

## HEGEL ON SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

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THE thought that self-consciousness (and in that sense self-knowledge or self-awareness) depends for its full realization on relations with others is an interesting one.<sup>1</sup> Hegel, as is well known, presents a thought of that kind when he says in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 111,<sup>2</sup> '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', or, on p. 110, 'Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness'. Such assertions have large implications for an understanding of human beings as conscious and self-conscious beings, or at least seem to do so. It is notorious that Hegel abstracted from the thought in question important social and political consequences, as exemplified in his famous discussion of the master-slave relation and the notions of lordship and bondage—consequences which were taken up and adapted by Marx. That part of Hegel's argument has been much discussed by others, but I shall have little to say about it, although it is important to recognize its place in the total framework of this part of Hegel's philosophical system. The notions of self-consciousness and self-knowledge have their own interest, however, and what Hegel has to say about them is worthy of note, independently of any social and political implications which he derives from that. The sections of his works in which Hegel discusses these matters are famous ones, particularly the section of the *Phenomenology*, but I make no apology for considering them once again.

My aim, therefore, is to provide some commentary upon and assessment of the argument which leads up to the assertions

<sup>1</sup> I have tried to say something about it in my 'Self-knowledge' in T. Mischel (ed.), *The Self* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), also included in my *Perception, Learning and the Self* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 239–66.

<sup>2</sup> References are in all cases to the translation of that work by A. V. Miller, with an analysis of the text and foreword by J. N. Findlay (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977).

mentioned earlier. Alongside them may be put the remark at §430 of that part of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* which is also called 'Phenomenology of Spirit',<sup>1</sup> 'In that other as ego I behold myself, and yet also an immediately existing object.' It should be noted also that in a passage of the *Phenomenology*, p. 110, soon after the second remark quoted above, Hegel says that what still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit (*Geist*) is, and he characterizes that as an "I" that is "We" and "We" that is "I"—which seems to be what in the *Encyclopaedia* he refers to as 'universal self-consciousness'. It is important that this idea is something that still lies ahead at this point. The self-consciousness which achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness is still an 'I'. There is thus a sense in which Hegel's approach is a first-person one; the identification of the 'I' with a 'We' is not his starting-point but a position towards which he is working.

This may suggest that his argument is firmly in the Cartesian tradition. Yet, it is sometimes said (e.g. by Charles Taylor in his book on Hegel)<sup>2</sup> that Hegel's philosophical approach involves a rejection of Cartesian dualism. There are indeed ways, as I shall try to indicate later, in which Hegel's thought is non-Cartesian; there is, for example, his emphasis upon life as providing the context within which the mind is to be viewed. As against this, however, Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his *Hegel's Dialectic*,<sup>3</sup> p. 35, says that 'Hegel's idea of phenomenology lies in the Cartesian tradition' in respect of the identification of consciousness with self-consciousness. Moreover, Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*,<sup>4</sup> pp. 235 ff., accuses Hegel of begging the question of the '*Cogito*' both ontologically and epistemologically—ontologically in assuming the existence of other selves, and epistemologically in claiming to know of them. For the accusation of begging the question to be justified it would at least have to be true that Hegel starts from the position of the '*Cogito*'. It is important, therefore, to try to make clear the starting-point of Hegel's argument.

For this purpose we need, first, to set out the historical context.

<sup>1</sup> Translated as *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) by A. V. Miller, with a foreword by J. N. Findlay.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), pp. 81 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic, Five Hermeneutical Studies*, translated with an introduction by P. Christopher Smith (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1976).

<sup>4</sup> J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by H. E. Barnes, with an introduction by Mary Warnock (London: Methuen, 1957).

It is an oddity which is perhaps worth noting that when Descartes introduced his very first-person approach to philosophical issues (and how he came to do this has, incidentally, never received an adequate historical explanation), he introduced the problem or supposed problem of the external world, but not, or not explicitly, the problem of other persons; he did not explicitly recognize the problem of avoiding, as Sartre puts it, the 'reef of solipsism'. The phrase 'external world' was never, to my knowledge, used by Descartes himself. I do not know who was the first philosopher to use it, although the phrase occurs in Hume (*Treatise* 1.4.2) and Berkeley speaks of 'external things' on a number of occasions. In spite of the fact that Descartes seems not to have used the phrase in question, the problem of justifying belief in a world outside the individual's mind is a central Cartesian concern. (And it is important to note that the so-called external world is external in the sense that it is outside the individual's *mind*, not just outside him or outside his body.) The justification of belief in the existence of other selves or persons—of other minds perhaps—is not an explicit Cartesian concern in the same way. Nor is it an explicit concern of the philosophers who succeeded Descartes.

Kant speaks at times, when concerned with the idea of objectivity (e.g. at *Critique of Pure Reason* A820, B848 ff.), of validity for all men, as opposed to validity for me. But in spite of the fact that he operates with the Cartesian-inspired apparatus of representations and the like, Kant seems in general to assume that there is no need to make a distinction between 'I' and 'We', between 'me' and 'us'. In other words, he presents the issues with which he is concerned on the assumption that whatever holds good of my sensibility and my understanding may hold good for men generally; the judgements which I make will have objectivity if they conform to the principles implicit in the doctrine of the categories, and if they are objective in this way they will have validity, not just for me, but for all men generally. The existence of others is not, in this, something that needs to be remarked on, let alone argued for. In a similar way, Schopenhauer, despite some incidental remarks upon what he calls 'theoretical egoism' (which amounts to solipsism) and the impossibility of providing a real refutation of it, nevertheless assumes that if the world is my representation (which indeed he explicitly asserts) it is everyone else's too.

