Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic and its Role in his Analysis of Conscience

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Synopsis

In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the Master-Slave Dialectic plays an important role, not only as a description of certain social relationships and the development of individual self-consciousness, but also as a stage in the journey towards Spirit and Absolute Knowledge. As such, its implications reverberate through later sections of that book, including the section in which Hegel analyses the possible use of conscience as a basis for morality. This essay provides a description of both the Master-Slave dialectic and the analysis of conscience, and shows how the latter depends on the former.

The essays starts with Conscience as Hegel describes it in both *Phenomenology of Spirit* (which I shall frequently abbreviate PhS) and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (abbreviated PhR). Numerous points in this analysis presuppose an understanding of the need for and the process of recognition. Since recognition is the main theme of the Master-Slave Dialectic, the subsequent discussion focuses on that section of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The essay then returns to the critique of conscience in order to make explicit those links with the Master-Slave Dialectic which were previously only implied.

1. Conscience

Hegel addresses the topic of conscience in both PhS (¶¶632–671) and PhR (§§129–140). I shall first summarise these two sections and then make a brief comparison.

Phenomenology of Spirit — "Conscience. 'The Beautiful Soul', Evil and its Forgiveness"

Prior to the passage on conscience in PhS, Hegel has been critical of the view that the source of moral responsibility could be external to the self. "Duty is no longer the universal which stands over against the self" but now he considers duty as a matter of internal conviction. "It is now the law that exists for the sake of the self, not the self that exists for the sake of the law" (para 639). In other words, moral law does not depend on external postulates, but on internal self-legislation. It is this internal self-certainty of conviction which Hegel refers to as conscience (Gewissen). Hegel systematically identifies numerous problems, or potential problems, with this immediate[1] form of moral self-certainty, and, by resolving those problems, shows how the dichotomy of universal duty and individual action can be overcome. Although conscience is an internal and personal matter, two self-consciousnesses may recognise and acknowledge each other's conscientiousness and a community of conscience may be formed via this mutual validation (¶¶640, 656).

The first problem faced by someone acting conscientiously is that dutiful action requires that one review all the circumstances of a situation before acting, including not only the conditions leading up to the act, but the future consequences of the act as well (¶642). One must also review all the aspects of duty (courage, self-preservation, reliability, etc) which may apply to these circumstances (¶643). Since neither of these is possible to the finite self, the self must act without being able to fully consider the implications of its action. However, partial information is sufficient for conscience: conscience acts on *conviction* and conviction is neither dependent on having all the facts, nor bound by any externally defined set of duties.

This leads to a second problem. Conviction is inherently personal, and any conscientious act based on conviction will inevitably reflect the personal whims and caprice of the actor. Hyppolite calls this arbitrary aspect the 'bad conscience' (p. 502). An outside observer need not accept that a person's actions really do conform to duty, but may instead think that they simply arise from the actor's particular character. It would seem that conscience allows anyone to do whatever they want (c.f. Lauer p. 225). "Every individual, therefore, whose conduct is subject to no moral judgement save his own, may aspire to absolute goodness and absolute rightness in total disregard of the existence of other individuals or of the effect on them his conduct entails" (Loewenberg p. 279).

Furthermore, when a person acts, he[2] sees his own self expressed in the action and this can lead to a sort of inner moral conceit, as though he were acting in order to witness and enjoy his own superiority. When Hegel later writes that "No man is a hero to his valet", he has this point in mind. The valet knows his master's daily habits and conceits and can always interpret the hero's motives as self-serving (¶665).

An associated problem is that the moral content of any particular act is ambiguous (¶¶648–649). The one act could be seen as courageous to one person but cowardly to another. Observers cannot determine whether a conscientiously acting agent is good or evil simply on the evidence of particular acts. To preserve the independence of their own conscience, the observers are likely to nullify the conscience of the other and call it evil. But regardless of how others may interpret one's act, it is no use saying that conscience should have acted otherwise, since it is the essence of conscience to follow one's *own* convictions. Neither is Reyburn correct when he claims that "It is not enough to be sincere: our sincerity must be well informed" (Reyburn, p. 195). It is no use saying that the actor could have known better or could have reasoned differently or could have taken something else into consideration, for this would make morality dependent on "the necessary *contingency* of *insight*" (PhS ¶645). Hegel is insistent that nothing but conviction of duty can be the essence of moral obligation[3], but at the same time he does not want to endorse the modern tendency to moral relativism.

