Propaedeutic to a Deduction of Desire in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

In the opening sections of his chapter on self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes how consciousness, having superseded the antithesis of the Understanding, becomes self-aware. A crucial component of this moment of consciousness is the appearance of desire, the dialectical necessity of which Frederick Neuhouser attempts to demonstrate in his essay, “Deducing Desire and Recognition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. ”

Chiefly because of Hegel’s own methodological constraints, the importance of an adequate justification or deduction of the appearance of desire in the *Phenomenology* is very great. In accordance with his rejection of immediate knowledge, it is of primary importance to Hegel’s project that the *Phenomenology* explain the development of consciousness without any reliance upon “outside” factors: if any stage of consciousness could be shown to depend upon consciousness’ immediate grasp of an outside reality, Hegel’s project would fail on its own terms by acknowledging a truth independent of consciousness. As Neuhouser notes in the introduction to his essay, if desire cannot be deduced, Hegel faces the objection that “…its [desire’s] introduction into the dialectic is not adequately grounded and that, consequently, Hegel is deceiving us—and himself as well—with his claim to be doing a rigorous and presuppositionless phenomenology” (Neuhouser 243). This objection is especially worrisome considering that desire shows up at the cusp of one of the most important transitions of the entire *Phenomenology*: the emergence of self-consciousness. This transition immediately precipitates the appearance of the lord and the bondsman, Hegel’s account of which is probably the most influential ten pages of the entire *Phenomenology*, so a problem with desire could potentially affect our understanding of a good deal more than his own work. Since it is desire that supposedly propels self-consciousness to seek the recognition that will eventually elevate it to
the status of Spirit, if desire cannot be adequately explained, neither can the struggle for recognition.

It is in an attempt to steer Hegel clear of such problems that Neuhouser offers a deduction of desire in his essay. After encountering difficulties in attempting the deduction by means of forward movements of the dialectic, he devises and follows a “transcendental” deductive method, concluding that the appearance of desire is justified because desire is a condition of the possibility of the appearance of self-consciousness. In this essay I will show that, while it is not incorrect that there is a necessary connection for Hegel between desire and self-consciousness, Neuhouser’s transcendental deduction actually fares no better than his original forward-moving attempt because of a problematic understanding of the nature of desire for Hegel. I will argue that we must think self-consciousness and desire as immediately implying one another, equivalent expressions of a single dialectical moment, rather than as distinct moments separated by a dialectical development as Neuhouser’s argument implicitly supposes. We cannot, as Neuhouser suggests, “…accept the initial standpoint of abstract self-consciousness because Hegel has presumably led us to that point along a path of rigor and necessity” (Neuhouser 251), and then proceed—whether forward or backward—to desire, as this will at best only restate the equivalence of self-consciousness and desire. In short, I intend to show that a deduction of desire cannot take self-consciousness as a starting-point, but that it is precisely a deduction of self-consciousness that is necessary to justify desire. Finally, at the close of the essay I will briefly outline some of the features that a good deduction will need to have, taking all the above conclusions into account.

Neuhouser begins his investigation with the question, “How is it that the capacity for desire is suddenly attributed to a self-consciousness which at its inception was nothing more than
the certainty that it ‘was?’” (Neuhouser 243). With the goal of answering this question, (and having rejected a Kojèvean assertion of desire as a basic and unavoidable assumption), Neuhouser first seeks to derive desire from a forward motion of the dialectic, to discover what about the previous stage of the development of consciousness necessitates the appearance of desire. Failing to find a suitable solution by this method, from which he is able to derive explanations of the role to be played by desire but not the necessity of its appearance, he turns to a different approach. Rather than forward, he proposes to look backward, to “…investigate instead the conditions of possibility of…” self-consciousness in order to derive desire (Neuhouser 248). Following this transcendental method, Neuhouser proposes to take the emergence of self-consciousness as given and to see whether he can show that desire is a necessary condition thereof. If this can be done, he argues, it will establish the necessity of desire’s appearance. Furthermore, this argument has no need of establishing “…that the point from which it departs is an undeniable facet of our experience” (Neuhouser 251), because to do so would be to embark upon a discussion of the entire Phenomenology up until this point, which is unnecessary when only an internal transition is in question.

