



# Self-Consciousness as Incipient Desire. An Interpretation of §426 of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*

Autoconsciencia como Deseo Incipiente. Una  
interpretación del §426 de la *Enciclopedia* de Hegel



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## Abstract

This article offers an interpretation of §426 of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*, which articulates the positioning of self-consciousness as desire, namely, the experience of contradiction arising from the simultaneous presence of its certainty of itself and its awareness of the external world. To this end, points of convergence are established with philosophical formulations found both in the same work and in some of Hegel's more mature writings. Furthermore, the relationship between the philosophical reflections of the Stuttgart philosopher and other representative figures of the major currents of modern philosophy serves as a heuristic framework for an admissible interpretation of the emergence of desire as presented by Hegel in this passage of her most systematic work.

**Keywords:** *Desire, Self-consciousness, Hegel, Modern Philosophy.*

## Resumen

Este artículo ofrece una interpretación del §426 de la *Enciclopedia* de Hegel, el cual articula el posicionamiento de la autoconsciencia como deseo, esto es, la experiencia de la contradicción que surge de la presencia simultánea de su

*certeza de sí* y su conciencia del mundo exterior. Para ello, se establecen puntos de convergencia con formulaciones filosóficas presentes tanto en la misma obra como en algunos de los escritos más maduros de Hegel. Además, la relación entre las reflexiones filosóficas del filósofo de Stuttgart y otras figuras representativas de las principales corrientes de la filosofía moderna sirve como marco heurístico para una interpretación admisible del surgimiento del deseo tal como lo presenta Hegel en este pasaje de su obra más sistemática.

**Palabras clave:** *Deseo, Autoconsciencia, Hegel, Filosofía Moderna.*

## 1. Introduction

Interpreting any excerpt of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's work is a complex task that requires the interpreter to both confront the esoteric language through which Hegel constructs his philosophical universe and immerse oneself in a systematic totality in which every component reflects its unique dialectical structure. In the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel encapsulates his reflection within the exposition of a system that delineates the journey from the idea to absolute knowledge. It is precisely within this framework that the contradiction arising from the coexistence of self-consciousness's abstract affirmation and the presence of an object that negates its identity is manifested. In §426 of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel expresses it in the following terms:

Self-consciousness in its immediacy is *singular* and *desire*, – the contradiction of its abstraction, which should be objective, or of its immediacy, which has the shape of an external Object and should be subjective. For the certainty of itself which has emerged from the sublation of the consciousness, the Object is determined as a nullity, and for

the relationship of the self-consciousness with the Object is also a nullity its abstract ideality.<sup>1</sup>

The main aim of this article is, therefore, the interpretation of that excerpt. However, with the awareness that interpretative labor can hardly attain a univocal meaning of its object, this document can be considered an essay—an attempt that seeks to render itself plausible by tracing the possible connections that give rise to it within the framework of modern philosophy. While the interpretative exercise has been limited to a few lines of Hegel's thought, the philosophical reflection contained in that paragraph from the encyclopedic text offers sufficient potential to undertake the task of tracing and identifying points of convergence within the framework of the author's mature period and throughout the course of modern philosophy. That's why the outcome this article represents was designed with a narrative and dialogical character emerging from its encounter with some of the most representative authors of the main currents of modern philosophy. This is how Descartes, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, and Fichte, as characters related to Hegel, weave the narrative upon which this document is built.