So we come to the next problem: how can conscience make itself known if not by its actions? If moral validity lies not in the act but in the conviction, then language plays a crucial role in the *declaration* of conviction (¶653). A person with the moral self-certainty of conscience will, by definition, act dutifully, for duty is defined in terms of the particular acts of a conscientious agent. But it is language rather than action which allows external access to the internal conviction (Loewenberg pp. 281ff). As long as someone can declare their self-knowledge of their own convictions, it *must be* that they acted conscientiously. "Whoever says he acts in such and such a way from conscience, speaks the truth" (¶654). Even so, it is possible for an external observer to remain suspicious of an actor's motives[4]. If a person's acts can be interpreted as morally bad, but their words claim moral rightness, they will seem evil indeed! This would be especially so if one suspects that the spoken words have been consciously chosen to mask the person's evil intentions (Loewenberg pp. 288f).

It begins to look as though this type of conscience is too self-centred to sustain itself. If conscience defines its own content, it is as though it deifies its own voice (¶655) and, by turning completely inward, becomes abstract and insubstantial (¶657). It lacks the power to externalise itself, lives in dread of besmirching itself by action and flees from contact with the outer world to preserve its purity. This self-willed impotence, whose only activity is an unexpressed yearning, is an unhappy, yet "beautiful" soul (¶658).

The so-called "beautiful soul" is not the only possibility for conscience, however. In fact we could propose two extremes — the particular self-consciousness for whom self-certainty expressed in action is paramount and, on the other hand, the beautiful soul which represents the universal consciousness for whom duty is paramount. This latter may also be seen as the impersonal moralist whose only action is to judge the actions of the former. To such a moralist, the acting spirit is both evil (since it does not adhere to universal duty) and hypocritical (since it nevertheless claims to be acting conscientiously). (See ¶660).

How is this dichotomy to be reconciled? Is there a way for the two types of conscience to become identical? Only by some process of mutual recognition. It could not happen by the acting spirit simply admitting to being evil, since that would be to deny its own nature (¶662). Nor can it occur by the judging spirit forcing itself on the acting spirit since the universal duty of the judging spirit has no more right to claim obedience than the individual duty of the acting spirit. In fact, by declaring itself to be at odds with the individual, the judging spirit admits that it is not truly universal, for there is at least this one individual who does not acknowledge it! (¶663).

To the extent that the universal consciousness conceitedly claims superiority over the individual consciousness, it is itself hypocritical, "wanting its words without deeds to be taken for a superior kind of *reality*" (¶666) whereas in fact "duty without deeds is utterly meaningless" (¶664). It is this which opens the way to reconciliation, for in their common hypocrisy the two forms of conscience are actually identical. The realisation of identity first becomes clear to the acting spirit who then admits to it, expecting that the judging spirit will respond with a reciprocal admission. However, it is likely that the judging spirit, unaware of, or denying its own hypocrisy, will refuse to acknowledge that it is the same as the "evil" acting spirit. Its stubbornness prevents the possibility of mutual recognition and maintains the disparity between the universal and the particular conscience (¶667).

Only when the hard heart of the judging spirit is broken can the equality of the particular and universal be actualised. "Just as the former [the acting spirit] has to surrender its one-sided, unacknowledged existence of its particular being-for-self, so too must this other [the judging spirit] set aside its one-sided, unacknowledged judgement" (¶669). The acting spirit has confessed to its hypocrisy, and when the

universal spirit finally renounces its hard-heartedness, in effect it is offering forgiveness. The mutual recognition entailed in this exchange of confession and forgiveness constitutes an act of reconciliation whose product is the actualisation of conscience in absolute Spirit (¶670).

Russon on Evil and its Forgiveness

The interpretation of evil and forgiveness by John Russon, perhaps deserves separate attention. Whereas I have emphasised the individual aspect of PhS, Russon emphasises the social. From this perspective, the institution of conscience is a system of social relating in which both evil and forgiveness must be accepted.

Conscience, Russon says, displays a form of necessity — I acted this way because I had to, given what I know, what I value and what power I have (Russon pp. 539f). While there is no guarantee that one can successfully implement one's intentions, the necessity of conscience makes it inevitable that one's acts will trespass on others' autonomy (p. 541). Conscience will realise that this is a symmetrical relationship — not only must it trespass on others, but they must also trespass on it. It is this inevitable imposition which is in need of forgiveness.