He goes on to delineate two different transcendental arguments to be considered as candidates for a deduction of desire. First, he suggests that

We might argue, for example, that the attempt to know can be subsumed under the more general category of “human activity.” Next, we might try to establish that all such human activities are goal-oriented and then that the notion of goal is incoherent without presupposing some sort of desire on the part of the acting subject…The attempt to know is possible only for a being which can desire to know (Neuhouser 249).

Neuhouser rejects this mode of argumentation as unfounded in the text, though he considers it a “not implausible” solution to the problem of desire. On both Neuhouser’s reading and the one I will offer below, this argument does not present itself as a possible solution and perhaps even contradicts what Hegel does say, so it will not be considered here.
The second option that Neuhouser considers—and eventually accepts—is to investigate whether desire is a necessary condition of self-consciousness. Here we are to begin from the presupposition of abstract self-consciousness (again, because the entire *Phenomenology* need not be considered for this internal transition).

Now we ask, however, about the conditions which make possible such a configuration of self-consciousness, and we are shown that such a self-consciousness must also be characterized by desire, for without the structure of desire, consciousness could never have the experience of the other which is a necessary condition for forming a concept of itself (Neuhouser 251).

This differs from the first transcendental strategy because it works with a presupposition having to do merely with self-consciousness rather than with thinking beings as such. The question is not whether we could have even embarked upon the journey of the *Phenomenology* at all without presupposing desire implicitly, but simply whether we can make sense of the appearance of self-consciousness without it. This second option has the clear strength over the first that it needs to presuppose less. It seems much more prudent to simply presuppose self-consciousness than to try to read desire into the entire *Phenomenology* so far, and take it, roughly as Kojève does, as an unavoidable postulate; this second version seems to require less in order to reach the same conclusion. It is also, in a way, consistent with the conclusion I will make below that desire is so closely linked to self-consciousness that the latter cannot be presupposed without the former.

Neuhouser proceeds to explain that the contradiction of the moment of self-consciousness (between its identity and its non-identity, or between itself and the living world) is one that must be discovered by self-consciousness, and that self-consciousness cannot make this discovery if it does not first have the faculty of desire, for

If viewed outside the context of how self-consciousness comes to find this out about itself, there is nothing which one could adduce to argue against this conception of the self. Furthermore, since there is, strictly speaking, nothing “false” about it, it is difficult to see how a contradiction could arise within this mode of self-consciousness which would stimulate another dialectical development of self-consciousness’ view of itself. It is only “we” who, having worked through the movement of consciousness, can be shown that this view is inadequate (Neuhouser 250).
Under this interpretation, the ability of self-consciousness to differentiate itself from the living outside world is dependent upon its capacity to desire. The contradiction of self-consciousness is one that emerges only after it has interacted with a world that does not accommodate its desires. According to this view, there is not even an *implicit* contradiction in self-consciousness before this point, but only one which is to arise out of an experience of self-consciousness of which the reader has been foretold. Furthermore, desire is what leads self-consciousness to act in the world, allowing it to establish its self-identity against the outside world:

It is only when I carry out the same procedure on an experimental level—when I try to make the animal really “for me” by attempting to consume it—that I first encounter the otherness of the animal. It is from its threatening snarl, its attempts to flee—its resistance in general—that I learn that it is something other than myself (Neuhouser 250).

Self-consciousness cannot form without otherness, but it cannot recognize otherness until it asks something of the world, that is, until it desires and acts according to that desire. It must have desire before it can interact with the world in such a way that its own separate identity becomes apparent to it, and thus before it can truly be said to have become self-consciousness. Self-consciousness presupposes desire, Neuhouser explains, because otherwise “…consciousness could never have the experience of the other which is a necessary condition for forming a concept of itself” (Neuhouser 251). He then concludes:

By showing desire to be a necessary condition of self-consciousness, we have in a quite strong sense “deduced” desire. There is nothing arbitrary about its introduction into the dialectic; it is, rather, implicitly presupposed by all that precedes it (Neuhouser 251).