This choice to engage directly and precisely with modern philosophers has led to dispensing with an extensive amount of complementary bibliography, which, contrary to what it might seem, has involved a higher level of demand. It is precisely this approach that shapes the style of this document, aiming to allow each of the selected modern philosophers to express themselves as actors, speaking in their voices. The direct reference to modern philosophers associated with this article has informed the construction of the final text and, it is hoped, will awaken the reader's own interpretive engagement. In doing so, it creates an

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<sup>1</sup> G. W. F. Hegel. *Enziklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse, III* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 215. My translation. For the *Encyclopaedia* reading, this research has also made use of the Spanish and English translations in G. W. F. Hegel. *Enciclopedia de las ciencias filosóficas en compendio* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1999); Hegel, G. W. F. *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894); G. W. F. Hegel. *The Encyclopaedia Logic, with the Zusätze: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of philosophical sciences with the Zusätze*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894).

opportunity to enhance intellectual rigor and contribute to the advancement of the philosophical community.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the authority represented by the presence of modern classics, the reference to authors such as Bloch, Hyppolite, and Kojève demonstrates that this article also draws on the works of interpreters who are now essential for engaging with Hegelian thought. Their contributions have helped shape the context and have served as catalysts in the effort to unravel Hegel. In other words, these interpreters have acted as bridges that, once they fulfilled their function, left behind the sediment upon which an appropriate appropriation of the Stuttgart philosopher's thought can be based. It is precisely this approach that has led to the selection, from among Hegel's dense body of writings, of some works belonging to the author's more mature period. In other words, these interpreters have functioned as bridges that, once their role was fulfilled, contributed by leaving behind the sediment on which the Stuttgart philosopher's thought is founded. It is precisely this approach that has led to the selection of certain works from the author's mature period from among Hegel's extensive written corpus. Thus, the *Logic*, the *Phenomenology*, the *Propaedeutic*, and the references to other sections of the same *Encyclopaedia* collectively provide the framework for a transition from the whole to the part—namely, the concise passage in which the Hegelian reflection on the self as nascent desire is distilled, as the author encapsulated in his most systematic work.

Authors such as Ikäheimo and Hamlyn, in developing their accounts of Hegel's thought on recognition and self-consciousness, respectively, have referred to the relevant

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<sup>2</sup> At the heart of this article's design is a narrative approach that involves tracing backgrounds, linking various entities, and endowing the final report with the flexibility characteristic of literature—thereby allowing actors to express themselves directly. This approach embodies the core elements of Actor Network Theory (ANT), whose principles have been applied here with more flexibility than those prescribed by Bruno Latour's TAR proposal, and which have guided the research, interpretation, and writing of this essay. See Bruno Latour. *Reassembling the social. An introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

paragraph of the *Encyclopaedia*.<sup>3</sup> While the first briefly alludes to Hegel's paragraph, the second delves a bit deeper into the supplementary material that accompanied it. This article takes a different approach by focusing exclusively on §426, aiming to trace its possible background both within the framework of modern philosophy and in some of Hegel's more systematic works, thereby establishing a foundation from which the exegetical task can be effectively pursued. Instead of considering such added which may well be a useful heuristic tool, but that also may led to interpretation problems of the paragraph that it accompanied, this essay has opted by using the discursive scaffolding that all of the referred authors, included Hegel, in the present text provide, in the same way that the notions of the same *Encyclopaedia* which converges in the paragraph object of study. Rather than incorporating an addition that might serve as a useful heuristic tool but could also lead to interpretative issues with its accompanying paragraph, this essay has chosen to employ the discursive scaffolding provided by all the aforementioned authors—including Hegel—in the present text, in the same way that the notions from the same *Encyclopaedia* converge in the paragraph under study.

Although the work adheres to the structure of an article, the narrative quality of its prose—infused with the very essence of philosophical reflection—has inspired a subtle literary tint in its design. This nuance permits each contributing author to articulate their insights through carefully chosen quotations, each serving as both a personal expression and a mirror of the broader philosophical discourse. Modern philosophers, in their own right, are timeless figures—not only emblematic of the paradigms that defined their eras, but also as enduring voices that continue to engage and challenge today's reader. There is, indeed, a distinct honor in the privilege of reintroducing them into our present dialogue.