Hegel, I suggest, makes a similar assumption at the beginning of his argument. The sense-certainty, which is the first concern of the

*Phenomenology* is, as Hyppolite puts it,<sup>1</sup> 'naïve consciousness, which knows its object immediately, or, rather, thinks that it knows it', and, initially at any rate, it is the consciousness or sense-certainty of an *individual*, even if it does not matter which individual that is. 'Consciousness', Hegel says (p. 58), 'for its part, is in this certainty only as a pure "I"; or I am in it only as a pure "This", and the object similarly only as a pure "This"'. He goes on to argue, however, as part of a general argument for the position that sense-knowledge must be mediated by concepts, that indexicals such as 'this' must be construed as universals because they have multiple application. For this reason too they must be taken to have content. Bradley argues similarly in chapter 2 of his *Principles of Logic* that the term 'this' involves the idea of a position in a series. The same, Hegel says, holds good of 'now' and 'here'. More importantly for present purposes, the same applies to 'I', and Hegel says (p. 62), 'Similarly, when I say "I", this singular "I", I say in general all "Is"; everyone is what I say, everyone is "I", this singular "I"'. This directly implies that the argument is to be taken as having application to each and all of us indifferently.

In this respect, although not, as we shall see, in others, Hegel is in no different position from that of Descartes, who also assumed that what he said about himself would be taken by all his readers as applying equally to them. Hegel's remarks about the term 'I' functioning as a universal simply formalize that point. It does not, however, amount to the '*Cogito*' and that is an issue to which I shall return. Nevertheless, no philosopher before Hegel had, to my knowledge, argued for the conclusion at which Hegel eventually arrives—that 'self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness'. Whatever that claim amounts to, it appears to take the relation that exists between myself and others as crucial to the nature of self-consciousness, and thereby to the philosophy of mind.

A further point which needs to be remarked on—a point at which I hinted earlier and on which there has been extensive comment by others with varying conclusions—is Hegel's emphasis on life. Neither Descartes nor any of the philosophers who count as successors of him placed that kind of emphasis on life. The reasons for Hegel's emphasis upon it are no doubt complex, but there can be no doubt that among them is to be reckoned the fact that Hegel looks back to Aristotle in a way that was not true of his immediate predecessors. It is noteworthy that in the *Encyclopaedia* the part on

<sup>1</sup> J. Hyppolite, *The Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1974), p. 77.

the 'Philosophy of Spirit' begins with a section on 'Anthropology, the Soul'. In this he sets out considerations about life and its forms, together with an account of their physical background. This is in the spirit of Aristotle's *De Anima*. In so far as it is fruitful to speak of Aristotle's philosophy of mind, as exemplified in that work, Cartesian concerns of the kind summed up in the '*Cogito*' and that way of thinking play no part in it.<sup>1</sup> So much is this so that it may be misleading in a post-Cartesian context to speak of Aristotle's philosophy of mind at all. The *De Anima* is a very biological work, and its preoccupation with the soul is, first and foremost, a preoccupation with the notion of life. Hence, concepts which we would think of as mental—concerned, that is, with aspects of the mind—are invoked and considered in that context alone. So, for Aristotle, if man is a thinking thing (as of course Descartes viewed man), it is because it is in terms of the power of thought that human beings are to be distinguished from other living things. Hegel's debt to that approach to the nature of the mind is profound, and it does indeed give a non-Cartesian slant to his thinking, even if he is inevitably and in many ways evidently a post-Cartesian philosopher.

For all these reasons, Hegel might well have repudiated hotly the criticisms that Sartre makes of him when he says that Hegel begs the question of the '*Cogito*'. He would have thought that Sartre was too committed to the '*Cogito*'. He might also have said, and rightly, that the paradoxical position into which Sartre gets himself should be taken as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Cartesian premisses which he presupposes. For Sartre says that if I experience the other 'with evidence, I fail to know him', while 'if I know him, if I act upon him, I only reach his being-as-object and his probable existence in the midst of the world' (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 302). That is to say that a mere reliance upon what is evident, what is clear to one, does not produce *knowledge* of others, while an active interaction with others does not really give us knowledge of *them*, as the source of the '*Cogito*' in their case. This is an inevitable conclusion for Sartre, given his emphasis upon the '*Cogito*', in spite of experiences such as that of shame, which Sartre famously notes. We cannot have such experiences without belief in others and their regard of us, but belief in others is not enough to give us *knowledge* of them. By contrast, what Hegel purports to argue for is the thesis that knowledge of others and their acknowledgement and recognition of us is implicit in some way in the very idea of

<sup>1</sup> Despite what may be suggested by the title, but not the substance, of my 'Aristotle's Cartesianism', *Paideia* (Special Aristotle Issue, 1978), pp. 8–15.

self-consciousness, so that to the extent that we have self-consciousness knowledge of others as such follows.

On the face of it, that is still a bold claim; for it is still the case that it is in *my* consciousness and *my* self-consciousness that such knowledge of others is implicit. How can I derive relations with others from what is simply me and mine? Hegel's reply might be to point to the fact that the starting-point of the argument is not me and mine in the sense implied in the '*Cogito*'. In *that* the foundation for the retreat from the method of doubt is to be found in an epistemological relation which is supposed to exist between me and something which is necessarily mine—my thinking. In terms of that relation the thinking which is necessarily mine is thereby necessarily private to me. The starting-point of Hegel's argument, as is made clear in the account of self-certainty, is consciousness in the form which this takes when there is a relation between an 'I' and a 'This'. But the 'This' does not have to be something necessarily mine, let alone necessarily private to me, even if it is identified solely by its relation to me.