> Conscience knows it must force its will upon others and, to the extent that it is animated by the notion of ultimacy of conscience, it equally must forgive it when others necessarily do the same... To forgive means to say of the offending other "she/he had to act that way"... In conscientious forgiveness, the right of the other to make and to have made demands upon me is my highest ideal, and the project of autonomy is thus realized only in this most radical heteronomy. (Russon, p. 542).

The words of Jesus in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us", with which Hegel and Russon were perhaps familiar, contain something of the same idea. The word "trespass"[5] denotes one's literal invasion of another's property, but also connotes, metaphorically, one's imposition on another's personal rights. Here we see Jesus, like Russon, stressing the mutuality inherent in forgiveness — the close relationship between the forgiveness of my impositions on another and of the other's impositions on me. The Mennonite theologian David Augsburger notes a similar dependence when he writes "Authentic forgiveness is the mutual recognition that repentance is genuine and right relationships are achieved" (Augsburger p. 28). Forgiveness depends on a relationship between two self-consciousnesses who recognise each other, and recognise the necessary evil of their impositions on each other.

Although I think Russon's point is a good one, it seem to me to be tangential to *Hegel's* point. For Hegel, evil arises from the conflict between the universal and the particular, not between two equal social agents. For Hegel, evil arises when one conscientious agent acts in violation of universal duty, not when one agent imposes his will on another. For Hegel, forgiveness is the eventual response of the universal spirit once its accepts its own hypocrisy rather than simply judging the hypocrisy of the acting spirit, not the mutual acceptance of inevitable imposition.

It should also be clear that neither Hegel's nor Russon's view on forgiveness coincides with the traditional Christian view. If the essence of evil is the inevitable imposition of one conscientious self-consciousness on another, as Russon suggests, then his understanding of forgiveness follows naturally. If, however, the essence of evil is rebellion against God, as Christianity proposes, then forgiveness will require something quite different — it will require an act of God.

Elements of the Philosophy of Right — "The Good and the Conscience"

As Hegel's section-title suggests, the discussion of conscience in PhR lies within the context of an examination of the nature of the general good. §§129–135 look at various aspects of the good and duty and then §§136–140 examines several views on conscience.

To start with, Hegel characterises the abstract concept of the good and notes that it can only be actualised "through the particular will" (§130). Conversely, "the subjective will has worth and dignity only in so far as its insight and intention are in conformity with the good" (§131). In the subjective sphere of will, insight can be both true and yet mere opinion and error. But in the objective sphere of action, goodness is not just a matter of the actor's subjective insight into moral value; rather, it is open to public judgment (§132(R)).

To the extent that duty is determined as a universal abstract essentiality, it should be obeyed for no further reason than it is duty (§133). Duty in this sense cannot be defined in terms of specific actions, but it means "to do *right*, and to promote *welfare*, one's own welfare and welfare in its universal determination, the welfare of others" (§134). However, given the formal and abstract nature of the terms so far,

proposing "duty for duty's sake" is empty rhetoric, since it provides no criteria for determining whether a particular act is dutiful (§135(R)).

If we keep following this formal line of reasoning it leads us to consider the absolute inward certainty of duty which we have seen previously, namely, conscience. Such formal conscience is still subject to judgement, but its truth or falsity cannot be recognised by an external observer. By way of comparison, Hegel points out that no-one would imagine that a *scientific* claim gains its validity from subjective opinion or its mere assertion, and likewise we could not validate conscience while it stays in this subjective form (§137(A)). Since right and duty cannot be determined via this formal conscience (§138), the self-conscious agent has two choices — either follow universal duty for its own sake (which we have seen is empty) or simply express its own individual caprice (which, as shown in PhS, leads to evil and hypocrisy) (§139).

Hegel provides here a fuller description of hypocrisy than in PhS. Hypocrisy requires four elements: knowledge of the true universal duty, to will a particular act which is at odds with this universal (i.e. to will something which is evil), knowledge that the act *is* evil, and an attempt to deceive others (and maybe even self) that the evil act was actually good. This is followed by criticisms of several views of conscience, including the view that "good will consists of *willing the good*" and the view that "the ethical nature of an action is determined *by the conviction which holds something to be right*" (§140R). For our purposes, the significant parts of these criticisms are included in the earlier discussion of PhS.

