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# Fichte, Hegel, and the Life and Death Struggle

James A. Clarke

Chapter IV of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* opens with an account of self-consciousness that is recognizably Fichtean: self-consciousness is characterized as the 'motionless tautology of I am I'. In the attempt to sustain this motionless tautology, self-consciousness is transformed into the insatiable 'activity' of 'desire' or appetite—*Begierde*. As several commentators have noted, Hegel's account of desire bears a striking resemblance to Fichte's account of 'striving' (*Streben*) in his 1794/5 *Foundations of the entire Doctrine of Science* and other works.<sup>1</sup> According to Fichte, 'practical reason' demands that we completely subordinate the 'not-I' (or world) to the 'pure I' (or reason).<sup>2</sup> Since we are finite rational beings—beings that are limited by, and dependent on, a not-I—we cannot hope to attain the goal that reason prescribes. (Fichte assumes that the attainment of this goal would eliminate the not-I.) Nevertheless, we can, and *should*, endlessly strive to attain it. This is our moral 'vocation' (*Bestimmung*).<sup>3</sup>

There can, I think, be little doubt as to the critical intent of Hegel's account of desire. Hegel's point, I take it, is that Fichtean moral agency is structurally identical to insatiable animal desire, and about as meaningless and frustrating. But if this is correct, it raises the question of whether the rest of Chapter IV can be construed as a critique of Fichte. More specifically, can the famous account of recognition, which is derived from desire, be interpreted as a critique of Fichte's position?

In a recent paper, Paul Redding has answered these questions in the affirmative.<sup>4</sup> Hegel's account of the dialectic of Mastery and Servitude should, he claims, be read as a critique of Fichte's position. Redding points out that Fichte presents his account of recognition as a 'solution' to problems inherent in his account of self-consciousness. Since Hegel presents his account of recognition in Chapter IV as a solution to problems inherent in a Fichtean conception of self-consciousness, it seems reasonable to assume, Redding argues, that that account is intended as a critique of Fichte's 'approach'. According to Redding, this critique consists in the claim that Fichte's commitment to a

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<sup>1</sup> Beiser 2005: 178, 181. Solomon 1983: 434-5. Redding 2009. See EPS: §§424-9.

<sup>2</sup> SK: 232. SW, I: 264.

<sup>3</sup> See EPW: 145-153; SW, VI: 293-301; SET: 143. SW, IV: 150-1.

<sup>4</sup> Redding 2009.

‘desire model of consciousness’ entails—not mutual recognition—but the asymmetrical relationship of Mastery and Servitude.

Although Redding’s interpretation is plausible, he has little to say about a crucial stage of Chapter IV: the life and death struggle. This is a shame for two reasons. First, one of the issues facing any interpretation of Chapter IV is how to make sense of the alleged necessity of the transition from the demand for recognition to the life and death struggle. Second, the life and death struggle seems to pose a serious problem for an interpretation of Chapter IV as an ‘immanent critique’<sup>5</sup> of Fichte’s account of recognition. This is because Fichte’s account of recognition conceives of mutual recognition as occurring without any interpersonal conflict, and seeks to eliminate the possibility of any such conflict. The life and death struggle is an innovation of Hegel’s, and it is sometimes claimed that it is inspired by his reading of Hobbes.<sup>6</sup> If one is to interpret Chapter IV as a critique of Fichte’s account of recognition, then one has to explain *why* Hegel thinks that Fichte’s account entails a life and death struggle.

The aim of this paper is to provide such an explanation. The first part provides a discussion of Fichte’s account of recognition that emphasizes its ‘epistemic’ concerns. The second part provides a reconstruction of the life and death struggle as an immanent critique of Fichte’s account of recognition. It also attempts to shed light on a puzzle regarding the interpretation of Hegel’s argument. Although this reconstruction will focus on the account of the life and death struggle in the *Phenomenology*, it will also draw upon the accounts provided in the *Philosophical Propaedeutic* and the *Encyclopaedia*.

## 1

### 1.1 A ‘system of freedom’

Fichte’s account of recognition can be understood adequately only if it is viewed in the context of his philosophical project. Consequently, a brief discussion of the nature of that project is necessary.

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<sup>5</sup> I explain the concept of immanent critique in §2.1 below.

<sup>6</sup> See Honneth 1995: 10, 16-18.

Fichte's philosophical project is to construct a system of transcendental philosophy that derives the *apriori* conditions of the possibility of every domain of human experience from a set of 'first principles' (*Grundsätze*). Fichte's name for this system—*Doctrine of Science* (*Wissenschaftslehre*)—might be taken to suggest a narrow preoccupation with issues in 'theoretical philosophy'. Although Fichte is concerned with such issues, that concern is tributary to a fundamental concern with 'practical philosophy' and the nature of human freedom. Indeed, in a famous draft of a letter to Jens Baggesen (dated April or May 1795), Fichte describes the *Doctrine of Science* as the 'first system of freedom'.<sup>7</sup> This system, Fichte claims, has accomplished a philosophical revolution that parallels and complements the French revolution. '[T]he first principle of my system', he writes, by way of explanation, 'presents man as a self-sufficient being [*selbständiges Wesen*].'<sup>8</sup>

The first principle of Fichte's system (as formulated in the 1794/5 *Foundations of the entire Doctrine of Science*) is 'The I originally and absolutely posits its own existence.'<sup>9</sup> This principle—which is equivalent to 'I = I' or 'I am I'—is intended to express the 'self-positing' activity of the 'absolute' or 'pure I'. The pure I, insofar as it is intelligible to us, is a self-conscious, completely free activity that has no bounds or limits. Fichte attempts to capture the complete freedom of the pure I with terms such as 'self-determination' (*Selbstbestimmung*), 'self-sufficiency' (*Selbständigkeit*), and 'independence' (*Unabhängigkeit*). These terms function as synonyms or near-synonyms for 'freedom'.

To say that the pure I is completely 'self-determining' is to say that any 'determinations'—any properties or characteristics—that it possesses are determined by itself alone. It is also to say that it is not constrained to determine itself in any particular way (self-determination is not the realization of a fixed 'essence' or 'nature'). Fichte conceives of self-determination as the I's limitless capacity to shape and re-shape itself, and he defines freedom in this context as the pure I's 'absolute power to make itself absolutely'.<sup>10</sup> An important implication of this claim (which will play a crucial role in Hegel's critique) is that the pure I is fundamentally 'indeterminate' (*unbestimmt*). If the I can 'make

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<sup>7</sup> GA, III, 2: 298. EPW: 385-6.

<sup>8</sup> GA, III, 2: 298. EPW: 385. Translation modified.

<sup>9</sup> SW, I: 98. SK: 99. Translation modified.

