *a priori*; instead, the agent must develop this notion of self-conception through experience. This experience develops through time, and is thus linked to the concept of "history." One can even claim that any development of self-consciousness must be historically conditioned, insofar as it draws upon the demands of desire and the means to its satiation. Thus, self-consciousness is far from innate in terms of the individual agent; Hegel's break with the tradition in this regard seems to be in arguing that self-consciousness develops out of non-self-consciousness over time in a process that is historically conditioned.

What commentators disagree on, however, are the specifics of this historical process and its total ontological location, particularly in the nature of the process underlying the development of self-consciousness. Some authors, such as Alexandre Kojève, find Hegel's dialectic of the master/slave relationship to be referring to historically conditioned, material processes,¹ whereas others, like George Armstrong Kelly, find that Hegel's phenomenological approach necessitates subjective interpretations of the dialectic.² The question really concerns the amount of historicity needed for the development of self-consciousness; is it a purely external process brought on by the conflict between two living beings, or is it an internal struggle that includes the conflicts between various faculties? Kojève argues for the former interpretation, whereas Kelly finds that the struggle is multifaceted, including the internal conflicts so prevalent in German

Idealist philosophy, for example, reason being “master” of the inclinations. In this paper I wish to explore the parameters of this debate, and eventually argue that Hegel’s phenomenology necessarily entails a historical process à la Kojève *because* it results in phenomenological experience and development. Contra Kelly, I find little evidence in the master/slave dialectic of reference to an internal conflict among mental faculties in a given subject. Kojève’s analysis would seem plausible with additional phenomenological import; as Robert Solomon notes, “the master-slave parable is a specific illustration of the reciprocal formation of two self-consciousnesses.”³ The important element here is that the development of self-consciousness or awareness in each being must involve two self-consciousnesses. This paper will first examine Kojève’s reading of the master/slave dialectic, followed by Kelly’s contrary position. My arguments for a synthetic, phenomenological reading will then be given in the final section of this inquiry.

Kojève on the Historicity of the Master/Slave Dialectic

Kojève’s analysis of the master/slave dialectic intertwines Marxist views of historical class struggle with Hegel’s phenomenological account. Starting with Hegel’s conception of desire (*Begierde*), Kojève assumes the physical creature as the basic unit of consciousness and as the locus for desiring. Indeed, human life is possible only given the basis of biological, animal life.⁴ It is from this basis that humans, as well as animals, possess desire, namely the urge to change external “shapes” or forms of being to that which would suit their own interests and being. Desire seeks to transform the world, to “negate” the external object in its own existence and put it to the use of the desiring being. For instance, Kojève points to the desire of hunger as a clear example of a desire that a being has that negates the very existence of an object through radical change (i.e. eating and digesting it). Indeed, the essence of human being is in this power

of negation; Kojève argues that “man is negating *Action*, which transforms given Being and, by transforming it, transforms itself.”⁵ The difference between human desire and animal desire is that the former goes so far as to transcend itself as the given. Animals are merely subservient to their physical needs and desires, and the satisfaction of these desires proves their subservience to this static conception of themselves. Humans, on the other hand, have desires that lead to the negation or transcendence of their conception as natural beings; Kojève points out that this leads to the possibility of self-consciousness, which requires “*transcendence* of self with respect to self as *given*.”⁶

Human desire can be the key to this transcendence if it aims at that which liberates oneself from that mode of being. To be able to desire nonbeing is distinctively human and allows a person to be free from the concept of being that so enslaves animal life. Instead of following the pulls and pushes of nature, the human can use desire to transcend the mere “freedom of the turnspit” and gain self-consciousness. Kojève is emphasizing the biological foundations of the master/slave relationship by labeling biological drives “desires;” the main difference between humans and animals is in the former’s ability to desire nonbeing or death. Kojève finds the ability to desire nonbeing the extreme limiting case of human freedom. Humans are free from their nature or essence in the most fundamental way possible; they can choose to end it through their own desires.