One major distinction needs to be added. Hegel is clear that these criticisms apply to the *formal* form of conscience, but not to *true* conscience. "True conscience is the disposition to will what is good *in and for itself*" (§137). Conscience only attains objectivity within ethical life (Sittlichkeit) (§137), that is, individual morality remains subjective, formal and abstract until it is rooted in a social context. This distinction extends the notion of conscience beyond the perspective in PhS. Part of the reason why formal conscience fails as a basis for morality is that morality itself is incomplete until duties can be "specified by our concrete relationships to individuals and institutions within an ethical order" (Wood 1993 p. 223). The moral value of conscience is unavoidably ambiguous until that occurs.

2. The Master-Slave Dialectic

Preliminaries

Paragraphs 166 to 177 of *Phenomenology of Spirit* set the scene for a struggle between two self-consciousnesses which is then played-out and analysed in paragraphs 177 to 196. The scene starts with a single character — an "I" whose self-consciousness is based on self-awareness. This I "is simultaneously subject and object; it poses itself for itself"; it is an immediate form of self-consciousness which could be summarised in the formula I=I" (Hyppolite p. 158). By the end of the scene, however, self-consciousness has confronted another self-consciousness and matured to a point that it can now glimpse a greater unity — "'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'" (¶177).

The driving force for this maturation of self-consciousness is what Hegel calls "Desire". Hegel goes so far as to say that "self-consciousness is desire in general" (¶167), although his use of the indicative is not that of identity, but rather suggests that the progressive movement of the one depends on the other. The German "Begierde", which is translated as "desire", denotes the basic urges and appetites calling for material satisfaction which humanity shares with the animal world; the desire for food, for warmth, for sex etc. Such desire is inexhaustible, repeatedly calling for satisfaction. Its satisfaction depends on the negating (the over-powering, destroying or consumption) of external objects in the impulse for self-preservation. However, Hegel claims that the real goal of desire is not this continual negation[6] of external objects, but rather desire itself. In effect, self-consciousness is seeking itself through trying to find an object which will satisfy its desires. The complete negation of external objects can never achieve this goal, but a different dynamic occurs when the object of desire is another self-consciousness.

The development of self-consciousness follows the standard phases of Hegel's dialectic movement — from immediate unity through dichotomy to a restored, mediated unity. The immediate unity of self-consciousness is an inner sense of one's self as a free and autonomous agent. This sense of self-consciousness is an unmediated and hence unjustified assertion; an inner certainty with no objective validity. In this state we can communicate with other people, "but this mutual recognition is tacit, implicit or unconscious" (Bernstein pp. 15f, 20). In Hegel's terms, "The individual who has not risked his life [i.e. not yet undergone the master-slave struggle described below] may well be recognised as a *person*, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness" (¶187). The stage of dichotomy occurs when one encounters another person and sees in them a reflection of one's self. This encounter produces two conflicting views of self, but also provides the setting in which unity can be

restored at a higher level. In this progression, the development of self-consciousness cannot occur within an isolated person, but depends on the reflection of one self in another. In this way, "A self-consciousness exists *for a self-consciousness*. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness" (¶177). That the mediated unity of a self-consciousness depends on its reflection in another is made more explicit in the following paragraph — "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" (¶178). The acknowledgment of a self-consciousness happens via the process of recognition, and it is in order to describe this process that Hegel presents the Master-Slave struggle.

The importance of this movement is that it signifies the birth of Spirit. "With this [i.e. in the relationship between two self-consciousnesses], we already have before us the Notion of *Spirit*" (¶177). For Hegel, Spirit (Geist), is not the non-physical substance which floats freely as an independent angel, deity or ghost, nor the life-essence embodied in a human being, but "spirit in the form of genuine universality such as ethicality and custom, which in being taken for granted, unite one and all" (Gadamer p. 72).

The Confrontation of Two Self-Consciousnesses

Figure 1 illustrates the progression described in *Phenomenology of Spirit* paragraphs 179 to 186. The confrontation of two self-conscious people is an educative process (Bildung) in which each initially has a unified, but unmediated understanding of himself. The confrontation raises a discrepancy between each person's understanding of himself and the understanding of the self by the other but also has the potential of restoring unity via recognition.

Figure 1 — The Development of Self-Consciousness via Recognition[7]

In the first picture, a person is shown as self-conscious in the elementary sense that he has some degree of self-knowledge, that is, a concept of his own "I". When such a person encounters another person (second picture), the first initially treats the second as simply another object, independent but not self-conscious — "Each is indeed certain of its own self, but not of the other" (¶186). There is no conflict between this understanding of the second person and the "I", for the self-conscious first person has already established a distinction between self and other. But the first person also grasps that the second will be seeing *him* as simply an object, and so sees himself through the second's eyes.