Before arriving at the conclusion that synthesizes the insights developed throughout this essay (5), the article embarks on an

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<sup>3</sup> See Heikki Ikäheimo, "Hegel's Concept of Recognition –What Is it?", in *Recognition-German Idealism as an Ongoing Challenge*, Christian Krijnen (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014), 20; and David Hamlyn. "Hegel on Self-consciousness", in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Volume 72, Hamlyn David (London: The British Academy, 1986), 329-330.

exploration—guided by prominent figures from empiricism, rationalism, and critical philosophy—of the myriad vicissitudes endured by the 'I' in its quest to assume the mantle of certainty and truth. In doing so, it unveils how the dynamic framework of objective idealism enfolds these alternatives within the very core of its transformed subject-object interplay (2). Following this, the exposition of the sublation of contradictions—the very engine propelling consciousness along its phenomenological journey—opens the way to reveal how the subject, forged within self-consciousness, once again finds itself entangled in a contradiction that defines its very nature. The author brings this paradox into sharp relief through the lens of rationalist monadology, illuminating the intricate dialectic at play (3). The final section of the article's body unveils the distinctive manner in which, within the framework of German Idealism, Hegel articulates the presence of an other Object within the depths of self-consciousness. This notion sheds light on how the certainty of the self, attained at a new stage of its development, shapes the very constitution of the 'self' as an incipient state of desire (4).

## 2. A comprehensive subject-object

The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations.<sup>4</sup>

That's how Hume delineates the relationship between the mind and the realm of sensory experience—a dynamic framework in which the empiricist philosopher challenges the very notion of a unified personal identity and its attendant self. For Hume, experience contains no constant or invariable impression that could justify the belief in a continuous awareness of the self's existence. Instead, it offers a ceaseless succession of perceptions, each supplanted and inscribed upon the mind in diverse ways. Without these perceptions, Hume argues, the self—and indeed, the very act of observation—remains elusive.<sup>5</sup> It is thus rooted in

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<sup>4</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 253.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 251-253.

Hume's empiricist reflection—a reflection that not only offered a pointed critique of rationalism at a time when natural science, grounded in empirical observation and demonstration, was established as the paradigm of valid knowledge, but also struck at the very cornerstone upon which its metaphysics was built. Indeed, for Descartes, the certainty and truth of any indubitable proposition reside in the capacity to clearly apprehend the necessary and coexistent relationship between thought and existence, as embodied in the *cogito* as the fundamental and founding principle of his philosophy. For the French philosopher, the security provided by this principle is powerful enough to withstand the onslaught of skepticism and the seductive illusions upon which thought rests. Doubt cast upon every entity is dispelled by a dynamic form of thinking—one substantiated by the undeniable proof of the self's existence. In light of this certainty, the 'I' even ventures to conduct the thought experiment of questioning its very own body—the support of its being—and the world that surrounds it.<sup>6</sup> Cartesio, through an insight which made history, formulates the consistency of the thinking self by asserting that:

(...) having noticed that there is nothing at all in this – *I think, therefore I am* – that would assure me that I am speaking the truth except that I see very clearly that, in order to think, it is necessary to be: I judged that I could take for a general rule that the things that we conceive very clearly and very distinctly are all true; (...).<sup>7</sup>

In this way, certainty and truth emerge as the very foundation of a system that marks the birth of philosophical rationalism in modernity—a legacy that reverberates through Hegel's thought. For Descartes, the reliability of the truth apprehended by the ego through the exercise of consistent thought is grounded in its identification with being itself, which serves as the foundation for the knowledge of what is effectively real.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, owing to the intrinsic and profound bond between the 'I' and existence, it would be misleading to claim that Descartes completely dismissed

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode/Dicourse on the Method* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 51, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 53

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Juan Pablo Esperón, "El Hegel Metafísico de Heidegger". *Philosophia* 79, n° 1 (2019): 68.