It is at this stage that a desiring consciousness the important realization that there are more than objects of desire in the world. The desiring subject becomes cognizant of other conscious beings in the world. Kojève argues that a conscious being can only be fulfilled when the other desiring conscious satisfies its desire for recognition. This, however, is not a natural reciprocation from the other beings, and the resulting lines of action are competitive in nature.

The two agents struggle in a “life and death fight” for recognition of the other. It seems that because humans demand recognition from the other being and have the capacity to transcend natural, animal desires through desire of nonbeing, a struggle ensues between these desires. It appears that Kojève posits freedom and ultimate worth reside in the being’s ability to defy nature and desire, and risking destruction in the face of inclinations towards natural preservation.

What is this risk being taken for? The non-essential (in terms of biological preservation) end of this venture is recognition from another desiring consciousness. Animals seem to only risk their life in the pursuit of the means to preserve their life, while humans, on the other hand, can defy nature to gain desired recognition from other creatures of the same capabilities. Recognition cannot be gained from a dog or cat in this scheme, but it must be from a being that can also risk all of its natural prerogatives in the pursuit of the same end of recognition.

Kojève finds that Hegel’s transition from a life and death struggle to one in which no being dies is a last and “irreducible premise in the *Phenomenology*.”⁷ It seems to be a mere assumption, according to this reading, that the deadly struggle ends in one being assuming the role of the master and the other of the slave. Kojève explains this as due to the master’s ability, and the slave’s inability to resist his natural instincts for survival. The master was strong enough to continue risking his or her life, whereas the slave eventually gave into his or her natural desires and tried to preserve his life through assuming the role of the slave. Kojève indicates, “the vanquished has subordinated his *human* desire for *Recognition* to the *biological* desire to preserve his *life*. . . The victor has risked his *life* for a *nonvital* end.”⁸ Thus, at the start of the struggle, the two agents appear to be unequal in terms of resolution and stamina; the one who is to be the slave is not able to continue the struggle, and thus is forced into subjection as the only way to preserve his or her life. One must judge that if both agents had the exact same resolution

and power, the struggle could possibly end with both being slain; this, of course, is a situation that would not help the development of self-consciousness or the furtherance of biological life, perhaps explaining why Hegel gives much more emphasis to the ascendance of one master and the servitude of one slave.

The slave's work is the intermediary between the master and the world of nature. It is this work, according to Kojève, that allows the master to meet all his or her needs without personal exertion; the master desires, and the slave's work bends nature to meet these desires. From the perspective of the master, desire is followed by immediate satisfaction. From the perspective of the slave, the desire of an other is answered with their labor, which then results in the other's desire being satisfied. The master, in this scheme, is still tied to the drives of nature; while he could risk his own natural drives to secure recognition from the subjugated other, his courage and freedom then faded into a mere pursuit of given biological desires. Kojève argues that the master remains "a *natural* being, an animal" because he maintains this state of egocentric desire and the satisfaction of desire.⁹ The real action of negation and transformation that is had in the instantiated relationship of the master and the slave is in that of the slave; he is the one that is acting and transforming the world, whereas the master merely has desires *qua* natural being. Given this basis, Kojève finds that the foundation is set for "the possibility of a *historical* process, of a *History*, which is, in its totality, the history of the Fights and the Work that finally ended in the wars of Napoleon and the table on which Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology* in order to *understand* both those wars and that table."¹⁰ History begins with the resolution of the initial struggle into two classes, those of master and slave. All material products and future struggles are to be understood within this simple framework of master/slave dialectic. History is but a product of the master/slave struggle, composed entirely of such struggles, and is no more when

such struggles physically end. The materialist tendencies in such a reading are quite evident, especially when Kojève points out that “Man” must always be either master or slave, and that beings must be in relation with each other for them to even be considered human. The extreme historicity of the master/slave dialectic is obvious in this reading, useful in describing not only the progress of world history, but even universal history, detailing humanity’s interaction with the natural world.