<sup>10</sup> SET: 37. SW, IV: 32.

itself absolutely’—if it can ‘choose’ the determinations that it possesses—then that choice must be unconstrained: the pure I cannot possess any determinations that would compel or necessitate it to determine itself in a particular way. As Fichte puts it in the 1798 *The System of Ethics*, the self, *qua* pure I, ‘originally [...] is absolutely nothing’.<sup>11</sup>

The first principle of Fichte’s ‘system of freedom’ presents ‘man’ as a completely ‘self-sufficient’, and therefore completely free, being. However, Fichte’s system does not conceive of the human being solely in such terms. Fichte maintains that the human being is a *finite* rational being or ‘individual’, a being in which the activity of the pure I is limited and constrained by a ‘not-I’ or world. This limitation transforms the activity of the pure I into a ‘striving’: the pure I impels the finite rational being to abolish the limitation of the not-I and to attain absolute self-sufficiency. The finite rational being cannot attain such a goal, since it would cease to be a *finite* rational being. Nevertheless it can *strive* to attain this goal, and has a moral duty to do so. This is its moral ‘vocation’.

## 1.2 The problem of recognition

As he developed his system of freedom, Fichte encountered a problem which he believed to threaten the coherence of the Critical enterprise (i.e., Kantian philosophy). The problem arises from a consideration of the epistemological presuppositions of Kantian moral and political theory. (For the sake of simplicity, I will focus on the former.) Kantian moral theory holds that the moral law commands us to treat ‘rational beings’ as ‘ends in themselves’, never merely as means. It also holds that we have different obligations towards rational and non-rational beings: I have an unconditional duty to treat rational beings as ends in themselves, etc., but no such duty to so treat non-rational beings. For the moral law to be applied, and therefore obeyed, we must be able to pick out and identify rational beings like ourselves. Now, as Fichte points out, such identification is part of our everyday moral practice, and we possess publicly shared criteria which, we assume, allow us to do this.<sup>12</sup> However, it is conceivable that our identification of rational beings is systematically mistaken. If that is so, then a whole class of actions that we take to be permitted by the moral law might in fact

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<sup>11</sup> SET: 52-3. SW, IV: 50. See also FNR: 74.

<sup>12</sup> See Fichte to Reinhold, 29<sup>th</sup> August, 1795. EPW: 408.

violate it. Thus our treatment of animals might violate the moral law, although that treatment is ‘supported by general opinion’.<sup>13</sup> To exclude this possibility, we need to *justify* our attribution of rationality to other beings. Absenting such a justification, the moral law ‘has no applicability or reality’.<sup>14</sup>

The problem that Critical philosophy faces, then, is an epistemic one: how to justify our attribution of rationality to other beings. (We would now refer to this problem under the rubric of ‘the problem of other minds’.) This problem seems to be a serious one for transcendental idealism, for it holds that the properties in virtue of which rational beings are rational—reason and freedom—are ‘intelligible’ or ‘noumenal’, and therefore cannot be given in experience. Thus Kant asserts, in the first *Critique*, that I ‘cannot have the least representation of a thinking being through an external experience, but only through self-consciousness.’<sup>15</sup> In his 1794 *Some Lectures concerning the Scholar’s Vocation*, Fichte claims that freedom—our radical capacity for self-determination—cannot be given directly in outer or inner experience.<sup>16</sup> Given such statements, it is not clear what would justify our ascription of rationality to other beings.

Fichte’s first full statement of the problem occurs in the second of the lectures just cited. Fichte formulates the problem as a question:

How does a man come to assume that there are rational beings like himself apart from him, and how does he come to recognize [*anzuerkennen*] them, since such beings are certainly not immediately given in his pure self-consciousness?<sup>17</sup>

This question contains two interrelated questions. The first asks how we come to ‘assume’ that there are other rational beings like ourselves since the properties in virtue of which they are rational—reason and freedom—cannot be given in experience. As Fichte’s subsequent discussion makes clear, this first question asks for more than just an account of how we come to acquire the relevant belief; it

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<sup>13</sup> EPW: 408.

<sup>14</sup> FNR: 75. SW, III: 81.

<sup>15</sup> Kant 1997: A347/B405. See also A357-8.

<sup>16</sup> EPW: 155. SW, VI: 305.

<sup>17</sup> EPW: 153. Translation modified. SW, VI: 302.

also asks for a *justification* of that process of acquisition. Thus, it would not be answered satisfactorily by simply claiming—as Kant does in the first *Critique*—that we ‘transfer’ our concept of self-consciousness onto certain phenomena.<sup>18</sup> We also need to show that such a ‘transference’ is *justified*.<sup>19</sup> The second question is more specific. It asks how we come to pick out and identify—‘recognize’—rational beings since they cannot be given in experience. As Fichte’s subsequent discussion makes clear, this question asks for criteria or ‘characteristic features’ which would enable us to ‘recognize’ other rational beings with certainty.<sup>20</sup> This, it should be noted, is the first occurrence of ‘recognition’ as a technical term in Fichte’s philosophy.

In several writings from the Jena period, Fichte criticizes Kant for failing to answer these questions.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, in the 1796/99 *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* he complains that this failure constitutes the ‘most striking demonstration of the incompleteness of Kant’s Critical philosophy’.<sup>22</sup> However, he notes that Kant came close to answering these questions in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.<sup>23</sup> Following Kant’s lead, Fichte’s own answer to these questions relies on the notion of ‘reflecting judgement’.<sup>24</sup> Fichte’s answer, simply put, is that among the phenomena that I must think under the concept of purposiveness, there are some that I can comprehend adequately *only* by transferring my concepts of reason and freedom to them. According to Fichte, the necessity of this transference confers certainty on the resultant judgement and justifies it. Those features of the phenomena that prompt this inferential process constitute ‘certain and nondeceptive’ ‘distinguishing features’ or ‘criteria’ that allow us to recognize rational beings like ourselves.<sup>25</sup>

Fichte therefore introduces the term ‘recognition’ (*Anerkennung*) in the context of an *epistemic* problem. In this context, ‘*Anerkennung*’ denotes what we might call ‘epistemic’ or

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<sup>18</sup> Kant 1997: A345-347/B 404-405. Fischbach 1999: 17-19. Radrizzani 1985: 58-9.

<sup>19</sup> EPW: 154. SW, VI: 303.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> See EPW: 407-9; FNR: 75. SW, III: 80-1.

<sup>22</sup> Fichte 1992: 303.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Fichte has in mind Kant’s discussion of the hexagon drawn in the sand. See Kant 2000: §64. For discussion, see Fischbach 1999: 53; Radrizzani 1987: 196-7.

<sup>24</sup> In ‘determining judgement’ a particular is subsumed under a given ‘universal’ (a concept or principle). In ‘reflecting judgement’ no universal is given and the power of judgement must search for a universal under which to subsume the particular. See Kant 2000: 66-8.

<sup>25</sup> EPW: 155. SW, VI: 305. FNR: 34-7. SW, III: 35-38.

‘cognitive’ recognition—the cognitive act of picking out and identifying another rational being.<sup>26</sup> Cognitive recognition is intimately related to—indeed, entails—what we might call ‘practical’ recognition. Fichte maintains that the cognitive recognition of another rational being involves understanding that one is under a rational obligation to ‘treat’ (*behandeln*) that being in a certain way (where this obligation is ‘contained’ in the concept of a free, rational being).<sup>27</sup> To deliberate and act in accordance with this obligation is to recognize that being ‘practically’.<sup>28</sup> An agent who cognitively recognizes a rational being will, if ‘consistent’ (*konsequent*), recognize that being practically.<sup>29</sup>

Fichte provides his most detailed treatment of recognition in his 1796-7 *Foundations of Natural Right* (hereafter, ‘the *Foundations*’). This work opens with two ‘deductions’ or transcendental arguments: the ‘Deduction of the concept of right’ (hereafter, ‘the first Deduction’) and the ‘Deduction of the applicability of the concept of right’ (hereafter, ‘the second Deduction’). Hegel’s critique presupposes familiarity with the Deductions, and we will therefore spend some time discussing them.