There is a profound difference between an argument for a thesis about what holds good for human beings generally via a consideration of what holds good for me as an example of such a human being, and an argument for a similar thesis on the basis of what is supposedly necessarily so for me alone. It is the latter which is involved in the '*Cogito*', especially as Sartre uses it, not the former. Hegel starts simply from the idea that each of us has consciousness of an object, because each of us is conscious and consciousness must have an object; he then seeks to fill out what this implies for each of us when one goes into the complexities of the situation. If one does go into these, it will appear, Hegel thinks, that we cannot be content with a description of such consciousness as that of an 'I' directed to a 'This', because when we look into what is implied by 'I' and 'This' we shall see that other things are presupposed in those very ideas. In the end (as far as concerns the part of the argument with which we are concerned) it will appear that such consciousness implies, according to Hegel, self-consciousness, and that in turn implies consciousness of and by others.

At least two questions might be raised at this point. First, is not Hegel an idealist of some kind, so can the appropriate description of his starting-point be quite as neutral as I have suggested? Second, what is meant by 'implies' when it is said that according to Hegel consciousness of an object implies self-consciousness, and that in turn other things? In answer to the first question it is

necessary to re-emphasize what I have already said in pointing out certain differences between Hegel and Descartes—differences which suggest that Hegel's starting-point ought not to be construed as a form of knowing which involves a relation between me and what is necessarily private to me. The starting-point is the relationship between oneself and an object which is the same for each of us. On the other hand, Hegel is certainly an idealist. That is explicit in, for example, *Encyclopaedia*, §424, where he says, 'The object is my idea: I am aware of the object as mine; and thus in it I am aware of me'. This occurs, however, in a section concerned with self-consciousness, and it is the argument which provides the transition between the section on sensuous consciousness and that on self-consciousness which leads to this conclusion. Hence it is not clear that idealism is a premiss of Hegel's argument rather than something to which the argument leads; it is not clear, therefore, that idealism is to be written into the description of the starting-point.

I am inclined to think it true that idealism would not have existed and could not have done so in a full sense without the prevalence of the Cartesian attitudes implicit in the '*Cogito*', but the passage from the latter to the former is not an absolutely direct one.<sup>1</sup> Still, whatever be the route by which Hegel comes to idealism, the fact that he argues for it in the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness (something to which I shall return later) surely makes difficult, to say the least, the derivation from the idea of self-consciousness of the idea that self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness. For, from an idealist point of view that other consciousness will still be 'my idea', and not something strictly independent of me. I shall return to such difficulties later.

The second question was about the meaning of 'implies' when it is said that self-consciousness implies consciousness of and by others. The issues here may provoke further questions about Hegel's general method and intentions—questions which have been amply discussed by commentators. I shall not here try to comment on the Hegelian idea of an *Aufhebung* (translated by Miller as 'supersession') nor about the part that that idea plays in his dialectic; enough has been said about that by others. But phenomenology should at least involve a description of, and perhaps an unfolding of what is implicit in, what appears to consciousness. In that sense it will also be concerned with the

<sup>1</sup> See my *Metaphysics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), ch. 2, and the reference to the work of Myles Burnyeat given there.

phenomena which consciousness makes possible, and with their conceptual ordering. That ordering will be one which the philosophical phenomenologist will argue must be there; it will not necessarily be apparent to any conscious being as such. But if it is possible for a philosophical phenomenologist to argue, with whatever degree of cogency, that a given ordering is there, one has reason to expect to find in Hegel specific arguments, whatever their nature, for the conclusions set out at any given point. Hence, my task must be to discover and assess the argument which Hegel provides for the propositions with which I am particularly concerned. It is only in that way that the meaning of 'implies' in this context can be made clear.

J. N. Findlay says in his analytical note to section 177 of the Miller translation of the *Phenomenology*, 'Hegel holds that the understanding of other minds, far from being more obscure than the understanding of things, is the model and paradigm in terms of which intercourse with things can assume a limited clarity. In all intercourse with things we are striving towards the complete penetration and lucidity of social intercourse.' Can this be how it is? Apart from possible doubts about what is said concerning the 'complete penetration and lucidity of social intercourse', in what sense could the understanding of others be the model and paradigm from which understanding of things falls short?

The conceptual ordering presented in the opening sections of the *Phenomenology* is in general terms: sensation, perception, understanding—and with the last Hegel passes from a consideration of consciousness *simpliciter* to a consideration of self-consciousness. This leads in turn to the idea of consciousness of others and of being the object of their consciousness. This is supposed to entail a necessary conflict between self-consciousnesses, which is the context of the famous or notorious discussion of the master-slave relation. From this in turn, as the *Encyclopaedia* makes more clear, is supposed to emerge the idea of a universal self-consciousness, in which 'I' truly becomes 'We' combined with a recognition of the independence of those who make up the 'We'. In all this it is clear that the form of self-consciousness which involves others is in some sense at a higher level than the consciousness of things which is involved in understanding *simpliciter*. That much of what Findlay says is certainly true. But what grounds are there for the ordering?

Perhaps some insight into this may be derived from a consideration of the particular case of Hegel's transition from consciousness to self-consciousness. In the *Encyclopaedia* this comes in the section (§422) entitled 'Understanding' ('Intellect' in the



Miller translation—‘*Der Verstand*’), and in the *Phenomenology* in the chapter entitled ‘Force and the Understanding: Appearance and the Supersensible World’.<sup>1</sup> I take it that the argument in these passages is in part Hegel’s version of and substitute for Kant’s ‘Transcendental Deduction’, although what Hegel says about the supersensible world and its curious inverted nature goes far beyond anything in Kant. The argument has some similarity also, even if again it goes far beyond it, to what Schopenhauer says when concerned with the ‘principle of sufficient reason of becoming’, to the extent that Schopenhauer finds that version of the principle of sufficient reason, involving an emphasis on causality and law, implied in our understanding of the perception of things—although, given Schopenhauer’s notorious antipathy to Hegel, he would have hated me for mentioning that similarity.