that which exists. Rather, it is Hegel who endows the self with a far more pivotal role in shaping both human and philosophical being.<sup>9</sup> Beyond merely acting as a thinking subject, the human emerges as the singular agent capable of unveiling the very essence of being. At the core of the 'I' lies an indispensable, authentic existence—one that inherently involves not only a dynamic interplay with the world but also an intimate engagement with itself, encapsulating both consciousness and, above all, self-consciousness.<sup>10</sup> In Hegel's thought, it is through the unfolding of the 'I' that consciousness liberates itself from every form of opposition, ultimately attaining a seamless union between thought and fact, between concept and existence. This synthesis gives rise to an objective mode of thought that asserts itself within the realm of pure science. In Hegel's philosophy, the intricate interplay between certainty and truth unfolds dialectically—a journey in which the manifold experiences of consciousness engaging with the object progressively lead toward the realization of absolute knowledge. In Hegelian reflection, the highest truth and the absolute nature of knowledge converge in a profound identity, one that ultimately finds its resting place in the realm of pure science.<sup>11</sup> This profound idea is eloquently rendered in the *Logic*, where the philosopher asserts that:

Absolute knowledge is the *truth* of all the modes of consciousness because, as the course of the *Phenomenology* brought out, it is only in absolute knowledge that the separation of the *subject matter* from the *certainty of itself* is completely resolved: truth has become equal to certainty and this certainty to truth.<sup>12</sup>

Kant, before Hegel, asserted that the very conditions rendering experience possible are also those from which the laws of nature emerge—a notion that gives rise to a critical distinction between judgments of perception and judgments of experience. The former—that is, judgments whose validity is anchored in

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Alexandre Kojève. *Introduction to the reading of Hegel. Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969), p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Ibid. 36.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 28-29.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 29.



subjectivity—require that a thinking subject logically interweaves individual perceptions; in contrast, the latter, imbued with objective validity, demand that the understanding generate a priori concepts which confer upon them their intrinsic objectivity.<sup>13</sup> It is within this refined distinction that Kant contemplates the interplay between truth and certainty in his conception of knowledge. He envisions truth as possessing both objective validity and subjective sufficiency—a harmonious convergence of certainty and conviction that unites what is universally valid with what resonates uniquely in the individual. In his theoretical criticism, the Königsberg philosopher summarizes this insight by declaring that:

(...) when taking something to be true is both subjectively and objectively sufficient it is called knowing. Subjective sufficiency is called conviction (for myself), objective sufficiency, certainty (for everyone).<sup>14</sup>

For Hegel, such a dualism manifests as a rigid and uncompromising opposition between subject and object. In his view, Kantian theory of knowledge falls into this very pitfall, for it fails to probe deeply enough into the nature of truth—where knowledge is conceived as striving for the most faithful correspondence with its object. Moreover, Hegel contends that Kant's transcendental idealism, by subsuming the object entirely within the domain of knowledge, deprives it of any true independence. The object, within this framework, exists solely as an object of knowledge, never attaining an autonomous reality beyond its epistemic function. This stance gives rise to a series of un-true representations, which emerging from the discord between reason and the things in itself, between these and the concept, between the concept and the reality. In this light, while subjective representation never fully corresponds with its object, there persists, from an objective perspective, an irreconcilable gap between the reality of the things and the concept.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Immanuel Kant. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 50.

<sup>14</sup> Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 686.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ernst Bloch. *Sujeto-Objeto. El pensamiento de Hegel* (México, D. F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983), 184-185.

Alternatively, Hegel envisions the spirit unfolding into both subject and object; in this view, each appears as a reflection, a “copy”, of the transcendent unity that the absolute embodies. Thus, though subject and object maintain their distinction, they are ultimately drawn together by a dialectical process that steadily guides them toward a harmonious synthesis with the manifold forms of totality.<sup>16</sup> Such a process is vividly depicted in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a work devoted to charting the journey toward absolute truth. The inability of ordinary life consciousness to grasp the full measure of what is real compels it to seek ever more condensed forms of experience—a pursuit marked by the gradual abandonment of previously internalized modes of knowing. In this unfolding experience, the certainties of the sensible yield to the truths of reason, a transition manifest in the evolving dynamics of the subject-object relationship. Here, philosophical consciousness comes to understand that the initial estrangement and independence of each term eventually give way to a bond of mutual necessity.<sup>17</sup>