### 1.3. Recognition and the ‘summons’

Fichte opens the first Deduction with the claim that self-consciousness necessarily involves the self-ascription of a free, self-determining activity. In the case of human beings—‘finite rational beings’—the absolutely self-determining activity of the pure I is necessarily limited by a not-I or world. This limitation engenders two types of activity: a ‘representational’ activity which represents an ostensibly mind-independent world in an apparently passive way; a volitional, ‘free’ activity which aims at ‘nullifying [*aufzuheben*]’ the objects that compose the world ‘insofar as they bind it’.<sup>30</sup> This free activity does not transform the world blindly; it seeks to transform it in accordance with ‘concepts of ends’ that it has freely constructed. Insofar as this free activity determines itself to act in accordance

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<sup>26</sup> Radrizzani uses the term ‘reconnaissance théorique’ to characterize the problem that Fichte is addressing. Radrizzani 1987: 195.

<sup>27</sup> FNR: 48, 70, 79-80, 83-4. SW, III: 52, 75, 86, 90-1.

<sup>28</sup> Redding also distinguishes between an ‘epistemic’ sense of Fichtean recognition and a ‘practical’ (or, as he puts it, ‘performative’) sense. Redding 1996: 103-4.

<sup>29</sup> FNR: 44, 46, 48. SW, III: 47, 49-50, 52.

<sup>30</sup> FNR: 20. SW, III: 19.



with such freely formed concepts, it is a ‘self-determining activity’. Fichte calls this activity ‘free efficacy’ (*freie Wirksamkeit*).<sup>31</sup>

If a human being is to attain self-consciousness, it must ascribe free efficacy to itself. Now, we know that free efficacy is directed towards, and seeks to transform, a not-I or world. Consequently, the self-ascription of free efficacy presupposes the representation of a world. However, Fichte claims that a rational being can represent a world only if it is self-conscious and has thus *already* ascribed free efficacy to itself. (Fichte’s thought, put simply, is that the world ‘shows up’ for us—is cognitively salient—only in virtue of our practical engagement with it). We thus seem to be caught in an impasse: the self-ascription of free efficacy presupposes the representation of a world, and the representation of a world presupposes the self-ascription of free efficacy. Fichte claims that we can exit this impasse if we can conceive of a situation in which the agent’s representation of an object (as he now puts it) and the agent’s self-ascription of free efficacy are ‘synthetically unified’.<sup>32</sup> In such a situation, the agent’s representation of an object would necessarily involve the self-ascription of free-efficacy. However, this solution is problematic. An object is supposed to elicit the subject’s awareness of its free efficacy. However, according to Fichte, an essential characteristic of an object is that it determines a subject, that is, exerts an influence upon the subject that *constrains* and *limits* its free activity. This seems to be a contradiction. Fichte thinks that we can resolve this contradiction if we ‘conceive of the subject’s being-determined as *its being-determined to be self-determining*, i.e. as a summons [*eine Aufforderung*] to the subject, calling upon it to resolve to exercise its efficacy’.<sup>33</sup> In other words, the object must be such that it constrains or compels the subject to freely determine itself, and hence to manifest its free efficacy. The object does this by issuing a ‘summons’ or ‘invitation’ to the subject to exercise its free efficacy, a ‘demand’ (*Anforderung*) that the subject act. In issuing the summons, the object presents the subject’s free efficacy to it as something to be realized or achieved. If the subject understands the summons, then it will realize its free efficacy: it will determine itself in accordance with an end that it has freely chosen and will ascribe this self-determination to itself.

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<sup>31</sup> FNR: 18. SW, III: 17.

<sup>32</sup> FNR: 31. SW, III: 32.

<sup>33</sup> FNR: 31. SW, III: 32-3.

The ‘object’ that issues the summons is clearly another rational being, for only another rational being could possess the concept of the subject’s free efficacy, set the concept of the realization of this efficacy as its end, and attempt to bring about the realization of that concept in the world.

Drawing on his account of reflecting judgement, Fichte argues that the addressee can understand the summons only on the assumption that its cause possesses the concepts of reason and freedom, and has limited its activity in accordance with a concept of the addressee’s (potential) freedom. Since the only being that can possess such concepts and act in such a way is a rational being, the addressee must infer that the cause of the summons is another rational being. This necessary inference furnishes us with a sure or ‘unmistakeable’ criterion for identifying another rational being: ‘Only the moderation of force by means of concepts is the unmistakable and exclusive criterion of reason and freedom’.<sup>34</sup> If this criterion is satisfied, then our recognition of another rational being is ‘categorical’. To recognize another rational being categorically is to judge that it is actually another rational being (the modality of the judgement is ‘assertoric’) on the basis of conclusive evidence. Fichte contrasts such ‘categorical’ recognition with ‘problematic’ recognition. To recognize another rational being ‘problematically’ is to judge that it is *possible* that it is a rational being.<sup>35</sup>

In issuing the summons, the summoner restricts his freedom in accordance with the concept of the rationality and freedom of the addressee, and thereby provides the addressee with a ‘sphere’ of freedom in which to act. By freely choosing to realize one of the possibilities of action contained within this sphere, the addressee ascribes free efficacy to itself and is constituted as an ‘individual’ or ‘person’—a free being that possesses a sphere of freedom.

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<sup>34</sup> FNR: 43. SW, III: 45.

<sup>35</sup> FNR: 41-44. SW, III: 43-47. A categorical judgement is a judgement in which a predicate is affirmed or denied of a subject. Fichte seems to use the term ‘categorical’ as a synonym for Kant’s ‘assertoric’. See SW, V: 158. Compare GA, IV, I: 280-1 with Kant 1997: A75-76/B100-101. He might do this because the modal status of an assertoric judgement—actuality—can be expressed simply by emphasizing the copula in a categorical judgement, e.g., ‘that *is* revelation’. SW, V: 146. By contrast, one has to use a modal adverb to express possibility or necessity. A problematic judgement is a judgement of modality which states that something is possible, e.g., ‘that *may* be revelation’. SW, V: 146. In the 1792 essay on revelation Fichte suggests that we can be warranted in accepting a categorical judgement on probable grounds as well as conclusive ones. See SW, V: 145. However, in the *Foundations* he is concerned with categorical judgements for which one has conclusive proof and which are therefore certain.

My understanding of the categorical/problematic distinction is indebted to conversations with Gabe Gottlieb and to Gottlieb 2012 (unpublished manuscript).