Hegel’s problem over the perception of objects is essentially the problem of the one and the many—how the unity of a perceived object can be reconciled with the plurality of its properties or appearances. This has its parallel, or at least a partial one, in Kant’s idea of the synthesis of the manifold of representations or appearances. In the version of the ‘Transcendental Deduction’ in the second edition of Kant’s first *Critique* there appears of course the famous sentence to the effect that it must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany all my representations. The word ‘possible’ in that sentence is important. Kant does not claim that all consciousness involves self-consciousness; that would be an absurd exaggeration. He does not even claim that all consciousness *of an object* must *ipso facto* involve consciousness of self. He claims simply that consciousness of self must be *possible* in this context; it must be possible for me to be aware, in having representations of an object, that those representations are mine.

If Hegel’s argument is parallel to this, its outcome ought equally to be that in consciousness of an object despite the infinite plurality of its possible appearances there must lie also the possibility of self-consciousness; or, in other words, that consciousness of an object is not possible without the possibility of self-consciousness. In fact Hegel goes considerably beyond that. Initially he finds the explanation of the perceived unity of an object despite the infinite plurality of its possible appearances in the notion of law or lawlike connection, which is what he has in mind in speaking of ‘force’; so far one might see in this some similarity to Kant’s argument in the

<sup>1</sup> See David Murray, ‘Hegel: Force and Understanding’ in G. N. A. Vesey (ed.), *Reason and Reality* (RIP Lectures, Vol. 5, London: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 163–73.

'Analogies' for the necessity of the principle of causality. Objective experience of a substance implies, in Kant's view, its identity through time, or at all events the identity of something in regard to it, i.e. its matter (the 'First Analogy' is unsatisfactorily ambiguous in this respect); it also implies its conformity to causal laws, and (in the 'Third Analogy') a reciprocity or mutual interaction between it and other substances. Hence, for Kant, as for Hegel, the use of the understanding to make possible the perception of objects in appearances implies a reference to something supersensible. But Hegel adds in effect that lawlikeness is something that *we* bring to appearances; it is not something which belongs to them *per se*.

It is conceivably possible to argue that Kant's argument has similar implications, and that the point about the 'I think' might be interpreted as establishing the possibility of our being conscious of bringing causality to bear, so that consciousness of objects necessarily has self-consciousness as a possible corollary. It is not clear that this would be a correct interpretation of Kant, however. In any case, Hegel seems to argue that the considerations about force and the understanding, about the way in which law and lawlikeness are involved in our perception of things, imply that consciousness of an object is *eo ipso* consciousness of self. For he says (*Phenomenology*, p. 102), 'The *necessary advance* from the previous shapes of consciousness for which their truth was a Thing, an "other" than themselves, expresses just this, that not only is consciousness of a thing possible only for a self-consciousness, but that self-consciousness alone is the truth of these shapes.'

Despite the obscurities of the translation, there could hardly be a more explicit acknowledgement of the fact that on this point Hegel takes himself to go beyond the conclusion reached by Kant. It is true that Hegel goes on to add that 'it is only *for us* that this truth exists, not yet for consciousness'. Simply as conscious beings we need not be aware that in perceiving things we are in large part conscious of factors which are in fact contributed by ourselves; it could seem to us, and normally does so, that things, the objects of our conscious perception, exist and are more or less as we perceive them. Against this, Hegel suggests that as philosophers we ought to conclude that 'self-consciousness is the truth of these shapes'; as philosophers we ought to be aware of what we ourselves contribute to our experience, and it is in this sense that it is '*for us* that this truth exists', i.e. only for us as philosophers if we follow Hegel.

It does not follow from any of this, of course, that we can be said to be *making up* the lawlike connections which we take to exist between appearances, or that we can discover the details of this

a priori.<sup>1</sup> Hegel stands in the tradition initiated by Hume, which sees the necessity involved in causality and lawlikeness as having its source in ourselves, not in things. There is no *de re* necessity; there are no objective necessities in the world independent of us. Whether that is a position which Hegel adheres to throughout, it is certainly one that he maintains at this point. But such a view is quite compatible with the claim that experience is required in order to find out the circumstances in which necessity is to be ascribed. Natural laws are not our creations in any sense that justifies the assimilation of them to things such as works of art, which are creations in a genuine way. Nor are they mere implications of our ways of thinking in ways which make their necessity analytic.

In spite of these caveats, it cannot be denied that Hegel goes well beyond what Kant claims on these matters. In his view, consciousness of objects does not merely imply the possibility of self-consciousness, so that only a self-conscious being (i.e. one that *can* be conscious of self, not one that must always be so) can have consciousness of objects; in being conscious of objects we are, in his view, directly conscious of ourselves, whether we know it or not. Hence, while consciousness as such cannot be said to imply self-consciousness, consciousness of objects can. We cannot justifiably infer from that that all conscious creatures or beings are self-conscious. As I said earlier, that would in fact be an absurd claim to make; it would have no application to some kinds of animals. Hegel does not draw that inference, but he does assert that anything that can be conscious of objects which have an identity (and that does surely apply to *some* animals) must be self-conscious, and that not just in the sense that it *can* be conscious of itself as an 'I', but also in the sense that it must actually be conscious of self in having that consciousness of objects. If that is not an absurd claim, it is certainly an extremely bold one.