At this stage (third picture), there is an ambiguity of whether the self is a subject or object; an essential being or simply an "other". The initial self-concept and the concept reflected by the second person are in conflict. In an attempt to resolve this conflict and to become certain of himself again, the first person must re-assert his autonomy (Hyppolite p. 169) by superseding the view of himself as an other in the second-person's world. But, since his "self" is now partly defined in terms of the second-person's view, any challenge to the view of self-as-other is also a challenge to his own self. (¶180)

The view that the other exists purely for-me becomes untenable once it is realised that the other thinks the same of me. It is insufficient to be recognised as simply existing (in the way an animal or inanimate *thing* may be recognised); a self-consciousness demands that it be recognised as an autonomous agent whose desire is directed towards the desire of the other. What must happen is that each accepts that the other exists for-itself. This movement depends on both parties — for the first person, the process is mediated by the second, and indivisibly, for the second, the process is mediated by the first. "They recognise themselves as mutually recognising one another" (¶¶182–184). The end of this process (the final picture in Figure 1) is that a unified self-consciousness is restored which knows itself as *both* subject and object.

So far, the process of recognition seems symmetrical between the two participants, but if we look in more detail this is not the case. The *need* for recognition is reciprocal, but not its achievement. For Hegel, the

need for recognition leads to a confrontation[8] in which the participants "prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle" (¶187). Life is essential for self-consciousness, and yet self-consciousness must free itself from the enslavement to life[9]. By staking one's life, one proves that the self is not bound to the immediate form of life.

Such a "trial by death", if it doesn't lead to the actual death of one or both participants, results in the subjection of one to the other. Here, more than anywhere else, it is clear that Hegel sees the struggle not just between two people, but between two forms of self-consciousness. In paragraph 189, he introduces the terms "lord" (i.e. master) and "bondsman" (i.e. slave) as names for "two opposed shapes of consciousness", but in the following paragraphs he uses the terms as though they applied to separate individual people. It even becomes natural to think of the terms as describing two opposing social classes.

At the stage of dichotomy (picture 3 in Figure 1), the "I" has split into a pure self-consciousness, existing for-itself, and a self-consciousness which exists simply as an object (a thing) reflected in the consciousness of the second person. The first is independent and there is something essential about its existence — the master. The second is dependent on the first; it exists only for-another; its existence is derivative rather than essential — the slave.

In terms of the life-and-death struggle between two people, recognition cannot occur if one person kills the other, but can occur when one sets aside his being-for-self (i.e. his initial, unmediated "I") and accepts the view of himself reflected in the other. Through acting in response and subjection to the other, this person becomes enslaved, his identity dependent on the other[10]. But the converse side of this act is that the other receives recognition from the slave. The dominant victor thus becomes a master whose being-for-self is maintained and who determines the view of self accepted by the slave. (¶191)

This would seem a natural point to end the dialectic, but Hegel makes a number of comments related to the paradoxical natures of the master and the slave. Firstly, the slave is viewed by the master as simply an inessential object, but it is through being recognised by this object that the master became certain of himself. "The truth of the independent consciousness [i.e. the master] is accordingly the servile consciousness of the bondsman" (¶193). The master is, paradoxically, dependent on the slave and this truth undermines the master's certainty of his own being-for-self.

Secondly, the slave has two advantages over the master: fear and work (¶¶194–196). "The slave has known fear, has feared death — the absolute master" (Hyppolite p. 175). Real freedom can come through overcoming this fear, but such a route is not available to the master since he has avoided rather than overcome fear. The slave also benefits from the need to work — "Through work, however, the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is" (¶195). Whereas in the master's case, the source of self-consciousness became empty, work is a more permanent basis for the slave's self-consciousness. Through work, the slave comes to know the independence of the world and thus comes to realise his *own* independence.

Comments

My portrayal of the Master-Slave Dialectic has emphasised the movement of consciousness between two people, with social and political implications. This is perhaps the easiest way to understand the passage, but Hegel's intent is clearly larger[11]. A second interpretation, not inconsistent with the first, would be that the Master-Slave Dialectic occurs *internal* to a single self-consciousness. From such a perspective we see the shifting patterns of psychological domination and servitude within the individual ego — the movements between passion and reason, between the newly established self and the natural soul, between animal and human desire. There is also a third set of movements implicit in the Master-Slave Dialectic — the internal movements which result from the external confrontation between one's self and an other. In this respect, the external dialectic acts as a catalyst for the internal one. (See Kelly p. 195.)