The summoner, by issuing the summons, proves or demonstrates that he is a rational being and rationally compels the addressee's categorical recognition of him. The summoner also proves to the addressee that he recognizes him as a rational being (because the summons is intelligible only on the assumption that it is addressed to a rational being). However, the summoner's recognition is only 'problematic'. The summoner restricted his freedom because he judged it *possible* that the addressee is a rational being. The summoner's problematic recognition will become categorical—that is, he will know for certain that the addressee *is* a rational being—only if the addressee restricts *his* freedom as a consequence of his recognition of the summoner. If the addressee does this he proves to the summoner that he is a rational being.<sup>36</sup> If he doesn't, the summoner is entitled to cease treating him as a rational being (because it is part of the concept of a rational being that it restricts its freedom on recognizing another rational being). Similarly, if the summoner should cease to treat the addressee as a rational being, the addressee is entitled to cease treating him as a rational being.

#### **1.4. Corporeal recognition**

In the second Deduction, Fichte deduces, in a series of transcendental arguments, the conditions of the possibility of the realization of the concept of right in the world. Fichte argues that if persons are to act freely in the world, they must ascribe an 'articulated' body to themselves, a body with a complex structure that permits an almost infinite variety of permutations. He further argues that the human body, and the world, must be posited as possessing certain features if subjects are to exert a non-coercive influence on each other.

As well as deducing the conditions of the possibility of the realization of the concept of right, Fichte considers a possible objection to his account of the intersubjective conditions of self-consciousness. In tackling this objection, Fichte answers a question that his account of the summons left unanswered: How, prior to the summons, does the summoner recognize the addressee of the summons as a rational being?

The objection turns on the fact that Fichte's account of the summons seems to make a human being's attainment of self-consciousness, and hence rationality, dependent on the 'free choice' (or

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<sup>36</sup> FNR: 43. SW, III: 45.

‘arbitrary choice’—*Willkür*) and ‘good will’ of another. A human being can attain self-consciousness only if he is summoned by another human being, but *whether* the summons occurs seems to depend wholly on the discretion of the latter. This picture has two features that might be thought problematic: first, it suggests that the emergence of self-consciousness and rationality is contingent—a matter of chance; second, it presents the summons as an asymmetrical relationship in which the addressee is wholly dependent and passive, while the summoner is wholly independent and active. As Fichte puts it, the account of the summons appears to make the summoned subject into the mere ‘accident’ of the summoning subject.<sup>37</sup>

Fichte answers the objection by claiming that I (the potential addressee of the summons) exert an influence on the other agent such that he is compelled to cognitively recognize me as a rational being. Having done so, he is obliged by ‘consistency’ to practically recognize me by summoning me to free interaction. This answers the objection by removing the problematic asymmetry and contingency of the summons. It removes the asymmetry because I exert an influence on the other agent (to the extent that I do this, the other agent can be said to be ‘dependent’ on me); it removes the contingency because the other agent is compelled to cognitively recognize me and, insofar as he wills consistently, to issue the summons.

The answer to the objection requires that I (the potential addressee) exert an influence on the other agent. At first glance, it is not clear how this is possible. For, as Fichte points out, I have not yet attained self-consciousness (since the summons has not taken place) and am therefore incapable of exercising my capacity for free efficacy. I therefore cannot act purposively in the world; indeed, Fichte claims that I cannot act at all. Given this, Fichte argues that the only possible source of influence is the shape and configuration of my body:

my body would have to exercise an efficacy in virtue of its shape [*Gestalt*] and its mere existence in space; and indeed, it would have to exercise an efficacy such that every rational

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<sup>37</sup> FNR: 69. SW, III: 74. Translation modified.

being would be obliged [*verbunden wäre*] to recognize me as a being capable of reason [*der Vernunft fähiges*] and to treat me in accordance with that presupposition.<sup>38</sup>

According to Fichte, the human body ‘compels’ cognitive recognition (and, if the recognizing agent is consistent, its practical counterpart) because it can be fully comprehended only on the assumption that it is the body of a rational being. Fichte’s argument in support of this claim relies again on the concept of reflecting judgement, and turns on a contrast between the human body and the animal body. The animal body, Fichte claims, can be thought exhaustively under the concept of ‘determinate free movement’ (a species of ‘articulation’). To attribute determinate free movement to something is to say that while it is capable of ‘arbitrary movement’ (or ‘voluntary movement’—*willkürlichen Bewegung*), the range of movement available to it is relatively constrained and limited.<sup>39</sup> Although the human body can be thought under this concept, it is not exhausted by it. This is because the articulation of the human body, unlike that of the animal body, has an ‘infinite determinability’. What Fichte means by this is that the parts of the human body can, in contrast to the parts of the animal body, be combined, configured, and formed in a potentially limitless variety of ways. Whereas the configuration of the animal body is formed and fixed (a horse can walk only on all fours), the configuration of the human body is highly plastic and formable. This ‘formability’ (*Bildsamkeit*) can *only* be understood adequately, Fichte argues, under the concept of freedom (and rationality).

The concept of freedom at issue here is freedom as a radical capacity for self-determination. A being that possesses such freedom is ‘infinitely determinable’ and, precisely because of this, ‘indeterminate’.<sup>40</sup> As Fichte puts it, ‘Every animal *is* what it is: only the human being is originally nothing at all’.<sup>41</sup> The body of such a being must, if it is to facilitate such self-determination, be itself ‘infinitely determinable’ or ‘formable’. Fichte is not, it goes without saying, claiming that one can do

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<sup>38</sup> FNR: 70. SW, III: 75.

<sup>39</sup> FNR: 74. SW, III: 79.

<sup>40</sup> FNR: 27. SW, III: 28.

<sup>41</sup> FNR: 74. SW, III: 79-80.

just *anything* with the human body. He is claiming, rather, that the human body has a complex organic structure that permits an infinite variety of permutations that are within our volitional control.<sup>42</sup>

According to Fichte, then, the human body can be understood *only* as the ‘representation’ (*Repräsentation*)<sup>43</sup> or ‘presentation’ (*Darstellung*)<sup>44</sup> of a free, rational being in the sensible world. Any fully rational human being who perceives the shape of the human body will be compelled to cognitively recognize it as the body of a being ‘capable of reason’. Consequently, human beings exert an influence on each other, and ‘interact’, simply in virtue of their corporeal form. As Fichte puts it:

at the basis of all voluntarily chosen [*willkürlichen*] reciprocal interaction among free beings there lies an original and necessary reciprocal interaction among them, which is this: the free being, by his mere presence in the sensible world, compels every other free being, without qualification, to recognize him as a person.<sup>45</sup>

Although Fichte does not say so explicitly, it seems that the recognition that is compelled by the shape of the human body must be ‘problematic’, rather than ‘categorical’, recognition. That this is the case is suggested by Fichte’s claim that the recognition in question is recognition of a being ‘*capable of reason*’. It is also suggested by the fact that Fichte develops his account of ‘corporeal recognition’ to explain how the summoner’s problematic recognition of the addressee is possible.

Fichte’s account of the articulated body as the ‘presentation’ of freedom in the world may seem to anticipate the conception of the body to be found in the work of phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty. However, a note of caution is in order. Although Fichte sometimes claims that the human body is the ‘expression’ of rationality<sup>46</sup>, he conceives of the relationship between reason (or freedom) and the body as an *instrumental* relationship. Indeed, in the 1798 *The System of Ethics*, he describes the body as the ‘tool’ or ‘instrument’ (*Werkzeug*) of reason.<sup>47</sup> The body is, so to speak, the

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<sup>42</sup> FNR: 53-8. SW, III: 56-61.