If one does think it an absurd claim on the grounds that there is an obvious distinction between consciousness of objects and consciousness of self, one will thereby be repudiating the idealism which Hegel is now making explicit. For one will be saying that it is obvious that objects have an independence from ourselves and from our consciousness. It might indeed be asserted that it is *a fortiori* obvious that what we are aware of in consciousness of objects is *not* ourselves, however much our sensory awareness of

<sup>1</sup> See David Murray, 'Hegel: Force and Understanding' in G. N. A. Vesey (ed.), *Reason and Reality* (RIP Lectures, Vol. 5, London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 172.

those objects is, as it were, coloured by what we bring to them. One who so thinks may conclude that we need go no further with Hegel's argument; for that argument has resulted in an absurdity.

No Hegelian idealist is likely to accept that conclusion; for the position which we are now considering and the idealism go hand in hand. It is important to note, however, how extreme, if that is the right word, Hegel's idealism is. I noted earlier the remark from the *Encyclopaedia*, 'The object is my idea: I am aware of the object as mine; and thus in it I am aware of me'. Berkeley might have accepted the first part of this threefold claim; he might also have been persuaded to accept the second part; but he surely would not have accepted the third. The situation is more complicated in the case of Kant's transcendental idealism, but he too would surely not have accepted the third part of Hegel's claim. I mentioned earlier Gadamer's remark to the effect that Hegel's idea of phenomenology lies in the Cartesian tradition; it does that, in Gadamer's view, because, as he puts it, 'the thesis that consciousness is self-consciousness has been a central doctrine in modern philosophy since Descartes'. It may have been a central doctrine that a conscious being must also be capable of self-consciousness, as Kant seems to assert, although even that needs to be qualified by restricting the consciousness in question to consciousness of persistent objects. But the *identification* of consciousness with self-consciousness has *not* been a central doctrine of post-Cartesian philosophy, and the assertion of that identification gives Hegel's doctrine the air of paradox.

However that may be, Hegel now says (*Phenomenology*, p. 105)

Consciousness, as self-consciousness, henceforth has a double object: one is the immediate object, that of sense-certainty and perception, which however *for self-consciousness* has the character of a *negative*; and the second, viz. *itself*, which is the true *essence*, and is present in the first instance only as opposed to the first object. In this sphere, self-consciousness exhibits itself as the movement in which this antithesis is removed, and the identity of itself with itself becomes explicit for it.

But curiously, perhaps, in comparison with what we should ordinarily think on these matters, Hegel claims that this unity of self-consciousness with itself makes it '*Desire* in general'. The idea of the unity of self-consciousness with itself reflects the idea of the '*I = I*' which Hegel took from Fichte, but it must be apparent that in the context of Hegel's argument there is involved more than a mere formal identity. For the identity of self-consciousness with itself derives from the identity of the *object* of consciousness with the

self, in that the consciousness of the one is, as we have seen, the consciousness of the other.

It might be thought that the use of the principle of the identity of indiscernibles which is implicit in this falls foul of considerations concerning referential opacity, and that it is illegitimate to infer from the fact that consciousness of A is also consciousness of B that A and B are themselves identical. It is hard to know what to make of such an objection in the Hegelian context, because Hegel takes it that in self-consciousness the object of consciousness, the A, exists not in itself, but for another, for self-consciousness. For that self-consciousness, as he says in the passage quoted earlier, the object has the character of a negative, i.e. it is different from self-consciousness. But for us, if we follow the Hegelian argument, the situation is different, and the object of self-consciousness is itself. These facts begin to explain to some extent why Hegel associates self-consciousness with desire as he does.

For, as Hegel sees it, self-consciousness in effect assimilates the object, the other, to itself. That comprises a movement, as is implicit in the quotation given earlier, in which the antithesis between consciousness of an independent object and consciousness of self is removed. Indeed, Hegel represents the state of self-consciousness, as his argument presents it, as one which involves a contradiction; and, as the *Zusatz* to *Encyclopaedia* §426 makes clear, there is, in his view, a necessary impulse to remove such a contradiction. This is achieved in the present case when, as Hegel says in the *Phenomenology*, 'the identity of self-consciousness with itself becomes explicit for it'. That realization amounts to the satisfaction of the desire or appetite (*Begierde*). But, it may be objected, all that Hegel has done in this is so to define desire that it is an urge to do away with the otherness of an object by assimilating it to oneself; satisfaction is obtained when that assimilation is achieved. That would be similar to what goes on in the case of biological urges, such as the desire for food which is satisfied when the food is assimilated to the body. Hegel seems to be saying, therefore, that self-consciousness has a similar tendency to assimilate its object to itself, the object being that which it has *qua* consciousness in the process of perception, namely the world, and that it can for that reason be characterized as desire or appetite.

As I have presented it, that would amount to an analogy only. In so far as self-consciousness is determined by the teleological principle mentioned earlier, the principle that it should so act as to free itself of contradiction or incoherence, it can do so in this instance only by assimilating objects to itself, making what is

other identical with itself. It will then function like something satisfying its appetite. Goal-directedness by itself, however, would not be enough to make self-consciousness like *desire*; what is required is that the goal in question should be the specific one of assimilating the other to itself, in the way that food is assimilated in the process of the satisfaction of hunger. The impulse to remove contradiction or incoherence provides the goal-directedness; it is the way in which the contradiction is removed that provides the likeness to desire. It removes the contradiction, if that is what it is, by maintaining its identity, while assimilating the other to itself. In the *Zusatz* to *Encyclopaedia* §426 Hegel asserts that life is essential to this possibility.