For Hegel, the slave interacts with nature. Thus, natural history details the progress of the slave overcoming nature and bending it to his will. Of course, the slave’s will is not the operative force here; rather, it is the master’s mediated will that drives the slave to his interaction with nature through his labor. It is this basic interaction with nature, according to Kojève, that allows for the dialectic reversal of the master’s dominance and the slave’s subservience in the *Phenomenology*. The master tried for the ideal and was willing to risk her life in attaining it, jeopardizing the biological real for the non-biological gain of recognition as “master,” which, for Hegel, is the master’s only motivation. This recognition is actualized in the slave’s subservience, a condition brought on by his yielding to the desires of nature and seeking life instead of recognition.¹¹ In other words, the slave feared death and the master did not; this will be reversed, however, through the relationship of the slave to the master via the labor of work.

While human desire exceeds animal desire through risking one’s own life, the desire of the slave, though deficient at first, now leads him or her to a great realization. By fearing the master, the slave “experienced the dread or the Terror (*Furcht*) of Nothingness, of his nothingness.”¹² The slave realizes that his or her being is negative, always staving off non-being through change and growth. Kojève’s interpretation argues that consciousness takes the “given” and transforms through end-directed action, either fighting or work. The former option has been

exhausted by the failure of the slave to maintain his or her nerve, but the latter option still remains option as a way to improve his or her self and conditions. Thus, work allows the slave to realize his true being as negation and thereby precipitates freedom from the master.

Through working in service for another, the slave realizes his or her nature and begins to suppress his natural instincts. The master did this in the initial conflict, but the slave now learns a more lasting and humbling way of transcending nature; through working for another, the slave's own instincts are repressed and the will of another becomes his own. Kojève finds that this material condition of forced servitude results in the slave "[freeing] himself mentally only thanks to *forced* work."¹³ The master commands the life and death of the slave, but the slave gains lasting ideas of true freedom from nature and of pure being, the former through this forced service and the latter through fear of death. Through actual labor on the materials of the world, the world is changed and the slave gains freedom, only mentally at first, from the master. Kojève's reading culminates with much emphasis on work, as it is only through the existence of a slave, and his or her forced work, that time and history exist. Since the fight ends in death or servitude, and as history begins only with the latter's actualization, Kojève finds that the slave gains proportionally greater control over the master in and through technological control over the world. For instance, he indicates that "it is not the Fight as such, the risk of life, but *Work* that one day produces a machine gun, and no longer an ax. . . After making the first ax, man can use it to make a second one, which, by that very fact, will be another, a better ax."¹⁴ The improvement in technology and its commensurate benefits to the users are given by and to the slave; they are the ones who make such advances and maintain the knowledge garnered in such improved technologies. Kojève labels work as "*Bildung*," as it transforms the natural world, which in turn transforms the slave.

Kojève's reading of Hegel's master/slave dialectic is quite materially grounded in its historicity. It involves the clash of individuals or groups, and requires that they resolve into two groups: those that are afraid of death and become the slaves, and those that can transcend this fear of death by risking their life and become the masters. History begins with this struggle, and the whole of history is the continuation of this struggle until finally the slaves are freed from the tyranny of the masters. This ultimate freedom comes from work, fear, and service, but only after the slave journeys through a "series of ideologies, by which he seeks to justify himself, to justify his slavery, to reconcile the *ideal* of Freedom with the *fact* of Slavery."¹⁵ These "ideologies" are the forms of self-consciousness (stoicism, skepticism, and the unhappy consciousness) following the master/slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology*. The end point of history, according to Kojève's reading, is when this physical struggle between master and slave ultimately ceases. History comes to an end, since history is nothing but the continual struggle between masters and slaves. It is on this note that many scholars believe Kojève ignores much of Hegel's true purpose behind the *Phenomenology*; Kelly's objections to this interpretation will now be examined as a contrast to this materialist reading. It remains to be seen whether such a different position can make a coherent interpretation of the master/slave dialectic with lesser grades of materialist historicity.