<sup>43</sup> FNR: 71-2. SW, III: 76-7.

<sup>44</sup> FNR: 112. SW, III: 123.

<sup>45</sup> FNR: 79. SW, III: 85.

<sup>46</sup> See Fichte to Reinhold, 29<sup>th</sup> August, 1795. EPW: 408.

<sup>47</sup> SET: 71, 112. SW, IV: 69, 128.

tool with which reason transforms the world and is, like any tool, a means to an end. With this in mind, we can turn to Hegel's critique of Fichte.

## 2

In the *Phenomenology* Hegel describes the initial situation in which two individuals who seek recognition confront each other as follows:

one individual is confronted by another individual. Appearing thus *immediately*, they exist for one another in the manner of ordinary objects; [they are] *self-sufficient* shapes [selbständige *Gestalten*], consciousnesses submerged in the *being of life*—for the existing object is here determined as life—which *for each other* have not yet accomplished the movement of absolute abstraction, of eradicating all immediate being, and of being merely the purely negative being of self-identical consciousness; in other words, they have not yet presented [*dargestellt*] themselves to each other in the form of pure being-for-self, i.e., as *self-consciousnesses*.<sup>48</sup>

This description of the initial situation is reminiscent of the 'original' encounter between Fichtean 'individuals' or 'persons' in which each is compelled to problematically recognize the other in virtue of the 'shape' (*Gestalt*) of the other's body. In the version of this argument in the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel notes that this 'immediacy' is 'at the same time the bodiliness [or 'corporeality'—*Leiblichkeit*] of self-consciousness in which, as in its sign and tool [*Zeichen und Werkzeug*], self-consciousness has its own *self-feeling*, as well as its being *for others* and its relation that mediates between itself and them.'<sup>49</sup> Given Fichte's characterization of the body as the *Werkzeug* of reason, and his account of corporeal recognition, it seems highly likely that Hegel has Fichte in mind in this version of the argument.

On Fichte's account of recognition, this initial encounter would rationally compel each agent to limit his freedom through the concept of the other's freedom, thereby proving 'categorically' to the

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<sup>48</sup> PhS: §186. Translation modified. W, 3: 148.

<sup>49</sup> EPS: §431. W, 10: 219-20.

other that he is free. The resulting relationship would be a pacific, symmetrical relationship of ‘reciprocal interaction through intelligence and freedom’.<sup>50</sup> Fichte assumes that this relationship is established unproblematically and without conflict. Hegel, as we know, thinks that the ‘individuals’ will be compelled to engage in a life and death struggle. The question we have to answer, then, is: How could this possibly be a critique of Fichte’s position?

## **2.1 Immanent critique**

Before we attempt to answer this question a brief discussion of Hegel’s conception of critique is necessary. Hegel’s method of criticism is ‘internal’ or ‘immanent’.<sup>51</sup> To say that a critique is ‘internal’ is to say that it judges the theory or ‘shape of consciousness’ under consideration in terms of criteria or standards that are internal to it. The critique consists in showing that the attempt to satisfy these criteria or standards engenders an internal contradiction which can be resolved only by substantively revising the criteria or standards, or by abandoning them. The resolution of this contradiction leads to a richer, more adequate form of the theory or shape of consciousness. Hegel often refers to the new form as the ‘truth’ of its predecessor or predecessors.<sup>52</sup> Thus, in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel claims that ‘perception’ is the truth of ‘sense-certainty’, and that ‘self-consciousness’ is the truth of the preceding shapes of consciousness.<sup>53</sup>

Hegel’s conception of criticism should lead us to expect that his critique of Fichte will be immanent and will engender a richer, more adequate form (or forms) of recognition.

## **2.2. Recognition of Personality**

We can start to answer our question by considering a claim that Hegel makes when explaining the transition to the life and death struggle. He writes:

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<sup>50</sup> FNR: 42. SW III: 44.

<sup>51</sup> See the Introduction to PhS. See Hegel 1969: 580-1. W, 6: 249-51.

<sup>52</sup> Inwood 1992: 300.

<sup>53</sup> PhS: §110/66; §164/102. W, 3: 92; 135.



The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a *person*, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition [or ‘being-recognized’—*Anerkanntseins*] as recognition of a self-sufficient self-consciousness.<sup>54</sup>

This claim merits scrutiny. It identifies a specific form of recognition—recognition of the person—and states that one can be recognized as a person *without* risking one’s life. However, it then adds that unless one has risked one’s life one will not attain to the truth of ‘*this* being-recognized’ (*dieses Anerkanntseins*) as recognition of a ‘self-sufficient self-consciousness’. If we read ‘*dieses Anerkanntseins*’ as referring to recognition of the person (as opposed to recognition *tout court*), then Hegel seems to be claiming that the ‘truth’ of this form of recognition: a) is recognition as a ‘self-sufficient self-consciousness’ and b) can be attained only if one risks one’s life.

To make full sense of this claim, we need to note that Hegel advances his own conception of recognition of the person, or, as I shall henceforth refer to it, ‘recognition of personality [*Persönlichkeit*]’. To recognize someone as a person is to recognize him as possessing a ‘universal’, rational nature; it is also to recognize him as an autonomous, ‘self-sufficient’ being.<sup>55</sup> This recognition involves the ascription of rights (especially the right of property) to the person. Now, as Franck Fischbach has argued, in the *Phenomenology* recognition of personality is realized fully only after a lengthy dialectical development which passes through the ‘servile consciousness’, ‘Stoicism’, the ‘State of Legality’ (*Rechtszustand*), and ‘Culture’ (*Bildung*).<sup>56</sup> This means, of course, that recognition of personality is achieved only *after* the life and death struggle, and must, presumably, pass through it. Moreover, in the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel states that recognition of personality occurs only *after* the life and death struggle.<sup>57</sup> Given all of this, Hegel’s claim that one can be recognized as a ‘person’ *without*

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<sup>54</sup> ‘Das Individuum, welches das Leben nicht gewagt hat, kann wohl als *Person* anerkannt werden; aber es hat die Wahrheit dieses Anerkanntseins als eines selbständigen Selbstbewußtseins nicht erreicht.’ PhS: §187. W, 3: 149. My translation follows Hyppolite’s French translation: ‘L’individu qui n’a pas mis sa vie en jeu peut bien être reconnu comme *personne*; mais il n’a pas atteint la vérité de cette reconnaissance comme reconnaissance d’une conscience de soi indépendante.’ Hegel 1941: 159.

<sup>55</sup> See PhS: §479/290. W, 3: 355-6.

<sup>56</sup> Fischbach 1999: 99-100.

<sup>57</sup> EPS: §432. I owe this point to Andrew Chitty.

risking one's life is extremely puzzling. As far as I am aware, the puzzling nature of this claim has received no attention in the literature.