Drawing on Hegel—and even despite Hume—one may contend that the journey of knowledge, or rather the unfolding process of becoming as it ascends toward truth, resembles a grand theatrical production. In this dynamic interplay, a network of relationships and mediations takes center stage, not only presenting an infinite array of perceptions but also enlisting doubt and skepticism as pivotal characters. Their dramatic interplay fuels contradictions that ultimately give rise to a self—one that, within its vast universe of experience, synthesizes far more than the realm of mere sensory phenomena, the intuitive demonstration of its own existence, and the formalism of a unity which validates from the *a priori*.

### 3. Self-consciousness as contradiction

Before the subject-object relationship is fully constituted in self-consciousness—within the developmental stage of the spirit’s

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ibid. 185-187.

<sup>17</sup> Herbert Marcuse. *Reason and Revolution. Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1955), 93-94.

concept, whether as subjective, objective, or absolute spirit—it must traverse three distinct moments, each of them marked by successive contradictions that ultimately guide the spirit toward a firm *certainty of itself*. In its most immediate, *sensitive* form, the subject apprehends the ‘this’ as its object—a presence that is as fleeting as it is transient. In the realm of *perception*, the object is that which remains identical to itself, even as it is endowed with a variety of conflicting properties.<sup>18</sup> Moving into the sphere of *understanding*, the object transforms into the very substance of the thing—the force unfolded in manifestation—yet a contradiction arises here as well: either the essence claims simultaneously to be both supersensible and sensible, or the phenomenon is identified solely with what is sensible.<sup>19</sup> This tension necessitates the emergence of law, which serves to express the phenomenon’s enduring character. Since law, as the essence of force, defines the consciousness of itself, it becomes incumbent upon self-consciousness to establish itself as the subject that reconciles the opposites that the former would have to unify.<sup>20</sup> At this juncture, what were once merely essential moments of consciousness evolve into distinct stages of self-consciousness—a transformation that Hegel defines in stating that:

(...) self-consciousness is in fact the reflection out of the being of the sensuous and perceived world and is essentially the return from out of *otherness*. As self-consciousness, it is movement, but while self-consciousness *only* distinguishes *itself* from itself as *itself*, that difference as an otherness is, to itself, *immediately sublated*. There simply *is* no difference, and *self-consciousness* is only the motionless tautology of “I am I”.<sup>21</sup>

Yet the dynamic essence inherent in self-consciousness demands that the abstract, tautological identity of ‘I = I’ be set against the preserved realm of consciousness—a confrontation through which the unity of self-consciousness is ultimately established via its own negation. In this double movement—a self-consciousness

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Ernst Bloch, “Sujeto...”, 68-69.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Hebert Marcuse, “Reason...”, 108 and Ernst Bloch, “Sujeto...”, 69.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Marcuse, “Reason...”, 111.

<sup>21</sup> G. W. F. Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 103.

that remains, simultaneously, the consciousness which enfolds the entire sensible world while affirming its unity with itself—there emerges the assertion that the veracity of the material world is found within self-consciousness; indeed, self-consciousness itself embodies the truth of a world that appears solely as phenomenon before itself.<sup>22</sup>

That trajectory, delineated in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, is later subsumed into the body of philosophical sciences comprising the *Encyclopaedia*, a work marked by a far greater systematic maturity whose framework the author had already begun to sketch in the *Propaedeutic*. In that preliminary exposition, self-consciousness is unveiled not merely as the immediate unity of itself with its otherness—that is, consciousness—but also as practical consciousness, by virtue of the negation of that otherness through which it asserts its position. It is precisely this internal negation of the 'itself' within an identity that explicates the emergence of desire. The philosopher of the Absolute articulates this dislocation of the subject when he asserts that in:

(...) the concept of Self-Consciousness lies the determination of the as yet unrealized difference. In so far as this difference does make its appearance in it there arises a feeling of an otherness in consciousness itself, a feeling of a negation of itself or the feeling of a lack, a need.<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, in the *Encyclopedia* it is not mere feeling that primarily characterizes the positioning of self-consciousness as desire. The subject, as it is constituted within practical consciousness, still retains many of the determinations that mark theoretical consciousness, manifesting itself through its intricate intertwinement with the relevant Hegelian logical notions. Moreover, from the *Propaedeutic*, Hegel introduces a determination of rationalist rootedness which enables him to infuse his reflection on phenomenological experience with new nuances. Leibniz's monadology conceives a representational relationship between the soul and the universe, mediated by the body that expresses the plenitude of the universe. The singular and

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<sup>22</sup> Jean Hyppolite. *Génesis y estructura de la Fenomenología del espíritu* (Barcelona: Península, 1991), 144.

<sup>23</sup> G. W. F. Hegel. *The Philosophical Propaedeutic* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986), 60.

irreducible character of each monad—especially those endowed with a soul—not only manifests itself in the body with which it is associated, but also attests to its independence relative to the others. Yet, in their interrelations, each monad harbors the potential to express the others through a harmony that renders it a mirror of the universe.<sup>24</sup> As Leibniz affirms:

(...) although each created Monad represents the whole universe, it represents more distinctly the body which specially pertains to it, and of which it is the entelechy; and as this body expresses the whole universe through the connection of all matter in the *plenum*, the soul also represents the whole universe in representing this body, which belongs to it in a special way.<sup>25</sup>

Hegel, inheriting and transforming this legacy, weaves it into his doctrine of the concept, thereby formulating a novel notion within his dialectical architecture. In the logic of the *Encyclopaedia*, much like the monad, every distinction is inextricably related to the whole. In other words, Hegelian reflection posits that each distinction constitutes the *one* totality, and that this unity pervades every distinction. This relational framework engenders a dynamic movement within the dominion of the concept—a developmental process in which the *one* totality returns to itself after its encounter with the distinct. It is this evolved totality that Hegel designates as the Object, a unity that not only embraces distinctions but subsumes them as complete totalities.<sup>26</sup> The indeterminate whole is thus defined by Hegel as:

(...) a splitting into distinctions, each one of which is, itself, totality. The Object is, therefore, the absolute contradiction of the entire self-sufficiency of the plural as well as of its total lack of self-sufficiency.<sup>27</sup>

Consider now how that philosophy of totality weaves itself into the evolution of self-consciousness. Within Hegel's system, every

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. G. W. Leibniz. *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1898), 56-57, 59, 63.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 62.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Hegel, G. W. F., *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse, I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 345-346.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 350. My Translation.

nascent stage on the journey toward absolute knowledge carries an inherent immediacy for each entity involved—a quality so indissolubly linked to mediation that the two become one. For, since immediacy cannot exist without mediation, even all forms of supersensible knowledge—deemed immediate insofar as they have risen from, and transcend, mere sensation—necessarily embody a mediation, an advancement emerging from a state that is, in essence, its very opposite. Yet this intertwined relationship does not strip supersensible knowledge of its self-sufficiency; rather, it is precisely by ascending beyond that mediation that immediacy secures its self-sufficiency.<sup>28</sup> Thus, once consciousness has been sublated, immediacy emerges as one of the foundational attributes defining self-consciousness. As a supersensible, abstract entity—this self-affirming ‘I’ ( $I = I$ )—consciousness of itself embarks on a developmental journey, distancing itself from mere consciousness and the realm of the sensible world that the latter once embraced. In this process, its immediacy is reconfigured through an established mediation with consciousness, which now appears as its antithesis. It is precisely this act of distancing that confers upon self-consciousness a distinctive self-sufficiency in relation to otherness. In its immediacy, self-consciousness simultaneously embodies both self-sufficiency and relationality—a duality that, in turn, marks its singular nature.