The Master/Slave Dialectic as Internal & External

Kojève's materialist reading of the master/slave dialectic has drawn much criticism in for what it leaves out of Hegel's phenomenology. In focusing on the purely external struggle between two agents, such a reading slights the integral, internal role of an other in the development of the subject's self-consciousness.¹⁶ Of particular interest is the critique of Kojève within George Armstrong Kelly's reading of the master/slave dialectic. Kelly finds that Kojève

unduly limits the master/slave analysis in Hegel's *Phenomenology* to the external struggle between two creatures; instead, he argues that the true reading of this dialectic must involve other perspectives as well.¹⁷ Kelly wants to make room for a "phenomenological" reading of the master/slave dialectic, in which the focus is more on the ego *qua* exemplary ideal type of consciousness, in regard to both interpersonal and intrapersonal development. This section will briefly detail Kelly's perspectival reading of the master/slave relationship, paying particular attention to the internalist reading he advocates, where the struggle is within the individual ego.

Kelly argues that the master/slave dialectic can be explicated from three perspectives. The first is the "social," which Kojève exclusively adopts. This reading of the master/slave dialectic focuses on the physical, actual struggle of individuals or groups to gain recognition and power. To the extent that Kojève's thought deals with such a reading, Kelly recommends it as heuristic for understanding Hegel. Yet it is incomplete to take this social perspective for the whole of the master/slave dialectic. It is complemented by the "psychological" perspective, which regards the dialectic as an intrapersonal struggle within the individual ego. In this case, the master and slave are various powers or patterns of the mind itself. The last perspective is one of "fusion" between the previous two perspectives; the ego is transformed by internal processes set in motion due to the external struggle between agents.¹⁸

Insofar as the limitations of the social perspective are acknowledged, Kelly has no problem with Kojève's analysis. He sets out instead to build the case for the psychological perspective, which would accordingly set the foundation for the third view. Thus, the real disagreement with Kojève is allowing for the historicity of the psychological account of the master/slave dialectic without reducing it to material conflict between physical agents. What Kelly sees at the heart of the Hegel's thought is the Platonic parallel between conflict in the state

and conflict in the individual agent. The search for harmony, according to this interpretation, will allow for the master/slave dialectic on the levels of both the social and the psychological.

Kelly argues that the psychological perspective on this dialectic is needed to understand the following development of self-consciousness. Integral to this perspective is the idea that “the faculties of the ego must contend in order to act, since a single comprehensive faculty, in however many egos, would render them either totally static or totally destructive (which amounts to the same thing).”¹⁹ Thus, underlying any external conflicts of desire must be the internal conflicts of which faculty of the mind one is to follow; indeed, one can see this as a simple conflict among contrary desires, or as is more likely the case, as conflict among desire as a whole and some other sort of rational control that is opposed to desire. Kelly argues that the ego is necessarily split into at least two competing parts, and he points out that “at each of its ascending stages the consciousness must apprehend itself as two estranged principles until its goal is reached.”²⁰ Thus, the possibility exists to give a psychological reading of the master/slave dialectic as a struggle, within the soul, of the ego striving for self-consciousness. Such a struggle would involve pitting of natural desire or instincts against other, more “transcendental” desires, such as the desire to risk one’s own being in external struggle. This will lead, according to Kelly, to a struggle between appetitive natural drives and more spiritual drives, such as those involved with man *qua* negative being.²¹ One principle wins, and the other is forced into servitude.

What makes this putative reading viable for Kelly is the milieu of master/slave discourse in philosophical circles in Hegel’s time. Hume discussed reason being the slave of the passions, and Kant’s thought in *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) pushed for virtue being tied to a self-mastery and rule over one’s inclinations. Even before this, Rousseau discussed the slave status

of the master in his *Social Contract*. Much of the philosophical discourse of the time was aiming to restore the harmony that was supposedly lost in the transition from ancient society to modern political states. One need only to look at Schiller's "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" (1800) to see ancient Greek culture equated with closeness to nature, and modern society with shattered wholeness within the ego. Hegel takes this struggle for harmony into his dialectical view of the mind's development in the form of a master/slave struggle. Kelly points out that the practical reward of such an intrapersonal struggle in Hegel's *Phenomenology* was the slave's progression to stoicism, or freedom within the consciousness of one's mind. Such a resolution did not deal with external factors as much as with the reorienting of mental principles and priorities. Instead, the resolution can be seen as purely internal to the ego.