The puzzle arises from the assumption that the phrase 'be recognized as a *person*' refers to *Hegel's* conception of recognition of personality—the conception that *results from* the dialectical development. This puzzle is solved if we take the phrase to refer to *Fichte's* conception of recognition, and, moreover, assume that this conception is the most 'immediate' and impoverished form of recognition of personality. If we read the phrase in this way, then Hegel is claiming that while one can obtain Fichtean recognition—the recognition outlined in the *Foundations*—without risking one's life, one cannot attain to the 'truth' of that recognition as recognition of a 'self-sufficient self-consciousness' without risking one's life. It seems plausible to think that the 'truth' of that recognition will be the form of recognition of personality that results from the dialectical development: Hegelian recognition of personality.

This interpretation suggests that Hegel's critique is as follows. Fichte's account of recognition aims to explain how the cognitive and practical recognition of individuals as free, self-sufficient beings is possible. This recognition is the 'truth' that Fichtean individuals, and Fichte's account, aspire to. The account of recognition offered in the *Foundations* does *not* allow individuals to attain that truth. They can attain that truth only if they pass through the life and death struggle.

### **2.3 The transition to the life and death struggle**

This provides only the beginning of an answer to our question, for it does not explain *why* Hegel thinks that Fichtean individuals must engage in a life and death struggle if they are to attain to the 'truth' of recognition of personality. In order to explain this, we need to consider Hegel's account of the transition to the life and death struggle.

On one interpretation of the transition, individuals are compelled to engage in the life and death struggle because their underlying practical attitude is that of 'desire' (*Begierde*).<sup>58</sup> Each individual seeks to ratify his sense of himself as a free, self-sufficient being by completely subordinating the other to his will, just as, in the dialectic of desire, he sought to subordinate objects

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<sup>58</sup> See Stern 2002: 76.

to his will by negating them. The attempt of each individual to subordinate the other to his will engenders a life and death struggle. The defect of this interpretation, as Stern points out, is that it fails to do justice to the idea that *recognition* is the source of conflict.<sup>59</sup>

A second interpretation holds that the life and death struggle arises because each individual wants to be recognized by the other, but does not want to recognize him in turn. The defect of this interpretation, as Stern again points out, is that it sees risking one's life as a 'side-effect' of the life and death struggle rather than as the *reason* for it. As Hegel makes clear, the life and death struggle occurs *because* individuals are compelled to risk their lives and to seek each other's death. A satisfactory interpretation of the transition must therefore answer the following question: 'Why are individuals compelled to risk their lives for recognition?'

A third interpretation—outlined by Stern—answers this question as follows.<sup>60</sup> Each individual is compelled to risk his life because the other can be expected to treat him as a self-sufficient, free being only if the other knows for certain that he is such a being. In order to ensure that the other has such knowledge the individual must present himself as a 'pure being-for-self'. However, the individual appears to the other as a natural being, a being that is submerged in, and 'attached to', 'life', and this appearance is incompatible with the 'presentation' (*Darstellung*) of the individual as a 'pure being-for-self'. The individual can 'prove' to the other that he is such a being only by 'showing that it is not attached to any determinate *existence*, [...] that it is not attached to life'.<sup>61</sup> The individual can only do this, Hegel claims, by risking his life by seeking the death of the other.<sup>62</sup>

At first glance, it is not clear why the individual must risk his life by seeking the death of the other, for surely the individual could risk his life, and prove himself to be free, in other ways (e.g., by playing Russian roulette in front of the other).<sup>63</sup> The reason why the individual must risk his life by seeking the death of the other is that the individual *himself* requires conclusive proof that the other is free. In other words, the individual needs to know for certain that the embodied being confronting him is the sort of being that is capable of treating him as a rational being (and which should be treated as a

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Stern 2002: 77-80.

<sup>61</sup> PhS: §187. Translation modified. W, 3: 148.

<sup>62</sup> PhS: §187. W, 3: 149.

<sup>63</sup> Stern 2002: 79. Inwood in EPS: 442.

rational being). By seeking the death of the other, the individual both proves that he is a free, self-sufficient being and ‘tests’ the other to see if he is such a being.<sup>64</sup>

How does seeking the death of the other constitute a ‘test’? Each individual’s aim, in trying to kill the other, is to elicit a response that would provide conclusive proof of the other’s freedom and self-sufficiency. Such a response is provided by the other’s willing risk of his life, for it demonstrates that he is not attached to his corporeal, natural existence; it shows that there is nothing which he could not regard ‘as a vanishing moment’.<sup>65</sup> In Fichtean language, one could say that the risk of life is the ‘unmistakeable and exclusive criterion’ of freedom and self-sufficiency. According to Hegel, the combatants initially interpret the criterion in such a way that it can only be satisfied by *death*: the freely willed death of the other provides incontrovertible proof that he risked his life and was not attached to sensuous existence. As Hegel puts it in the *Encyclopaedia*, ‘The *absolute* proof [absolute *Beweis*] of freedom in the struggle for recognition is *death*’.<sup>66</sup> Obviously, this ‘proof by death’ (*Bewährung [...] durch den Tod*) would render recognition impossible by eliminating one or both of the combatants.<sup>67</sup> Faced with the possibility of death, the combatants realize that ‘life’ is as ‘essential’ as ‘pure self-consciousness’ and revise their interpretation of the criterion so that its satisfaction is compatible with their embodied existence.<sup>68</sup> In so doing, they enter the relationship of Mastery and Servitude.

What is interesting—indeed, surprising—about this interpretation is that it suggests that the life and death struggle is motivated by *epistemic* concerns.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, one could say, on the basis of this interpretation, that the struggle for recognition is a struggle for *epistemic* recognition. Individuals do not risk their lives because of an overweening sense of their own importance or because they desire to subordinate the other to their will. They risk their lives because they need to prove that they are free and require proof that the other is free. Such proof, Hegel claims, can be provided *only* by the risk of life.

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<sup>64</sup> Stern 2002: 80. W, 4: 79.

<sup>65</sup> PhS: §187. W, 3: 149.

<sup>66</sup> EPS: §432. W, 10: 221. Translation modified.

<sup>67</sup> PhS: §188. Translation modified. W, 3: 149. Hyppolite translates this as ‘suprême preuve par le moyen de la mort’. Hegel 1941: 160.

<sup>68</sup> PhS: §189. W, 3: 150. See EPS: §432-3. W, 10: 221-4.

<sup>69</sup> Chitty also notes this in Chitty 2012 (unpublished manuscript).

This interpretation suggests that Hegel's critique is concerned with Fichte's epistemic conception of recognition. As we have seen, on Fichte's account of recognition an individual proves conclusively that he is free—and thereby justifies the categorical judgement that he *is* free—when he limits his freedom in accordance with the concept of another individual's freedom: 'only the moderation of force by means of concepts is the unmistakable and exclusive criterion of reason and freedom'.<sup>70</sup> According to Hegel, Fichte's criterion is flawed: the unmistakable and exclusive criterion of reason and freedom is the risk of one's life. If a Fichtean individual is to prove conclusively that he is free, and is to acquire categorical knowledge that the other is free, he must engage in a life and death struggle. Since the provision of such proof is a necessary condition of being recognized categorically as a free, self-sufficient being, Hegel can claim that a Fichtean individual cannot attain to the 'truth' of the recognition of personality without risking his life.