Even accepting these multiple interpretations, however, leaves open a question about what status Hegel intends us to give this dialectic. Does he consider the progression he describes to be a necessary one, or simply illustrative? *Must* it be that all encounters between two self-consciousnesses end either in death or in domination and servitude? *Must* it be that our self-consciousness can only become actualised through such a life-and-death struggle? Surely this is untenable. If we grant that the development of self-consciousness could not occur without encounters with others, we need not accept that the Master-Slave Dialectic is the only possible avenue for such development, nor that it is the only possible course of such encounters. Normal human experience suggests otherwise. From the point of view of developmental psychology, one's self-image develops at an early age through the processes of separation and individuation, and from seeing oneself reflected in the mirrors of significant others. Such reflections typically occur within the care and nurture of a family[12]. Such a context will, of course, include conflict, but the process is essentially supportive rather than confrontational.

Closely related to this problem is the extent to which the master-slave relationship can be "scaled-up" to situations more complex than the meeting of two self-consciousnesses. What happens when *three* self-consciousnesses encounter each other? What happens when a Master from one encounter meets another Master — must they too engage in the life-and-death struggle? Could it be that we spend our lives repeatedly risking our lives and competing for dominance in every encounter? Such a proposal would necessitate a vast hierarchy of domination. But I would say that in a normal social context, one finds recognition more from *peers* than from any relationship of domination.

Even given the need for the life-and-death struggle which Hegel proposes, he does not seem to have exhausted the range of outcomes. In particular he does not consider the possibility of mutual recognition via reconciliation. This, however, is not an unwarranted omission. At this point in PhS, the stage has not yet been set for such a resolution. As we shall see below, it is only once the role of conscience has been established that such a resolution is possible.

3. The Place of the Master-Slave Dialectic in the Critique of Conscience

Having now examined the nature of conscience and the Master-Slave Dialectic separately, we can now consider how the two concepts relate to each other.

The Dialectic Method Underlying Both Concepts

Even though the subject matter of the two sections, Master-Slave relationships and conscience, is quite different, there is nevertheless a great deal on commonality in the assumptions and method of the two.

Both concepts depend on recognition. As noted above, self-consciousness only really becomes self-consciousness when it is acknowledged by another self-consciousness. The life-and-death struggle in the Master-Slave Dialectic is motivated by a need for recognition. Similarly, conscience only finds its fulfilment in a social context of mutual recognition; its problems can only be overcome by the recognition of the inevitability of evil and, subsequently, its forgiveness.

Both concepts are analysed via an immanent critique[13]. Hegel's method is not to impose outside criteria to validate some claim or system or form of being, but rather to examine internal coherence and consistency. As we have seen in his approach to both master-slave and conscience, it is the internal problems at each stage which drive development on to the following stage. Furthermore, this immanent critique always follows the form of dialectic movement from immediate unity, through dichotomy, to mediated unity. In many cases this process in not just repeated, but nested, i.e. any of the three stages of the dialectic may itself include a sub-dialectic with the same three stages. For instance, we see that conscience, itself the product of a previous cycle of the dialectic, is soon revealed as only immediate in form and hence in need of further dialectic progression. The inadequacy of externally imposed duty leads to the supposition that internal conviction is a better basis for morality, but then the dichotomy between an individual's conscience and the universal conscience appears and demands resolution. This sort of repetition makes it sometimes seem that no progress has been made, but it is part of Hegel's project to address the same concerns at increasingly higher levels of actuality. (c.f. Hyppolite pp. 517f)

In the development of both concepts, the two key figures exchange places in a similar way. The Masters, who first appear to have established their autonomy, are shown to be dependant on the Slaves; and the Slaves, who first saw their being-for-self denied by the Masters, come to full self-consciousness via fear and work. When Hegel contraposes the individual, acting spirit and the universal, judging spirit, at first it is the acting spirit which appears as evil and hypocritical, but as the dialectic progresses the evil and hypocrisy of the universal spirit are also uncovered. It first seemed that the self-centredness of individual caprice was the chief blockage to morality, but then the purity of the "beautiful soul" is shown in the form of a judge whose hard-heartedness prevents further development. (c.f. Hyppolite p. 495)

Lastly, there is an underlying common structure which links the Master-Slave Dialectic with Conscience and points beyond it. This structure provides the continuity of the whole work, perhaps summarised in the progression "To be human is to be social, to be social is to be conscientious, and to be conscientious is to engage in absolute knowing" (Russon p. 533f).