It is this phenomenological dimension that Kelly finds lacking within Kojève, and is what precludes a psychological perspective in Kojève's analysis. The psychological "master" in this internal process "who emerges from the struggle for recognition can be identified with the primitive notion of control or decision."²² Staking an agent's life is a non-natural act, and represents, in this case, the assertion of the principle of control over other principles within the ego. The "enslaved" principles, then, are presumably "natural" instincts and desires, such as those for the preservation of life. The master principle of "courage, decisiveness, idealism" must then be sublated into the opposite, the slave principle. This has been made possible by the control of the master principle, and is transformed through its fear and labor. At later stages of the development of spirit, such distinctions between desires and controlling principles will be dissolved, but Kelly argues that they are quite necessary at this level of the dialectic. Kojève's reading is found to be too one-sided in favoring material conditions and struggles at the social level, whereas Kelly argues that a profitable reading at the psychological level can make room

for not only these two perspectives, but also for a third combined fusion of perspectives. The next section will examine this complex of perspectives, and will eventually argue that the psychological reading is necessarily connected to the social reading and cannot be separately defended as Kelly desires.

Internal Change through External Struggle

The psychological reading offered by Kelly as a viable interpretation of the master/slave dialectic is too internal to catch the main point of Hegel's analysis of consciousness, that consciousness must find itself using the spur of desire and the mirror of the other. This section will make two arguments concerning the master/slave dialectic. First, Kelly is right that Kojève's reading misses something important about Hegel's master/slave dialectic which cannot be simply a historical progression of class consciousness, but necessarily involves the development of an individual's ego through the phenomenological encounter with the other. Second, an independent psychological, internal, account of the master/slave dialectic will be untenable due to the necessary role played by the external other in the development of consciousness and in the nature of consciousness according to Hegel.

Internal Aspects to the Master/Slave Dialectic

Any reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology* that greatly privileges themes found in earlier sections is bound to encounter trouble on the hermeneutic highways of modern scholarship, as the received notion of this work's developmental nature holds much power. The master/slave dialectic is subsumed in the course of the work, and Hegel moves on to other dialectic tensions in the sections on reason and spirit. What is important about the master/slave dialectic is the internal development, spurred on through interaction with outside world, which serves as preparation for spirit's further understanding of itself. Kojève's reading of the master/slave

dialectic is insightful, but one may agree with Kelly that it misses the Hegelian point of its importance; it is a way station onto the further development of consciousness and is not a static description of historical patterns.

Kojève's reading, insofar as it makes the master/slave conflict equivalent with history, ignores the basic Hegelian point that history of consciousness passes beyond the master/slave dialectic by developing through such a dialectic. Thus, the Hegelian reading would minimize claims that the slave is the agent who starts and ends all history, and would instead emphasize the phenomenological development of consciousness through external struggles with the other. The consciousness that emerges out of the master/slave dialectic (the stoic, etc.) is a different consciousness than the one that started the process. The resulting consciousness is *self*-consciousness, because it developed from merely a desiring, animal being into its true nature as a being that is able to transcend its natural desires and urges in negation. At the start of "Self-Consciousness," Hegel labels the consciousness of the individual as "mere being in sense-certainty."²³ At the end of the master/slave dialectic, the slave undergoes a "rediscovery of himself by himself, . . . realiz[ing] that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own."²⁴ It is through the process that Kojève so aptly describes that the slave ceases to be simply a slave and gains new forms of consciousness. Indeed, it is the latter part that is of utmost important to Hegel since he is giving a phenomenology of the development of spirit; it is the progression of consciousness through its various forms that is the focus of his work, and not of any particular historical group or struggle. Hegel's dialectic of the master/slave is historical in dealing with an ego interacting in specific circumstances with others over time, but it does not require certain groups or nationalities to have actually been "slaves" and doesn't refer to any given masters. Its historicity deals with its *a*

posteriori development, and does not refer to any innate sense of self-consciousness. Thus, the internal spur of desire begins the process detailed in the master/slave dialectic, but fades out of the picture in following sections when the new players, reason and spirit, take the stage in their various costumes.