This explains how Hegel's account of the life and death struggle can be interpreted as a critique of Fichte's conception of recognition. However, it does not yet explain how it can be interpreted as an *immanent* critique of that conception. For why can't Fichte simply deny what Hegel asserts? If the life and death struggle is to be interpreted as an immanent critique of Fichte, Hegel must be able to argue that certain features of Fichte's position commit him, *malgré lui*, to accepting the claim that the *only* criterion of freedom and self-sufficiency is risking one's life. Hegel does not, unfortunately, provide such an argument, and we will therefore have to construct one on his behalf. We can start to do this by providing an explanation of *why*, according to Hegel, the only possible criterion of freedom is risking one's life.

According to Stern, the reason why risking one's life is the only criterion is that the life and death struggle takes place in a primitive social condition in which individuals lack alternative ways of demonstrating their freedom. In the absence of social roles which allow them to express, and thereby demonstrate, their freedom, the *only* way in which individuals can prove their freedom is by risking their lives.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> FNR: 43. SW, III: 44.

<sup>71</sup> Stern 2002: 81.

This explanation has a certain plausibility and receives some support from Hegel's account of the life and death struggle in the *Encyclopaedia*. However, as Stern points out, it makes the necessity of the transition a function of contingent historical circumstances and this is 'unsatisfactory' insofar as the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* has, until now, been 'driven by some sort of *conceptual* one-sidedness or tension'.<sup>72</sup> A more satisfactory explanation would explain the necessity of proving one's freedom by risking one's life as resulting from an impoverished or limited conception of freedom.

I think that such an explanation is available. In the accounts of the life and death struggle in the *Philosophical Propaedeutic*, Hegel suggests that the parties to the struggle have an impoverished conception of freedom as consisting solely in 'abstraction from natural existence'<sup>73</sup> or 'freedom from sensuous existence'.<sup>74</sup> Hegel calls this conception of freedom 'negative freedom'. It seems plausible to think that the nature of the criterion of freedom, and of the corresponding proof, are determined by this conception of freedom. In other words, it is because individuals, *at this stage of the dialectic*, conceive of freedom as 'negative freedom', that the *only* proof of freedom is risking one's life.

This conception of freedom is not, it should be noted, the exclusive preserve of individuals existing in a primitive condition. It is also expressed, in a rarefied and abstract form, in Fichte's transcendental philosophy. Indeed, Hegel first introduces the term 'negative freedom' in his critique of Fichte in the 1801 *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (hereafter, the '*Differenzschrift*'). In that work, Hegel argues that Fichte is committed to a conception of freedom—negative freedom—that creates insuperable difficulties for his system of transcendental philosophy. This suggests that Hegel's immanent critique will consist in the claim that Fichte's conception of freedom—a conception that is *fundamental* to his system of freedom—entails that the only 'unmistakeable' criterion of freedom is risking one's life. In order to provide the resources with which to construct an argument in support of this claim, a discussion of Hegel's critique of Fichte in the *Differenzschrift* is necessary.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Hegel 1986: 62. W, 4: 120-1.

<sup>74</sup> W, 4: 79.

## 2.4 Negative Freedom

In §1.1, we discussed the nature of the Fichtean ‘pure I’. We saw that it is essentially free, which is to say that it is completely ‘self-determining’, ‘indeterminate’, and ‘self-sufficient’. Now, Fichte often characterizes the pure I in contradistinction to the ‘not-I’ or nature. The pure I and the not-I are presented as having opposed and mutually exclusive characteristics. The pure I is characterized as ‘spontaneity’, ‘self-activity’, ‘agility’ (*Agilität*), and ‘mobility’ (*Beweglichkeit*).<sup>75</sup> The not-I or nature is characterized as passive, lifeless, and inert. ‘The nature of a thing’, Fichte writes, ‘lies in its fixed subsistence, lacking any inner movement, passive and dead.’<sup>76</sup> On one occasion, Fichte explicitly assimilates the opposition between the I and not-I to the opposition between life and death.<sup>77</sup> In his explanation of radical evil, Fichte attributes a ‘force of inertia’ (*Kraft der Trägheit*) to nature, a capacity to resist the activity of reason.<sup>78</sup> Finally, he characterizes the I and not-I in terms of the opposition between indeterminacy and determinacy. If the I is indeterminate, the not-I (or nature) is wholly determinate: its nature is fixed and unchanging.<sup>79</sup>

In the *Differenzschrift* Hegel argues that Fichte is committed to a conception of freedom that threatens the coherence of his system of transcendental philosophy. Hegel calls this freedom ‘negative freedom’ or ‘freedom regarded from the standpoint of reflection’.<sup>80</sup>

The ‘standpoint of reflection’ treats the phenomena that it considers in terms of oppositions such as inner and outer, subject and object, pure self and empirical self, I and not-I, freedom and nature.<sup>81</sup> It conceives of these oppositions as hard and fast, mutually exclusive, oppositions—as ‘absolute opposites’.<sup>82</sup> It is to be contrasted with, and is ‘sublated’ by, the standpoint of ‘speculation’ (Hegel’s standpoint) which seeks to comprehend the opposed terms in their inner unity or ‘identity’ while recognizing their difference. Fichte’s system is a prime example of the ‘standpoint of reflection’

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<sup>75</sup> SET: 7. SW, IV: 8.

<sup>76</sup> SET: 39; SW, IV: 34. See also SET: 12. SW, IV: 7.

<sup>77</sup> ‘The I is not to be derived from the Not-I, life is not to be derived from death’. SET: 56. SW, IV: 54.

<sup>78</sup> SET: 189-90. SW, IV: 119-200.

<sup>79</sup> SET: 108. SW, IV: 112-3.

<sup>80</sup> DS: 133, 145. W, 2: 69, 82.

<sup>81</sup> See DS: 89-98. W, 2: 20-30.

<sup>82</sup> DS: 126. W, 2: 60.

since, as we have just seen, it characterizes the pure I (or freedom) and the not-I (or nature) in terms of pairs of fundamentally opposed and mutually exclusive qualities.

According to Hegel, ‘freedom is the characteristic mark [*Charakter*] of rationality’ and ‘the summit of Fichte’s system’.<sup>83</sup> However, he argues that Fichte conceives of freedom in an impoverished way, as ‘something merely negative, namely, absolute indeterminacy [or ‘indeterminateness’—*Unbestimmtheit*]’.<sup>84</sup> To conceive of freedom as ‘indeterminacy’ is to conceive of it as a capacity to abstract from, and negate, any determinate features or characteristics. To conceive of freedom as *absolute* indeterminacy is to conceive of it as completely incompatible with— as *excluding*—determinacy. If one conceives of freedom in this way, then one will also conceive of it as incompatible with any limitation, since to limit something is to determine it. Consequently, freedom, on this conception, is that which ‘in itself abolishes all limitation’.<sup>85</sup> Such freedom is appropriately characterized as ‘negative’ because it is the *negation* of what it is not: *determinacy* and *limitation*.