Hegel further elucidates that within the ambit of reflective judgement, the singular harbors a subject that simultaneously refers to itself and yet constitutes the other of the predicate. The subject, as revealed by reflective judgement, is indelibly embedded in a web of relations with an external “other”.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the very singular that defines self-consciousness also unveils its reflexive nature: in the expression ‘ $I = I$ ’, the subject not only mirrors itself but also embodies the other, conceived as the ‘I’ that assimilates the full extension of sensible, perceptible, and understandable experience. Driven by an aspiration for truth—a unity of subject and Object—the abstraction that signifies its tautological demands and objective affirmation, a union of the self-

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 56-57.

<sup>29</sup> Cf., *ibid.* 325-326.

identical 'I=I' with a concrete, external object. Simultaneously, the impulse to affirm its singular identity necessitates a liberation from that Object, thereby emancipating its immediacy and consummating its full subjectivity.

#### 4. An incipient desire

The journey by which the various modes of consciousness evolve into self-consciousness—a process previously noted—reveals that the spirit's quest for truth commences with a subjectively apprehended entity, intimately linked to a particular content, subject matter, or object. When Hegel speaks of *certainly of itself*, he envisions a simple, initial form of knowing that necessitates the mediation of the subject's perspective in order to be validated as truth.<sup>30</sup> In the realm of self-consciousness, however, this self-certainty—embodied in the succinct equation 'I = I'—is attained only after transcending mere consciousness. Yet, self-awareness is not, in the strict sense, the origin of the process by which reason is constituted—that is, the fusion of consciousness and self-consciousness—since it is already mediated by an Object that represents consciousness. In this framework, the initial stage coincides with the second developmental phase of self-consciousness: consciousness is simultaneously self-aware, leaving no room for an entirely distinct mediation. Moreover, although self-consciousness inherently carries its own negation—by having assimilated the knowledge of the phenomenological world of consciousness—it must still confront an other-Object, a new external reality that forms one of the pivotal terms of its tautology and thereby confers objectivity upon its self-certainty. In other words, the abstract ideality of self-consciousness must transpose itself onto a reality that is manifest in concrete existence. Thus, within the intricate interplay that undergirds self-consciousness, the subject-object relationship is revealed as desire.

It is important now to highlight the singular manner in which Hegel delineates the emergence of desire from this dualistic relationship. Although both Hegel and Fichte acknowledge the intimate

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 49-50.

connection between consciousness and the object, they diverge regarding the origin attributed to the latter. For Fichte, the practical 'I' does not initially present itself within consciousness as an active force but rather as a fixed entity that harbors a latent tendency—the desire to assert its own active causality. This impulse is, in effect, a self-generating tendency residing within the Ego—an immanent force that does not transcend the domain of the subject. Yet, as the 'I' strives to affirm itself, it necessarily requires delimitation by that which lies beyond it. Consequently, the object emerges as the external negation of the internal impulse.<sup>31</sup> Fichte condenses this deduction when he expresses that:

The Ego must posit a ground of this limitation, and must posit it outside of itself. It can posit the impulse as limited only by an opposite, and hence the impulse evidently determines *what* is to be posited as object. If the impulse is posited as Y, the object must, therefore, necessarily be not-Y.<sup>32</sup>

While Fichte derives the object from the 'I' and its inherent necessity, Hegel ensures that the object attains self-consciousness only after consciousness has traversed a labyrinth of certainties and contradictions on its quest for external knowledge. Every distinction that unfolds within the realm of the sensible, the perception, and the understanding is ultimately subsumed into the Object of self-consciousness as a complete totality. Yet the certainty of the phenomenological world, residing within that very Object, is nothing other than self-consciousness itself. Consequently, the subject confronts the paradox born of the simultaneous presence of a tautological assertion—'I am I'—and the reflex of an otherness already assimilated. In this dual movement, self-consciousness, conceived as the totality unifying the subjective and the objective, is inscribed on the very plane where it emerges with a novel certainty—a unilateral determination for which the Object lacks the requisite value to affirm its own knowing and self-sufficiency.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. J. F. Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge* (London: Trübner & Co., Ludgate Hill, 1889), 291-293.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 294.