This leads on to the next stage of the argument, but, before I consider that, further attention is required to what Hegel says about desire. So far, I have been content to point out that in fact Hegel makes good only the assertion of an *analogy* between what happens in the case of self-consciousness and what happens in the case of desire or appetite. Unfortunately, there also exist apparent disanalogies. It is part of Hegel's account that the identity of self-consciousness with itself becomes explicit for it; it is equally part of the account that the supposed contradiction between the fact that it has itself as an object and also has, as consciousness, an object external to itself, must become evident to it. Hegel dwells on that aspect of the situation when he says in the same *Zusatz* (§426), 'the living being and mind or spirit necessarily possess impulse, since neither soul nor mind can exist without containing contradiction and *either feeling or being aware of it*' [my italics]. What Hegel describes in this passage as contradiction is simply what Aristotle described in the *De Anima*, when he said that in feeding the living thing is potentially like the food while being different from it, although in the process of nutrition it becomes actually like it. But Aristotle did not say that the living thing has any feeling or awareness of this as such. Nor is it evident why desire should imply any such thing. Why should any analogous state of affairs be evident to self-consciousness in its activity? Why is it not the case that this is at best evident only to us—evident to us, that is, if we follow and accept Hegel's argument, as phenomenologists or philosophical commentators? What makes it the case that a self-conscious being must itself come to see that its object is really itself?

At the beginning of the section of the *Phenomenology* entitled 'Self-consciousness', Hegel says that, as a result of the preceding argument concerning 'Force and the understanding', we must come to see that 'not only for us, but for knowing itself, the object

corresponds to the Notion [or concept—*Begriff*]', and that in this context 'it is clear that being-*in-itself* and being-*for-another* are one and the same. For the *in-itself* is consciousness, but equally it is that *for which* an other (the *in-itself*) is.' Yet, towards the end of the previous chapter he had said that 'it is only *for us* that this truth exists, not yet for consciousness'. If the argument of the previous chapter were valid, Hegel would have shown that, in what is supposed to be knowledge of an object, consciousness really has itself as its object, so that what is for it and what it is in itself are the same. But for this identity, or the identity of object and concept, to be evident to any self-conscious being as such, and not merely to the philosophical commentator, it would have to be the case that the relation between consciousness and object was always a transparent one. Hegel has not justified that assumption; indeed the argument up to this point seems to presume the opposite. None of this, therefore, can properly be used as backing for the claim that the urge to remove a supposed contradiction must operate by way of an insight into that contradiction, so that the contradiction exists not only in itself but for consciousness too. This, unfortunately, is necessary if it is to be the case that for self-consciousness 'the identity of itself with itself becomes explicit for it'.

Perhaps I make too much of this point, although I doubt it. Nevertheless, Hegel goes on to make, in the case of self-consciousness, the same sort of move that he has already made in the case of consciousness, but in the converse direction. (This is made explicit in the *Zusatz* to *Encyclopaedia* §425, where, comparing the present move to that previously made in identifying 'I' and object, he says 'this process is identical with its converse'.) Self-consciousness too has an object, which *qua* object is seen as different from itself, although it must, evidently, be in fact identical with itself. In order to get to the conclusion at which Hegel does eventually arrive, when he says that self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness, the independent object has to be seen, not only as self-consciousness itself, but also as *another* self-consciousness; for only in that event is there any possibility of the other being revealed as identical with self-consciousness itself.

The argument presented is in fact more complicated than that. The *Phenomenology* makes much of the notion of life, as a kind of flux in which the identity of the living being is maintained. It is indeed asserted (p. 106) that the object of self-consciousness is in fact life, as indeed it must be, in a certain sense, if self-consciousness is a form of life. Apart from that, there is a certain parallelism

between life and its manifestations and the position of self-consciousness in relation to its objects, in that there is in both the preservation of an identity through constant change. The reference to life is present also, as I have indicated, in the *Encyclopaedia*, but it plays a much less prominent role there. The arguments of both works stress the self-perpetuating character of desire, in the sense that the satisfaction of one desire is said to lead immediately to another. Appetite, says the *Encyclopaedia* §428, 'is again generated in the very act of satisfaction', because, the accompanying *Zusatz* indicates, of 'the lack felt by immediate subjectivity'. An object is always called for, but this is destroyed in the process of the satisfaction of desire, which is what self-consciousness involves.

The *Phenomenology* makes this a function of life itself. Nevertheless, the crux of the argument there seems to be (cf. §175, p. 109) that the persistence of an object of desire, which is what underlies desire's self-perpetuating character, is due to the fact that desire, and equally self-consciousness, must, logically, have an object. That is to say that these states have no being except in relation to an object; they are, to use the current jargon, intentional states. But Hegel's identification of self-consciousness with desire has the implication that the object must, in the process of their actualization, be made null or destroyed by being assimilated to self-consciousness. If that identification were valid, it ought to have the consequence that self-consciousness is abolished with the abolition of its object. For self-consciousness must have an object in order to exist, and that is a conceptual point, a point of logic one might say, not one of psychology. It is clear enough that *desire* is not in fact abolished with the abolition of an actual object; for the desire, being an intentional state, need not have an actual object, only an intentional one. Hence Hegel's attempt to connect this point with a psychological thesis about the self-perpetuating character of desire is a mistake. It is at best a psychological fact that desire, when satisfied, is simply renewed again, and that it is a fact is dubious; the thesis that desire must have an object is a logical consequence of what desire is.

If we fasten on to the logical point, the question at stake is how self-consciousness is possible if the process of self-consciousness involves the abolition of its object. Does not that involve a contradiction? An affirmative answer to that question would have of course no terrors for Hegel, since his dialectic sees such a contradiction only as one moment in a process of transition to some higher state of affairs. That process, as far as concerns this part of the argument, is described in the *Phenomenology* (p. 109) by the words,



On account of the independence of the object, therefore, it can achieve satisfaction only when the object itself effects the negation within itself; and it must carry out this negation of itself in itself, for it is *in itself* the negative, and must be *for* the other what it *is*. Since the object is in its own self negation, and in being so is at the same time independent, it is consciousness.