Fichte *has* to conceive of freedom in this way because determinacy and limitation are essential characteristics of the not-I or nature, and the I and not-I are absolutely opposed. In other words, this conception of freedom is entailed by the exclusionary logic of the ‘standpoint of reflection’. This exclusionary logic also compels Fichte to conceive of the not-I or nature in an impoverished way. Here, Hegel picks up on, and exploits, Fichte’s characterizations of the not-I or nature as lifeless, fixed, and completely determinate. Fichte, Hegel asserts, presents nature as an ‘absolute effect and as dead’<sup>86</sup>, as ‘something essentially determinate [or ‘determined’—*ein wesentlich Bestimmtes*] and lifeless’.<sup>87</sup> This impoverished conception of nature is a consequence of the ‘absolute opposition’ between nature and freedom. If one characterizes the freedom of the pure I in terms of spontaneity, agility, and mobility, and one thinks that freedom is *absolutely opposed* to nature, then one *has* to conceive of nature as dead, fixed, and completely determinate.

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<sup>83</sup> DS: 144. W, 2: 82.

<sup>84</sup> DS: 145. Translation modified. W, 2: 82.

<sup>85</sup> DS: 144. Translation modified. W, 2: 82.

<sup>86</sup> DS: 143. W 2: 80.

<sup>87</sup> DS: 139. W, 2: 76. Translation modified.



A crucial, and obvious, upshot of Fichte's 'absolute opposition' between freedom and nature is that freedom can be realized, or manifested, in the world only at the 'expense' of nature or the not-I. If freedom is conceived of as 'absolute indeterminacy', then its realization entails the negation and elimination of that which is determinate and fixed. Freedom, so conceived, cannot be expressed adequately in specific social institutions or character traits, since these are necessarily determinate and specific. Nor, for that matter, can freedom be expressed adequately by the human body. As we have seen, Fichte claims that the human body is, in virtue of its 'infinite determinability', the 'representation' or 'presentation' of freedom in the world. In the *Differenzschrift*, Hegel points out that this conception of the body as the representation of freedom is not available to Fichte given the underlying logic of his position. The body is, as Fichte acknowledges, posited in *opposition* to the pure I; consequently, it must possess the characteristics of the not-I. As Hegel puts it: the pure I's 'connection with this sphere is merely a *having*. The basic character of nature is to be a world of the organic being, an absolute opposite; the essence of nature is atomistic lifelessness [...]'.<sup>88</sup>

## 2.5 Hegel's critique of Fichte

The *Differenzschrift* provides us with the resources with which to construct an argument on Hegel's behalf and, in so doing, to provide a definitive answer to our question: How could Hegel's account of the life and death struggle possibly be a critique of Fichte's position?

Two Fichtean individuals confront each other as embodied beings immersed in 'life'. Each is compelled, in virtue of the shape of the other's body, to recognize him problematically as a potentially free being. Each desires to interact with the other, because he believes that the other is the kind of object that is able to ratify and confirm his sense of himself as a free being. However, *prior* to such interaction, each individual requires conclusive, 'categorical' proof that the other is a free being. The nature of this proof will, as we have noted, depend upon each individual's conception of freedom. Now, if Hegel's critique in the *Differenzschrift* is correct, Fichtean individuals conceive of freedom as 'negative freedom', that is, they conceive of freedom *solely* as absolute indeterminacy—as the abolition of any limit. They also conceive of nature, and hence the body, as *absolutely opposed* to

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<sup>88</sup> DS: 142. W, 2: 80.

freedom: as completely determinate, ossified, and lifeless. As Hegel puts it in the account of the life and death struggle in the 1808/9 ‘Doctrine of Consciousness for the Middle Class’ in the *Philosophical Propaedeutic*, ‘*Being* is the not-I, inertia, not self-determination [Sein ist das Nichtich, Trägheit, nicht Selbstbestimmung.]’<sup>89</sup>

Given this conception of freedom, conclusive, categorical proof that an individual is free cannot, *pace* Fichte, be provided by the ‘moderation of force’ in accordance with concepts—that is, by the *limitation* of freedom. However, freedom could be proven categorically if it could somehow be shown that an individual is willing to completely negate that which is opposed to, and limits, his freedom, namely, his corporeal, natural existence.

In Fichte’s account of recognition, the act of issuing the summons constitutes a *test* of the freedom and rationality of the addressee, and *proves* categorically that the summoner is a free, rational being. If Hegel is correct, then, as Fichte’s conception of freedom entails a very different criterion of freedom and rationality, it follows that it requires a very different test. In order to test whether the other individual is a completely free and self-sufficient being, a ‘pure being-for-self’, each agent must seek ‘the death of the other’.<sup>90</sup> Insofar as each agent does this, he risks his own life and *proves* that he is a free being. The irenic gesture of the ‘summons’ is therefore replaced by the belligerent pursuit of the other’s death.

As we saw in the first part of this paper (§1.2), Fichte’s account of recognition is motivated by a ‘practical’ concern with the applicability of Kantian moral and political theory. If the principles of Kantian moral and political theory are to be applicable, we must be able to recognize other ‘persons’, that is, other free, ‘self-sufficient’ beings. Hegel’s critique, if successful, shows that Fichte’s account of recognition in the *Foundations* does not—given his conception of freedom and self-sufficiency—furnish an unmistakable criterion for recognizing other persons as self-sufficient beings. Fichte’s conception of freedom entails a very different criterion which, when applied, engenders a violent struggle that is inimical to morality and law. Fichte’s conception of freedom therefore undermines, paradoxically, the coherence of his ‘system of freedom’. To ensure the

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<sup>89</sup> §20. W, 4: 79.

<sup>90</sup> PhS: §187/113. W, 3: 148.

coherence of his system, Fichte must revise and deepen his conception of freedom and self-sufficiency. Such a revision and deepening takes place in the subsequent stages of the *Phenomenology*. The parties to the life and death struggle realize that their embodied existence is as important as freedom, and the servant learns—through work—that freedom can be expressed and manifested in nature. It is only after a lengthy process of development that passes through ‘Stoicism’, the ‘State of Legality’ and ‘Culture’ that individuals acquire an adequate conception of their self-sufficiency and freedom. If Fichtean ‘persons’ are to attain the ‘truth’ of recognition of personality, they must undergo this process of development and must, therefore, pass through the life and death struggle.<sup>91</sup>

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## Abbreviations

- DS Hegel, G. W. F. *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, translated and edited by H. S. Harris and W. Cerf (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977).
- EPS Hegel, G. W. F. *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, translated by W. Wallace and A. V. Miller, edited by M. Inwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).
- EPW Fichte, J. G. *Early Philosophical Writings*, translated and edited by D. Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).
- FNR Fichte, J. G. *Foundations of Natural Right*, translated by M. Baur, edited by F. Neuhouser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- GA Fichte, J. G. *J. G. Fichte: Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, edited by E. Fuchs, R. Lauth, H. Jacobs, and H. Gliwitzky (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann, 1964 —).
- PhS Hegel, G. W. F. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
- SET Fichte, J. G. *The System of Ethics*, translated and edited by D. Breazeale and G. Zöller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- SK Fichte, J. G. *Science of Knowledge with the First and Second Introductions*, translated and edited by P. Heath and J. Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- SW Fichte, J. G. *Johann Gottlieb Fichtes sämtliche Werke*, edited by I. H. Fichte (Berlin: Veit, 1845–46).
- W Hegel, G.W.F. *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, edited by E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970).

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