The thrust of this argument is that, because we begin from the assumption that the entire dialectic up to and including the emergence of self-consciousness is necessary, if desire can be shown to be a necessary condition of self-consciousness, it can be said to be necessary to the dialectic as well.

This line of reasoning, however, works only so long as the necessity of desire is not among the presuppositions of which we are assuming the necessity to begin with—and,
therefore, only so long as self-consciousness is \textit{not} a necessary condition of desire. If it turns out, not only that desire is a necessary condition of self-consciousness, but that self-consciousness is also a necessary condition of desire, then the assumption of self-consciousness begs the question here. For, in this case, when we assume the necessity of the emergence of self-consciousness and therefore the necessity of all its preconditions, and then “deduce” desire as one of these, we will effectively be restating one of our assumptions. That is, the deduction will have \textit{assumed} the necessity of desire from the start, rendering it just as problematic as the forward-moving deduction that Neuhouser first attempts. Even if its conclusion turns out to be the right one, it will simply be too trivial to be considered a meaningful deduction of desire.

I will now try to show that Neuhouser’s transcendental deduction falls into precisely this difficulty. As the problem ultimately stems from a misreading of desire, I will first offer an explanation and critique of Neuhouser’s reading. I will then give an alternative one, followed by a sketch of a plan for a forward-moving deduction that seems more promising.

Neuhouser is not entirely clear as to how intimate the connection between desire and self-consciousness is. In one passage he writes that life “…is what intervenes between the stance of merely abstract self-consciousness and self-consciousness as desire” (Neuhouser 246), and shortly thereafter he makes the following point: “Desire appears, then, at that point of the dialectic where the falseness of self-consciousness consists in the fact that it sees its opposition to life without recognizing its essential connection to it” (Neuhouser 247-8). These statements could be read as implying a distance of some sort between a basic form of self-consciousness (as it is immediately constituted in the transition from Understanding) and desiring self-consciousness. In this case, Neuhouser would theoretically allow for a stage of self-
consciousness which has not yet begun to desire, by distinguishing an “abstract” self-consciousness from a desiring one. However, he also asserts that

The relationship is not a simple linear progression in which [naïve self-consciousness] somehow leads to life which in turn becomes desire. Rather, self-consciousness and life are two distinct phenomena which appear on the scene simultaneously, with desire being the moment that mediates between them. The justification for the introduction of desire can therefore not be that it somehow develops out of life, as our strategy of looking for rigor within a forward movement of the dialectic would imply (Neuhouser 248).

This formulation is quite explicit that self-consciousness, life, and desire appear all at once, and on this account, self-consciousness never appears without desire. But it is unclear why a strategy based upon forward movement necessitates the interpretation, which Neuhouser rightly rejects, of life, desire, and self-consciousness as separate and serial. The possibility that the elements of this triad could be deduced all at once by moving forward from what directly precedes them—rather than trying to deduce them from one another, which, as Neuhouser recognizes, is bound to fail—is not dealt with.¹ Considering the above passage, it is also unclear why Neuhouser even attempts the forward-moving deduction to begin with, since he appears to recognize here that, without a linear progression to work with, it cannot be done. For a deduction of desire from self-consciousness to have any hope of proving the phenomenological necessity of desire, there would have to be some substantial movement between desire and self-consciousness; such a deduction presupposes that the connection between desire and self-consciousness is not simply an equivalence, which holds at a single moment and therefore has nothing to do with dialectical necessity, but rather that these are two are ultimately distinct moments. Neuhouser thus appears to be espousing two opposed interpretations of desire and self-consciousness at different points in his essay: the supposition of separation in the dialectical process, which his initial attempt at a forward-moving deduction of desire from self-consciousness presupposes, contradicts his explicit interpretation in the passage above of desire and self-consciousness as inextricably

¹ I argue for this excluded possibility below.
linked. It is this confusion as to the relationship between desire and self-consciousness, rather than some insusceptibility of desire to deduction by forward movement, that dooms his attempt at a forward-moving deduction. Although he seems at one point to recognize the problematic reading of desire underlying his attempt at a forward deduction, he goes on simply to abandon the entire method of forward deduction without recognizing that a backward one could be susceptible to the same problem. Even backward deduction, as I have already shown, simply begs the question when applied to moments between which there is no movement.