This leads directly to the claim that self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness. The trend of thought is not altogether clear; it seems to be that the only possible object of self-consciousness which could survive the contradiction of being abolished in the process of self-consciousness and yet of maintaining its identity is another self-consciousness. Only such a thing could have the requisite independence.

One might wonder, in reading this, whether Hegel is not saying that self-consciousness, reflexive as it is, can be understood only as involving a duplication in itself. The self would then be double, and the idea of another self-consciousness which is invoked need not, in these terms, involve the idea of another self. This might indeed be thought of as a rather crude conception of self-consciousness, in which there is no proper reflexivity, if it were not for the complexity of the argument which leads to the final position. The *Encyclopaedia* version of that argument gives an even stronger impression to this effect; for §429 says, 'The judgment or diremption of this self-consciousness is the consciousness of a "*free*" object, in which ego is aware of itself as an ego, which however is *also* still outside it.' The ego, it should be noted is aware of *itself*, although this ego, as object, is also independent of itself. The accompanying *Zusatz* says that self-consciousness 'has given itself the determination of otherness towards itself, and this Other it has filled with the "I", has made out of something self-less a free, self-like object, another "I". It therefore confronts its own self as another, distinct "I", but in doing so has raised itself above the selfishness of merely destructive appetite.' One should note, once again, the phrases 'determination of otherness towards itself' and 'confronts itself as another'. Hence, when he goes on in the next section to say, 'In that other as ego I behold myself, and yet also an immediately existing object', the words 'that other' do not as yet have to be taken as referring to another person—or at least not to another independent person. (It must be remembered in any case that there is a sense in which, in accordance with the underlying idealism, that other exists simply for me.)

Hegel says in the *Phenomenology* (p. 111) 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'; and in the *Encyclopaedia* he refers to the whole notion as that of 'self-consciousness recognitive' (*das anerkennende Selbstbewusstsein*). It exists only for another and in being acknowledged, in that, according to the argument, a self-consciousness cannot exist without the self which is its object being conscious of it, so that it is in turn the object of a self-consciousness. If the argument is to be so construed and if it is valid, that is the conclusion to be drawn—one about the nature of the self. Its nature will be in some respects like that of a society, in that it involves *interrelations* with itself, and to that extent the remark by Findlay, quoted earlier, has pertinence. Hegel goes on to argue that those interrelations must involve conflict—indeed a battle. For the process of recognition, like the process of consciousness in general, must involve an attempt on the part of one self-consciousness to assimilate the other to itself, and so to destroy it or abolish its independence; but the actual independence of the other prevents that and the process is mutual in any case. It is this thought that leads on to the discussion of lordship and bondage.

That discussion has been generally recognized as having a certain brilliance, and its influence on Marxian thinking is well known. It is reasonable enough to view it as providing social and political comment. Nevertheless, if one regards its context in the way in which I have been suggesting it should be regarded up to this point—as an attempt to characterize what self-consciousness must be like—the discussion of lordship and bondage ought to be regarded as presenting a metaphor only. The political image will in that case be meant to offer a model for the construal of the self, in much the same way as Plato's account of the constitution of the ideal state in the *Republic* is meant to offer a model for the construal of the soul. The same applies to the subsequent discussion in the *Phenomenology* of Stoicism, Scepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness. They will have to be regarded simply as pathologies of self-consciousness, and the accounts of them as descriptions of attempts to avoid the consequences of a true construal of the self and what has to be accepted as inevitable in it.

While this could well be one illuminating way of looking at Hegel's argument, it is not clear that it will do as a whole, however. In the first place the *Encyclopaedia* §431 speaks explicitly of my being 'aware of me as myself in another individual', and the accompanying *Zusatz* elaborates on this. §433 speaks of the emergence of man's social life. More importantly perhaps, there is no way of getting to the idea of a universal self-consciousness, in

which there is 'affirmative awareness of self in an other self' (§436), so that 'I' truly becomes 'We', except via consideration of one self as an individual standing in social relations to other individuals. In the second place, even if much of the discussion in the *Phenomenology* could conceivably be regarded as a brilliant metaphorical description of a self, it still has to get to the same conclusion as the *Encyclopaedia*, as the remarks (p. 110) about the 'I' that is a 'We' and 'We' that is 'I' indicate. Moreover, the discussion in the *Phenomenology* includes remarks such as 'The individual who has not risked his life may well be regarded as a *person*, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness' (p. 114). The idealism perhaps affects how Hegel's use of 'independent' is to be read, but that does not affect the all over point. (It is of some interest to note, in the light of recent emphases upon the concept of a person, how disparagingly Hegel uses the term!)

What then justifies the move from what are, arguably, the implications for self-consciousness of that very concept to what many have thought of as the more interesting thought that self-awareness involves some form of relationship with others? It might be said that the argument concerning self-consciousness is directed only to the abstract conclusion that that is how self-consciousness ought to be if it is to be self-consciousness proper. The next question which would then naturally arise would be one about the realization of that ideal. It might be argued for example, that that ideal is never realized in single, isolated, human beings, and that such a human being could never have self-consciousness proper. That conclusion has the air of paradox, although there are available arguments of a different and more general kind which cast doubt upon the idea of a human being the *whole* of whose existence had been in isolation from others.<sup>1</sup> Such arguments might have the corollary that self-consciousness is not possible in a wholly and continually isolated human being. Hegel's argument is not of that kind, however. He seems to move directly from considerations about self-consciousness to conclusions about the status of individuals—indeed to conclusions about 'me' and my relation to others.

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. my 'Human Learning' in S. C. Brown (ed.), *Philosophy of Psychology* (London: Macmillan, 1974), also in my *Perception, Learning and the Self*, pp. 132–48. See also my *Experience and the Growth of Understanding* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), and other papers, especially 'What exactly is Social about the Origins of Understanding?' included in *Perception, Learning and the Self*.