No Man is a Hero to His Valet

Although Hegel's discussion of conscience does not explicitly mention the Master-Slave Dialectic, there are clear allusions to it. It would be an easy mistake to see Hegel's reference to the hero and his valet (¶665) in this light as merely an example of a master and slave relationship. However, the parallel is not so straight-forward. A valet is not simply subordinate to his master, but has a special relationship which gives him personal knowledge of the hero's habits and character. The valet knows the hero's strengths

and weaknesses, fears and conceits and as a result can always see deeper than the public image of heroism.

It could be imagined that the valet, as slave, always *wants* to interpret his master's actions as conceited in order to undermine him. Perhaps Nietzsche would support this view by asserting the valet's propensity to interpret the hero's actions as evil (though Nietzsche's use of "evil" differs from Hegel's) as a means of defining the valet's own good (Nietzsche, First Essay, section 10). But this is not Hegel's point. Hegel's point is that every action *could* be interpreted as either conforming to duty, or resulting from the individual's particular character, and that for someone with intimate personal knowledge of another, the second interpretation seems the more probable. As Loewenberg observes, the same message could have been conveyed in our times by noting that no-one is a saint to his or her psychoanalyst (Loewenberg p. 290).

The Beautiful Soul Allows no Recognition

A clearer example of the way the development of conscience depends on the Master-Slave Dialectic is found in the description of the beautiful soul (¶¶658, 668).

We have seen that both the development of self-consciousness and of conscientious morality depend on recognition. Furthermore, the lesson of the Master-Slave Dialectic is that recognition requires a contest between one's self-image and the image of one's self held by an other. But the beautiful soul isolates itself from the other and hence prevents the necessary confrontation. In doing so, the beautiful soul also prevents any possibility of recognition and ceases to be a self. This full argument is only sketched in the description of the beautiful soul's failure, and can only be filled-out by an understanding of the Master-Slave Dialectic.

Reconciliation Provides an Alternate Resolution to the Master-Slave Dialectic

At the end of Section 2 I posed the question about why Hegel did not consider mutual recognition via reconciliation as a possible outcome to the Master-Slave Dialectic. It is now clear that Hegel not only sees such reconciliation as possible, but the progression of PhS drives towards that end[14]. Reconciliation is partially realised in the actualisation of conscience in absolute Spirit, though not fully realised until the end of the book. But the question remains, why was this option not available earlier? When two self-consciousnesses encounter each other why is it impossible for each to say to the other "To the extent that I understand your self-image, I recognise it and take it on as my own image of you"?

The answer perhaps lies in the importance of ethical life. The Master-Slave Dialectic emphasises the need for self-consciousness to be for-another, i.e. it develops only via an encounter with another self-consciousness. But even this meeting of two self-consciousnesses is insufficient: full individual moral development requires an ethical context which is necessarily social. Only by working through the implications of social interaction do we discover the possibility and the means of forgiveness. At the earlier stage of self-consciousness, there is no understanding of the general good or of duty, and hence no understanding of evil and hypocrisy, and hence no understanding of forgiveness. So when one self-consciousness sees another whose image of the first does not correspond to the first's self-image, he may sense the implied imposition (that the second wants to impose his image of the first onto the first), but can have no means of responding to it positively. He must seek to *overcome* the other's conflicting image, since he can neither accommodate it, nor forgive it.

In summary, the way of reconciliation is unavailable in the Master-Slave Dialectic, but it does become available phenomenologically later. Prior to the influence of ethical life, the conflict between two self-consciousnesses cannot be resolved apart from through domination and subjugation, but once conscience has created the possibility of forgiveness, the path of reconciliation becomes an alternate (and superior) resolution to this conflict.