The development of consciousness to self-consciousness also necessitates the internal aspect of desire, a factor that both Kojève and Kelly agree upon. Desire for the instinctual means of preserving life initiated the struggle for recognition, and the desires associated with preservation allowed for the experience of fear and death that ends up releasing the slave's consciousness. It is work on the outside world and fear of the master's power that eventually teaches the slave that he has being-for-itself and he exists in a state of being that is more developed than that of the master.²⁵ Work helps slaves free themselves from their desires and instincts, and to transcend their being *qua* animal nature. Instead, they realize that they are a free self-consciousness, paving the way for the stoic and skeptical conceptions of freedom. Kojève's reading is quite astute in terms of the psychological changes that work, fear, and service create in the slave. Where his reading suffers, however, is in simply viewing the following forms of the *Phenomenology* as strictly material forms that the slave's "ideology" will assume as history progresses towards its end in the actual freedom of the slave. The slave ceases to be truly a "slave" when she realizes the true nature of her being *qua* self-consciousness. Kelly is correct in stressing the internal aspect of the slave's development as a self-consciousness; it is this type of reading that Solomon adopts when he refers to the master/slave dialectic as a "parable" that is meant to illustrate the development of consciousness in the face of external powers and agents.²⁶ The internal phenomenology of the ego must be taken into account in any sustained reading of the master/slave dialectic.

The Master/Slave Dialectic as Not Purely Internal

While Kelly's point of the internal aspects to the master/slave dialectic is well taken, his argument for the possibility of a purely internal reading, as opposed to the social and fusion readings, seems off target. I fail to see how a purely internal, psychological account can be given in light of Hegel's insistence on the otherness involved in the development of self-consciousness and in the Hegelian notion of the mind. Given these main arguments, it will be shown that while social and fusion readings are possible, no such purely psychological reading can do justice to Hegel's text. Instead, the best reading would be the hybrid fusion of internal and external aspects to the process. As will be argued shortly, the master/slave dialectic can be profitably seen as an external series of events that result in internal changes. It should not be purely external, or purely internal in the intrapersonal sense espoused by Kelly.

Hegel's general conception of the mind should make interpreters wary of proposing a strongly internal reading of the master/slave struggle. Kelly argues that the ego must be filled with contending principles, enabling some to be the master-principles and some to be the slave-principles as a result of this struggle. This view of the Hegelian ego seems quite mistaken, as Hegel is against any such essential reading of the mind *qua* faculties or determinate contending principles. Indeed, at the beginning of "Self-Consciousness," Hegel points out that "self-consciousness is *Desire* in general," leaving little room for speculating about opposing faculties and principles.²⁷ At this stage in the development of consciousness, the mind is merely filled with natural instincts, desires and drives, and it is through the master/slave dialectic that it gets the opportunity to discover that it is capable of being-for-itself, through transcending the desires of nature and risking life for the non-natural end of recognition. For a thinker like Kant, such an internal struggle can be portrayed as a viable reading; indeed, Kant gives such an account of evil

involving the placing of one's self-interest over the moral law in terms of moral motivation,²⁸ and in describing the inclinations as those principles from which a rational being wishes to be free.²⁹ Kant is able to make these moves because he conceives of the human agent as being subject to set forces and as possessing a mind with static faculties; the struggle is among which one of these faculties are to be the ruler and which are to be the ruled. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, specifically in his doctrine of virtue, Kant uses language to which Kelly refers, pointing to the essence of virtue resting in "being one's own *master* in a given case (*animus sui compos*), and *ruling oneself* (*imperium in semetipsum*), that is, subduing one's affects and *governing* one's passions."³⁰ Hegel, however, is unable to make such a move because he is conscious of the mind as such a fluid, developing entity. The whole point of the *Phenomenology* is to show the development of spirit and mind through its experiences; its conception of itself shapes these experiences, and these experiences consequently shape the future forms that it is to take. For the previous sections, consciousness found certain things to be true about experience; in the section on self-consciousness, the mind now finds other things of importance about the world, especially its being in it.³¹