That step can be taken, surely, only if there are good and independent grounds for thinking that self-consciousness, as it has been construed, is realizable only in a social context. To assume that, however, would be to beg the question. It might be suggested that self-consciousness, with all the conditions laid down by Hegel, could not exist in a single human being, because human beings do not have the kind of double nature that Hegel argues for in respect of self-consciousness. Despite what Freud, for example, has to say about the primary and secondary processes, human beings are surely not *necessarily* split in the way which that conception assumes; and it is a *necessary* antithesis between two self-consciousnesses to which Hegel's argument leads, not a merely contingent one. Where else is such an antithesis to be found except in a group? Unfortunately, that way of looking at the situation does not obviate the paradox to which I made reference earlier. It is surely paradoxical to assert that only groups constitute forms of self-consciousness within which there is the kind of antithesis which Hegel describes. It would follow also that individual human beings are not self-conscious in the full sense, since individually they do not meet the conditions laid down.

In commenting upon the general argument, Charles Taylor says,<sup>1</sup> 'Man, as a being who depends on external reality, can only come to integrity if he discovers a reality which could undergo a standing negation, whose otherness could be negated without its being abolished. But the negation of otherness without self-abolition, this is a prerogative of human, not animal consciousness'. He goes on to derive from this the conclusion that 'the basic desire of self-consciousness can only be fulfilled by another self-consciousness'. Men, he says, 'seek and need the recognition of their fellows' and 'what is needed is a reality which will remain, and yet will annul its own foreignness, in which the subject can nevertheless find himself. And this he finds in other men in so far as they recognize him as a human being.' This seems to me a rather impressionistic picture of Hegel's actual argument. Why, in any case, should it be that the subject can find himself only 'in other men in so far as they recognize him as a human being'? Their recognition of him might enable the subject to find *something like himself* in them—but find *himself*?

I cannot think, therefore, that what Taylor has to say is either close enough to what Hegel actually maintains or enough in itself to sustain the conclusion to which Hegel's argument is directed. In what he has to say, however, there may be found as much as is

<sup>1</sup> Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, p. 152.

acceptable, as a position to maintain independently of that argument. Hegel's argument, I have suggested, implies, if taken at its face value, that only within a group is self-consciousness properly to be found, and in a rather special way at that. By that I do not mean that the self-consciousness in question corresponds to the colloquial sense of that expression, according to which self-consciousness implies a kind of reserve or nervousness in the face of others. Hegel does not have that in mind, but rather that each member of a group has to see others as himself and yet also as independent. I suggested earlier that Hegel might be taken as arguing for a double nature in respect of self-consciousness. That is certainly implied by the penultimate stage of his argument, when he argues that the 'ego is aware of itself as ego, which however is *also* still outside it'. That could conceivably hold good of members of a group, provided that they saw other members of the group as somehow identical with themselves; and that provision is allowed for by Hegel in the remark about my beholding myself in the other as ego. But to say that the conditions so laid down might conceivably hold good of a group is not to say that they *must* hold good of groups, and it is not to say that a member of a group is self-conscious only when he and this fact are recognized by other members. But that is what is argued for in the final stage of the argument, if it is taken to apply to individuals in relation to other individuals.

Before finishing it may be as well if I provide a summary of the points which I have been trying to make:

- (1) Hegel was not a Cartesian; so that there is no question, despite Sartre, of his begging the question of the '*Cogito*' in arguing that self-consciousness implies conscious of and by others.
- (2) He was, however, individualistic in his approach to the mind; hence there is a problem how anything about others as independent entities can be derived from his analysis of self-consciousness. In any case, his idealism affects the question how the conclusion is to be taken.
- (3) The most plausible account of what he has to say about the analysis of self-consciousness is that self-consciousness and the self must necessarily be double in such a way that there is a conflict between their components.
- (4) It is clear nevertheless that Hegel intends more than that. One way of arguing for the something more would be to argue that the conditions of self-consciousness are realizable only in groups. That, however, is not Hegel's actual argument.
- (5) It follows that the conclusion, though extremely interesting in itself, does not seem to be derivable from the material provided.

As is often the case in philosophy, the conclusion of Hegel's argument may well be judged more interesting than the route to it, and the brilliance and suggestiveness of the passage about lordship and bondage may well be taken to reinforce that point. Given the importance which philosophers rightly attach to arguments, this may seem surprising. How can a philosopher be great if his arguments are invalid? Paradoxical though it may seem to some, that is a possibility which must be recognized, and it is a possibility which has often been realized in the history of philosophy. Philosophers tend to work from within frameworks of ideas and assumptions which are currently accepted, and the real revolutionary does not appear on the scene all that often. I have tried to indicate the extent to which, and with what qualifications, Hegel is to be seen as still working within the shadow of Descartes. Granted that he saw a problem over self and other, which was not explicitly seen by his predecessors that shadow is there. Sartre's version of Hegel, coloured as it is by the influence of Heidegger, deepens that shadow, because Sartre's epistemological and metaphysical thinking, at any rate in *Being and Nothingness*, is not only individualistic but also imbued with the presuppositions of the 'Cogito'—that I have a clear and distinct idea of myself in a way in which I do not have this of other things. That view is not to be found in Hegel, but he does not thereby escape all the problems to which Cartesian epistemological individualism gives rise. It took Wittgenstein's emphasis on the primacy of forms of life and on the necessity of agreement with others, if understanding *of any kind* is to exist, to provide a way of escaping from the tradition which has been with us, as philosophers, for about three hundred years. But such is the force of tradition that it may still be a matter for doubt whether that lesson has yet been learnt. According to that lesson, self-consciousness must certainly depend for its possibility on relations with others, but not in the way or for the reasons which Hegel supposed.