Neuhouser’s deduction, however, might still be plausible if it could be shown that there is some kind of dialectical distance between self-consciousness and desire. In this case we might argue on Neuhouser’s behalf that, while he perhaps has no need to abandon forward movement, his transcendental account nevertheless suffices as a deduction. However, the opposite interpretation—that which has desire as essentially equivalent to self-consciousness—arises far more naturally from the text. There is little evidence to suggest that desire and self-consciousness are distinct in any substantive way, or that we should postulate some sort of distance between them. Instead, they are presented as two descriptions of the very same moment of consciousness, connected by analytical or definitional rather than dialectical necessity. Hegel does not use the language of conditionality with regard to the relationship between desire and self-consciousness; he does not say that one depends upon the other for its appearance, but he does repeatedly say that desire is equivalent to self-consciousness. How he arrives at this conclusion merits attention.

Hegel writes, in reference to the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness, that “…now there has arisen what did not emerge in these previous relationships, viz. a certainty which is identical with its truth; for the certainty is to itself its own object, and consciousness is to itself the truth” (Hegel §166). Self-consciousness is characterized by the equivalence of the
certainty and the truth of consciousness, or the coincidence of certainty and truth in a single entity: consciousness itself. The truth of consciousness has, up until this point, rested in objects exterior to consciousness. Consciousness is both self-certain and the truth of itself, not only for the phenomenological observer, but for consciousness; “…being-in-itself and being-for-an-other are one and the same” (Hegel §166). The ‘I’ is the relation of the in-itself and the for-itself of consciousness; it is consciousness’ recognition of itself and thus its existence for itself.

Consciousness says ‘I’ only when it has first taken the form of self-consciousness: “Opposed to an other, the ‘I’ is its own self, and at the same time it overarches this other which, for the ‘I’, is equally only the ‘I’ itself” (Hegel §166).

But the objects of the “outside” world, with the supersession of Understanding, have also changed their character, and this change has had an effect on consciousness. These objects have not only lost the “simple self-subsistent existence” that they previously had, but consciousness’ realization of this loss has brought it back to itself, and “…in point of fact self-consciousness is the reflection out of the being of the world of sense and perception, and is essentially the return from otherness” (Hegel §167). That is, self-consciousness is consciousness which looks outward from itself at itself in otherness, but recognizes that self as its own self. It might be described as the ability to think itself in the same manner in which it thinks other objects, and thus the ability to differentiate itself from among such objects and at least the capacity to think what it does as distinct from what they do. It still observes objects of the “outside world” as unities governed by laws in accordance with the preserved moments of Perception and Understanding, but now takes them only as appearances.

Here Hegel introduces desire, as the character of the relation between self-consciousness and its objects which arises out of the need of self-consciousness to establish its essential unity:
This antithesis of its appearance and its truth has, however, for its essence only the truth, viz. the unity of self-consciousness with itself; this unity must become essential to self-consciousness, i.e. self-consciousness is Desire in general (Hegel §167).

Self-consciousness is conscious of two sorts of objects, those of sense-certainty and its own self, but it is conscious of the latter only in opposition to the former, and thus the identity of itself with itself is thrown into question; its objects are both part of it and independent of it, which is a contradiction. The movement of self-consciousness, Hegel tells us, is to be the process whereby “…the identity of itself with itself becomes explicit for it” (Hegel §167). The antithesis of “its appearance and its truth” is the antithesis of self-consciousness and the living world (only now recognized as living), and as an antithesis it must be overcome. It must reconcile its identity with the world with its identity as separate from that world, that is, its non-identity with the world.

Thus what Hegel calls the “…unity of itself in its otherness” (Hegel §177) could also be thought, with Beiser, as “the identity of identity and non-identity” (Beiser 183).