Another major obstacle that stands in the way of any purely internal reading of the master/slave dialectic must be the necessary confrontation that an external other poses to the developing consciousness. This interaction takes place in time and space, thus constituting its historicity. Hegel points to this locating of the development of self-consciousness, stating, "self-consciousness is the reflection out of the being of the world of sense and perception, and is essentially the return from *otherness*."³² It is the other, external ego *qua* locus for desire that enable the individual ego to develop. Desire shifts from its focus on negating mere objects to concentrating on an object of a different sort, namely a conscious being. Through desiring

recognition from this being, the first ego grows in terms of transcending its natural desires via the life or death struggle that precedes the master/slave dialectic. Even to start this process, internal drives and desires are needed, as well as the existence of at least two interacting consciousnesses. Kelly's reading of conflicting internal principles does not capture the point that Hegel is straining to make, that self-consciousness comes from stimuli outside a creature. If an agent were to develop a sense of their being in the world as self-conscious from only a struggle within their egos, the potentiality for self-consciousness would not even need any type of externalist reading, such as those offered in the social and fusion readings. Instead of this, however, Hegel emphasizes the importance of struggle with an external other in the form of the other consciousness. The basic living beings that Hegel discusses in ¶171 are split into differing forms and interact with and on other shapes of life; in the case of consciousness, it possesses the ability to transcend a mere feeding off of nature and its forms, and can attain knowledge of itself. This is an obviously external scenario, and requires a good deal of externality in any interpretation of desire or its resulting process of master/slave struggle. Indeed, the very essence of self-consciousness, the result of the master/slave dialect, is external; Hegel points out that "self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged."³³ The end result of the master/slave conflict is the establishment of certain forms of self-consciousness; the consciousness of the slave emerges from the dialectical encounter with the master and his power. All of this, of course, must be external and not merely within one's head; any reading of master-principles and slave-principles is too metaphorical for Hegel's own intentions. He aims to describe some sort of development of consciousness, which, at this stage, involves some type of struggle with externally equal beings. Internal psychological aspects are present only insofar as they initiate the struggle for recognition

and as they result from the slave's struggle to transcend natural drives and the mere being of the master. It is the externality of this struggle that is of prime importance for Hegel; he says "*self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness... self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it.*"³⁴

Another important consideration that should lend credibility to Kojève's externalist, social reading, although not to his ultimate materialist conclusions, is the issue of power in the master/slave dialectic. The important developments for the slave come in and through her reaction to the wielding of power by the master. Initially, however, one must recognize that the struggle was initiated over a desire for unilateral recognition by the other; in other words, each agent wanted power over the other to the extent that they could achieve unreciprocated recognition. This leads to the staking of lives *qua* transcending being, and to the life or death struggle for recognition. Kojève is accurate in his assessment of conflict relating to power; in this case, the power relates to external objects that a subject would like to exercise control over.

The other source of power in the struggle comes from the master, once the roles have been assigned. One agent becomes a slave because he yields to his natural instincts and desires; the master is able to risk his life long enough for the other's desire to give way. In this regard, he earns the title of master because he was able to transcend his natural desires, such as those of self-preservation. The slave feels this external power exercised by the master and is forced to work and labor on the world to sate the master's desires. Again, the externality of Hegel's point is clear, in that the two self-consciousnesses are in a struggle that involves the status of both wills; the master's will is that which ends up being sated with the unwilled action of the slave because of the massive power difference. The master is able to force the slave to serve him

through the fear of death.³⁵ It is through this experience, however, that the slave gains a realization of her being in the world; she realizes that she is a being-for-self and that the master's power only goes so far. Indeed, in the later sections on stoicism and skepticism, the slave begins to exercise this putative freedom through mental activity.