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Endnotes

[1] In Hegel's usage, "immediate" means unmediated, unquestioned, naive, not yet rational.
[2] The use of pseudo-generic masculine terms throughout this essay is simply to remain consistent with Hegel's own usage.
[3] "For the *essence* of the action, duty, consists in conscience's *conviction* about it" (¶640, see also ¶643).
[4] This is expressed notably well in the following quote — "The possibility that I accept an appeal to conscience as justification for your action goes hand in hand with the possibility that I will treat this appeal as a sham. To the extent that you are free to justify any action by an appeal to your subjective conscience, I am equally free to interpret your act as evil and your declaration of conscience as hypocrisy" (Wood 1990 p. 187).
[5] My comments here really apply to the traditional version of the Lord's Prayer rather than to the words of Jesus as reported in Matthew 6:12 or Luke 11:3. "Trespass" is actually not the most appropriate translation of the Greek original — "sins" or "debts" would be more accurate.
[6] "For Hegel, negation is never merely negative; its function is not *to cancel out* but *to put in opposition to*" (Lauer p. 46).
[7] The diagram is limited in many ways but at least serves as an initial simplification. The bubbles should not be interpreted as representations, as though they were images presented to self-consciousness, but rather as the substantive concepts which constitute self-consciousness.
One of the difficulties in understanding PhS is the ambiguity with which Hegel writes in order to make his analysis as broadly applicable as possible. As Hyppolite observes, "This ambiguity, which opens the door to diverse interpretations, undoubtedly constitutes the richness of this philosophical text" (Hyppolite p. 519). And so an obvious limitation of the diagram (indeed any diagram) is that it imposes a single interpretation. The diagram gives the impression that the Master-Slave dialectic is about a conflict between two *people*, and then shows this process for only *one* of the participants. Nevertheless, I hope that this simplified diagram can serve as a prototype for the other interpretations which Hegel intends and which I discuss later.
[8] Hegel appears to discount the possibility of a non-confrontational recognition (and this is echoed by Hyppolite p. 164) on the grounds that it would lack the oppositional form which is the very essence and

driving force of dialectic movement. However, it seems to me that this rationale is based on an unjustified presupposition of the necessity of the dialectic form. Hegel's dialectic is a powerful mechanism for progress, but is it the only such mechanism? [I write this as a footnote comment and rather tentatively because I cannot substantiate it.]
In an encounter with another self-consciousness, there is the inevitable risk that the other will refuse to recognise one's self-image (Gadamer p. 62) and so it may be that you need to find a way to supersede the other's image of yourself so that your own self-image can be vindicated. Perhaps the threat of killing the other is the ultimate way to call attention to your demand for recognition, but what is strictly required for recognition is only the death of *the other's image of you* and this need not constitute a threat to the other's *life*.

[9] One shouldn't imagine that this freedom can be achieved via suicide, nor by any other form of death. It is true that death terminates the enslavement to life, but it brings no benefit to the self-consciousness. Firstly, because death is merely an abstract negation of life; a termination rather than a constructive overcoming of life. And secondly because a dead person cannot engage in any mutual recognition. (See PhS ¶188 and PhR §328(R).) On the other hand, I don't think Hegel would disagree with C. G. Jung's claim that "Anyone who refuses to experience life must stifle his desire to live — in other words, he must commit partial suicide" (quoted in Dowrick p. 36).

[10] Though Hyppolite perceptively notes that the slave is not so much newly enslaved to the master as he is continuing in his enslavement to life. "He is a slave because he has retreated in the face of death" (p. 173).

[11] It may be interesting to compare the essential nature of Masters and Slaves in Hegel with that of the Masters and Herd in Nietzsche (Genealogy of Morals, First Essay). In both accounts, the Masters place the others in a role of subservience. In both accounts, an almost paradoxical inversion shows the subservient class to be the one with most potential for creative development. But whereas for Hegel, the Masters owe their self-image to their recognition by the Slaves, for Nietzsche, the Masters conceive their own self-image (and label it "good", pp. 39f) without reference to the Herd. For Nietzsche, it is not that domination makes Masters, but that the nature of Masters makes them dominant (p. 45). Whereas in Hegel, being a Master is a derived status, in Nietzsche it is an inherent characteristic.

[12] Hegel certainly admits to the importance of family in the development of self-consciousness (PhR §§174, 175, 177) but it is not clear to which he gives priority: the family or Master-Slave confrontations. Perhaps he would assert a distinction between the genesis of the self-consciousness of a *member* (based on family relations) and that of an *independent person* (which must rely on encounters with those outside the family) (PhR §158). Interestingly, Kelly notes that in lectures during 1803 and 1804 (before the publication of PhS), Hegel placed the role of family prior to any struggle for recognition (Kelly p. 197).

[13] The process of immanent critique is described and justified, though given this name, in the Introduction to PhS, for instance in ¶¶79f.

[14] Russon goes to the extent of claiming that the central offering of PhS is a hierarchical series of studies in how to forgive the other (Russon p. 545).