The difference between implicit and explicit self-identity is the difference between the initially unsatisfied self-consciousness and the satisfied one that is eventually to emerge through the process of mutual recognition and ultimately the independence of the bondsman. Here we are concerned only with self-consciousness in its implicit stage, however, as this is the earliest stage which manifests desire:

To the extent, then, that consciousness is independent, so too is its object, but only implicitly. Self-consciousness which is simply for itself and directly characterizes its object as a negative element, or is primarily desire, will therefore, on the contrary, learn through experience that the object is independent (Hegel §168).

Hegel here indicates that self-consciousness has desire even in its most implicit and abstract form. Desire is a characteristic of self-consciousness before it is explicitly aware from experience.

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2 Here I follow Pippin, who writes that “…when he [Hegel] says that self-consciousness ‘is only in being recognized,’ he means a self-consciousness that is ‘in and for itself,’ or a finally realized, completed, or reassured self-consciousness. Again, ‘self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness’” (Pippin 69).
that its objects are independent. From the very moment consciousness becomes self-conscious, even as it is just beginning its quest to overcome its independent object, it is “primarily desire.”

Because of this independence of the object from self-consciousness, self-consciousness posits this object as life, something which contains its own principle of action rather than being a mere adjunct of consciousness. This has the effect that

…self-consciousness is thus certain of itself only by superseding this other that presents itself to self-consciousness as an independent life; self-consciousness is Desire. Certain of the nothingness of this other, it explicitly affirms that this nothingness is for it the truth of the other; it destroys the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a true certainty, a certainty which has become explicit for self-consciousness itself in an objective manner (Hegel §174).

Hegel reiterates that self-consciousness is equivalent to desire. The two are strongly linked because abstract self-consciousness is by nature the antithesis of itself and the living object, an antithesis which must be overcome just as every other that has occurred so far in the Phenomenology. Self-consciousness is this antithesis before it realizes that it is; it therefore also desires before this realization, for desire is merely the need to overcome this antithesis.

This last point, that the need to overcome this antithesis is desire, is essential, because desire is therefore part and parcel of self-consciousness itself. Hegel is not characterizing desire here as either a new “faculty” of self-consciousness or as a phenomenological precondition thereof. Rather, desire is the name given to the necessity of superseding the antithesis of this particular moment in the development of consciousness, an antithesis which is itself the definition of self-consciousness. To return to a passage cited above, “…this unity must become essential to self-consciousness, i.e. self-consciousness is Desire in general” (Hegel §167). Desire is merely the expression of the need to overcome the antithesis of self-consciousness and its immediate living objects. Self-consciousness by no means chooses what it shall desire; rather, its desire is the necessity of overcoming its inherent contradiction. Desire is this necessity manifest through the actions of self-consciousness, and these actions are determined entirely by this
necessity. The degree of free agency implied by the idea that self-consciousness has been brought to a point where it is suddenly capable of directing itself according to desires is entirely insupportable at this stage of consciousness, and the text of “Self-Consciousness” gives us no reason to think that this is Hegel’s argument. Self-consciousness may not realize that it has desire before it has become acquainted with the living world, but this does not mean that \textit{that which self-consciousness will realize is its desire} is not present within itself from the point of its emergence. The necessity of overcoming the present moment’s antithesis is as strong (or Hegel means it to be) in this case as it is for every preceding moment, for this preserves the strong necessity of the dialectic itself; we only now call this necessity desire because it is only now recognized as a need. This is not to say that self-consciousness is explicitly aware of its antithesis, that it knows that through desire-directed actions it shall overcome something within itself that is contradictory. Self-consciousness only feels a blind need to do certain things, but \textit{what} it feels this need to do is determined by what only we recognize as its contradiction; we can easily say that self-consciousness has desire without saying that self-consciousness knows why it has it. Indeed, we cannot attribute such thorough self-knowledge to self-consciousness since this implies a level of free agency in self-consciousness that Hegel has not demonstrated, some criterion other than the one with which self-consciousness is supposed to be working. None of the movements of the \textit{Phenomenology} can be said to be made “intentionally” by consciousness. Such intentional dialectical progression is doubly insupportable because, first, the degree of free agency it implies is not justified, and second, it waters down what is supposed to be the very strong necessity of the dialectic by making it contingent on what consciousness “wants.” We can only conclude that the opposite is true: what consciousness wants is necessitated by its constitution, not by something that it learns once it has already become self-consciousness. Self-
consciousness does not phenomenologically condition desire; rather, they are two interchangeable descriptions of the same moment. Desire is the name given to the need of self-consciousness to overcome the untenable antithesis of self and outer living world, the antithesis which simply is the definition of self-consciousness. Thus we should not ask why self-consciousness desires to supersede its objects, for the need to supersede these objects, the mere fact of being self-conscious, is itself desire.