The external power of master, responsible for this ultimate change in the slave's consciousness, takes the form of forces compelling the slave to work in service of the master. This work is what educates the slave and yet keeps him "grounded" and in touch with the world of nature. The historicity of this development again displays itself in that the slave consciousness must develop mechanisms or technologies of coping with the world in order to excel at its labor. The master, on the other hand, simply desires and basks in the satisfaction of those desires, basically losing the self-consciousness they achieved in transcending natural desires for self-preservation in the life or death struggle that made them the "master." It is the fear that motivates the slave, and that also results a lasting impression of his being-for-self. The master's realization of his status disappears once he gains the position of master, whereas the slave's fear continues on and motivates him to labor with purpose and benefit, and to realize his true status as a self-conscious being. All of these aspects to the master's power over the slave and the slave's response to it presuppose an external interaction and development. The very heart of the slave's endeavor, work, allows his being-for-self to become "an object for him only through his setting at naught the existing shape confronting him."³⁶ It is not his ego's desires at work, but that of the mediated master; it is the slave who realizes the important aspects of his existence, however, and continues on in the dialectical development of stoicism, skepticism, etc. The only reading that can capture this element of power alien to one's own being must be some

sort of fusion reading, or at least a social reading infused with intrapersonal consequences of the interpersonal interaction.

Conclusion

This inquiry has explored the historicity of Hegel's master/slave dialectic, attempting to investigate how much of a material process it entails. Some commentators, such as Kojève, see it as extremely historical, even creating the history of humanity through such class struggles. This reading privileges the social dimensions of the dialectic, and emphasizes the development of the slave. This totalizing interpretation worries other scholars such as Kelly, who propose other perspectives on this crucial part of Hegel's *Phenomenology*; he offers an internal, psychological account, addressing the struggle between master-principles and slave-principles within a given ego, or proposing a fusion between the purely internal and external readings. Kelly finds that each of these interpretations is justified in light of Hegel's texts. I have tried to argue that while the social view can be modified to a fusion view in order to accommodate a reading true to Hegel, the psychological reading is untenable. This claim is substantiated by the externality present at multiple levels in Hegel's master/slave conflict. Self-consciousnesses are pitted against one another as objects of desire, and the externality of power also enters into the arrangement of master/slave roles. Indeed, the only way that Hegel gets any benefit out of this shape of consciousness and its development is in terms of his larger project in the *Phenomenology*; things obviously do not end with the slave, nor do they deal with a static conception of mind, such as that evoked by Kant in describing an individual's progress toward virtue by taming their inclinations. In the previous sections in the *Phenomenology* on sense-certainty, perception, and the understanding, the ego was faced only with a given part of the world; in this section, however, truths about its nature *qua* self-conscious being are discovered

when faced with itself in the other, when its desires conflict with those of another desiring being. While Kelly manages to point out important problems with Kojève's account, his alternative psychological reading fails to include the externality that is so crucial to the discovery of self-consciousness through desire and the presence of the other.

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- ¹ Alexandre Kojève. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Eds. R. Queneau, A. Bloom. Trans. J. H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).
- ² George Armstrong Kelly. "Notes on Hegel's 'Lordship and Bondage'." *The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader: Critical and Interpretive Essays*. Ed. Jon Stewart. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), pp. 172-191.
- ³ Robert C. Solomon. *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G. W. F. Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 444.
- ⁴ Kojève, 37.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 47.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 49.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.
- ¹⁶ John Plamenatz is also accused of committing this interpretive sin, reading Hegel's master/slave dialectic on a purely interpersonal level in his *Man and Society*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), vol. II.
- ¹⁷ Cf. Robert Stern. *Hegel and the Phenomenology of Spirit*. (London: Routledge, 2002) for further details of such critiques.
- ¹⁸ Kelly, 175.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 180.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 185.
- ²³ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A. V. Miller. (New York, Oxford University Press, 1977), ¶166.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, ¶196.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, ¶195-196.
- ²⁶ Solomon, 444-445.
- ²⁷ Hegel, ¶167.
- ²⁸ Immanuel Kant. *Religion within the Boundaries of mere Reason*. in *Religion and Rational Theology*. Trans. Allen W. Wood, George Di Giovanni. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6:36.
- ²⁹ Immanuel Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. in *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. Mary J. Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4:428.
- ³⁰ Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals*. in *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. Mary J. Gregor. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6:407.
- ³¹ Hegel, ¶166.
- ³² *Ibid.*, ¶167.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, ¶178.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, ¶176-177.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, ¶194.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, ¶196.