## 5. Conclusion

Paragraph 426 of the *Encyclopaedia* delineates how self-consciousness takes shape as an incipient state of desire. This article concludes with a concise exposition of the exegetical framework that has emerged from the intricate web of relations woven between this passage and a selection of philosophical reflections drawn from the broader landscape of modern thought.

**a.** Within the theoretical corpus advanced by modern empiricist philosophy, a space emerged for questioning the very existence of the self—a notion that rationalism had long enshrined as a foundational principle and the starting point for attaining true knowledge. In this intellectual climate, an audacious endeavor took shape: to dismantle the very underpinnings of the rationalist paradigm. It is within this framework that Hegel constructs his pure science, charting the arduous journey of the “self” as it overcomes the myriad oppositions born from its own *certainty of itself*, ultimately arriving at a state where certainty and truth coalesce into a singular identity. Under the rigorous parameters of valid judgement, this duality was woven into a theory of knowledge that envisions truth as the product of synthesizing the subjective with the objective. Yet, the updating of a philosophy of knowledge through objective idealism of Hegel sought not merely to classify the given as a mere object of knowledge but to reimage knowing itself as a quest for an absolute unity. This unity, unfolding through the dynamic interplay of opposites within the subject-object relationship, is reached along a dialectical path—a route marked by successive moments in which provisional certainties are sublated and transcended. Thus, as the subject navigates each knot of contradiction, the “I” progressively integrates the diverse modes through which modern philosophy approaches knowledge, revealing them as interrelated facets of a systemic, ever-unfolding whole.

**b.** The intricate web woven between the whole and its parts—each of the latter conceived as irreducible singularities—forms the conceptual terrain upon which monodological reflection sought to grasp totality. This convergence finds a refined expression in Hegel’s notion of the Object, as incorporated into

the system of the *Encyclopaedia*, a notion through which he explicates the succession of experiences that culminate in self-consciousness. Within the framework of the phenomenology of spirit, the dialectical overcoming—and thus the inclusion—of the various modes of consciousness entails that the 'I', in becoming self-consciousness, assumes the paradox of being a distinction that is, at once, no distinction at all. The immediacy of self-consciousness is determined, on the one hand, by the mediation it establishes with consciousness, which presents itself as its opposite. Yet it is precisely this distancing from mere consciousness that renders self-consciousness self-sufficient in relation to an otherness. Its immediacy thus comprises both autonomy and correlation, a dual characterization that defines it as something singular: a subject that refers to itself while simultaneously standing as the other of itself—namely, as consciousness. The contradiction at the heart of self-consciousness unfolds in its demand for two seemingly irreconcilable conditions: first, the unity of the "I = I" with an object entirely other; and second, the complete sublation of this Object, which is none other than consciousness itself.

**c.** It is this contradiction that gives rise to the emergence of self-consciousness, initially manifesting as a form of desire—an incipient force whose object Hegel succeeds in defining within the framework of German Idealism. This definition does not proceed from a mere deduction of an abstract 'I' but rather unfolds as the result of its prior experiences, shaped through its consciousness of the external world. The *certainty of itself*, which at first appears as a tautological identity to which self-consciousness has ascended, finds itself compelled to confirm, through its subsequent development, the knowledge it has attained. In doing so, it imparts concrete content to its otherwise abstract ideality. Thus, the 'I' that inaugurates and grounds philosophical discourse in modernity—transformed by Hegel into a highly comprehensive unity—begins to take shape as a subject that both assimilates and transcends its reflection on the natural world. In this process, it not only configures itself as an intellect that mediates reality but also as a practical self, engaged in shaping its own becoming.

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