We can easily adduce good reasons why this need to overcome an antithesis is only now called desire. Only now is this need of consciousness—the necessity of overcoming antithesis, the same necessity which has been in force all along in the Phenomenology so far—something of which consciousness is aware; the need to supersede the antithesis is now a need not merely “in itself” but a need for self-consciousness. Desire is thus a dialectical necessity like any other except that it is for self-consciousness, which is the same as to say that self-consciousness is for self-consciousness. Action arises with desire, for, as Beiser writes, “The ego now has to begin acting since action is the decisive test for its thesis” (Beiser 180) that it is all reality. Indeed, “action” in the strict sense is impossible before the emergence of self-consciousness because in this moment consciousness first realizes that it is an entity distinct from the world in which it operates, and that a certain mediation is necessary between what is willed and what is actual; self-consciousness just is the conceptual separation of willing and actuality in which context alone the idea of action makes any sense.

We can conclude overall that Hegel’s repeated statements to the effect of “self-consciousness is Desire” must be taken literally to mean that desire and self-consciousness are inseparable, two aspects of one and the same moment of the dialectic. To call a thing desiring is to call it self-conscious and vice versa. As I have shown, even in its basic, abstract and
unsatisfied phase self-consciousness is characterized by the antithesis of itself and its immediate
object (life), because this antithesis is the definition of self-consciousness. Precisely the need to
overcome this antithesis, I have argued, Hegel calls desire. It is not that self-consciousness is
aware of the antithesis as such and desires to overcome it; rather, the desire of self-consciousness
is simply the expression of this necessity, which abstract self-consciousness does not explicitly
comprehend. Self-consciousness in general thus immediately implies desire. However, because
desire is differentiated from the need to overcome any previous antithesis by the very fact that it
is a need which is only now for consciousness—which is recognized as a need—desire cannot
occur outside of the self-consciousness which experiences it as its desire; desire also
immediately implies self-consciousness. Self-consciousness and desire can thus be considered to
mutually condition one another; as Kojève writes, “…the self-conscious being, therefore, implies
and presupposes Desire” (Kojève 4, emphasis mine).

This reading, if correct, rules out the first interpretation of desire that appears in
Neuhouser’s essay (as distinct from self-consciousness) in favor of the second (as an equivalent
formulation of self-consciousness). To be sure, the biconditionality of desire and self-
consciousness for which I have argued here is in accord with Neuhouser’s claim that we cannot
try to deduce the necessity of desire in a simple forward progression beginning from self-
consciousness; on both his account and mine self-consciousness implies desire. But if my
account is accurate, we also cannot deduce desire by a backward-looking movement from self-
consciousness, for on my account self-consciousness also presupposes desire. That is, I have
aimed to refute the assumption underlying Neuhouser’s attempts to move between self-
consciousness and desire—whether by forward- or backward-looking analyses—that these two
elements are somehow distinct in the dialectical process. A deduction of desire from self-
consciousness would require that the former be a dialectical consequence of the latter rather than
the analytical equivalence that (I have argued) Hegel’s text gives us. In other words, the text
makes a tautology of Neuhouser’s deduction. His early attempt at a forward-moving deduction
naturally does not prove the necessity of the appearance of desire in the Phenomenology, for his
initial assumption of self-consciousness, because of its analytical reducibility to desire, is also
merely an assumption of desire. However, if I have been correct here, a similar problem belies
his transcendental account as well.

But the question now becomes: how do we deduce desire, given that it both conditions
and is conditioned by self-consciousness even in that moment’s most basic and “abstract” form?
The clearest solution is that, rather than assume the transition from Understanding to self-
consciousness as given and trying to deduce desire from self-consciousness, which will give us
only a trivial result, we should look at the transition from Understanding to examine its
necessity. If, as I have argued, self-consciousness immediately implies desire without further
dialectical movement, then we will be unable to accomplish any deduction of desire’s necessity
by assuming self-consciousness as given. In order to make a meaningful and philosophically
interesting deduction we must rather demonstrate the necessity of the entire movement from
Understanding to the moment of self-consciousness and desire. Although such a deduction is a
separate issue from what I have undertaken here, it is not difficult to delineate how it could
proceed. The necessity of the movement from Sense-certainty through Perception to
Understanding could be assumed. This is, of course, only a general guideline, and as I hope the
present discussion has made clear, great care would need to be taken as to where precisely the
assumption of necessity should stop and the deduction should begin. Certainly it would begin no
later than the very first appearance of the form of Understanding, or perhaps even the movement
of Perception which segues into this appearance, so as to avoid the risk of inadvertently taking as
given any development that needs to be proven. From this point, one would need to demonstrate
that the movement from Understanding necessarily results in the form of consciousness that
Hegel describes in the closing paragraphs of the section on Understanding and in the subsequent
discussion of self-consciousness. Such an investigation would thus be focused primarily on the
text of “Force and the Understanding” and perhaps the close of “Perception” and the opening of
“Self-consciousness.” If the conclusions of this discussion have been correct, such an
investigation would have no need for recourse to Neuhouser’s transcendental method (though it
may be valid). One would also need to be careful, as with any deduction of necessity in the
Phenomenology, not to take anything as a “given.”

This includes refraining from attributing motives or faculties to consciousness for which Hegel has not provided clear justification.
Though it is difficult to talk about the machinations of consciousness without resorting to the
language of independent agency, it would need to be kept in mind that words like “tries,”
“struggles,” and (this especially in the case of a deduction of desire) “wants” are only imperfect
terms that reflect our inability to escape the point of view of the phenomenological observer;
their usual implication of the kind of agency we like to attribute to ourselves should by no means
be taken up along with them. Finally (and again if I have been right to argue this), a deduction of
self-consciousness from a framework such as this one itself constitutes a phenomenological
deduction of desire. Once the moment of self-consciousness has been deduced, no further
dialectical movement is necessary in order to reach desire.

I have not myself attempted to deduce desire or anything else in this discussion. I do
hope, however, to have clarified how such a deduction would have to be accomplished, by

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3 Neuhouser rightly finds Kojève’s characterization of Desire (as an “undeducible” but necessary element of
the Phenomenology) to be far from Hegel’s intention and thus unacceptable for the purposes of the deduction he
undertakes (Neuhouser 245).
referring to certain problematic elements of Neuhouser’s own. I have argued that Neuhouser’s reading of desire fails to properly recognize the strength of the relation between self-consciousness and desire. I have proposed a reading of Hegel that has desire as an integral part of self-consciousness, one which outwardly manifests the inner contradiction in self-consciousness even from its initial emergence. Desire and self-consciousness are thus not separated by any dialectical development but are two aspects or formulations of a single moment. Under this reading of Hegel, Neuhouser’s original attempt at a forward deduction and the transcendental or backward-looking deduction he eventually rests upon fail for the same reason: the equivalence of self-consciousness and desire makes a tautology of any deduction of desire that takes self-consciousness as its starting-point, whether it proceeds forward or backward. Finally, and in light of these conclusions, I have offered a basic overview of how a deduction of desire is to be successfully carried out. Rather than deducing, or even beginning to deduce, the necessity of desire in the Phenomenology, I hope this essay succeeds at providing something like a propaedeutic to a deduction of desire. Such a deduction is of particular importance to a good understanding of Hegel’s work, but it begins where this discussion leaves off.
Works Cited


