

Le démon de midi, an illustration of a new dialectic of Ethics

Introduction

Le Démon de midi is a novel by the French writer Paul Bourget (1852 † 1935) published in 1914 by Plon-Nourrit Editions, Paris. This novel offers a strong ideological content, such as in *L'Étape* (1902) or *Un divorce* (1904), and enables the academician to develop social, political and religious themes he discovered by reading Lamennais, De Maistre and De Bonald. In describing the evolution of his main character, Louis Savignan, Paul Bourget affirms the necessity of a discipline of mind and morals. By doing so, he belongs to a wider literary movement, the « traditionalist » movement, which gathered authors such as « Barrès, Bourget, Brunetiere, Bazin, Bordeaux, Lasserre et Maurras. »¹ Thus, his book has been released during the crisis of modernism, which, between 1900 and 1930, challenged the traditional values in France. This traditionalism, expressed again by Bourget in a letter on November 25th, 1903² made him eager to fight the « progressifs » in politics and the Naturalism in literature to offer a psychology-oriented novel, a clinical analysis of an individual's mind :

« Les peintres des passions, comme le sont par métier les romanciers, éprouvent toujours, en se relisant, un scrupule sur leur influence même quand ils se sont efforcés - c'est du moins la justice que je peux me rendre - de dégager, à travers les maladies morales qu'ils étudiaient, les grandes lois de la santé »³

His literary enterprise is to show, through a complete study of Savignan's consciousness, how important is the loyalty of an individual to its moral principals. Therefore, we chose to pick this novel as a support, a ground for our interpretation of Hegel's dialectic since Bourget is one of the

¹ Roche, Alphonse V. "Le Mot 'Traditionalisme.'" *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 52, no. 3, 1937, pp. 167–171

² *Revue des Revues*, 1904, p. 21

³ Mathias, Yehoshua. "Paul Bourget, Écrivain Engagé." *Vingtième Siècle. Revue D'histoire*, no. 45, 1995, pp. 14–29

most prominent french author when it comes to describe the violent dialectic which oppose *Le Démon de midi* and Ethics in individual'consciousness.

Bourget describes the behaviors, thoughts and actions of a group of catholic characters at the beginning of the XXth century. Understanding the implications of the novel's title is important to understand the framework of the story. The *Démon de midi* or the *noonday devil* refers to a specific moment in the day of Catholic monks when, around noon, they experience a drop in their moral strength: a torpor which is synonym with a loss in the faith they have in God. This momentary loss is due to their state of utter physical exhaustion and is called *acedia*. What Bourget offers in his novel is a translation of this specific phenomenon into the life of a Catholic called Savignan. This story is also a realistic account of the troubles, woes, and misfortunes experienced by the principal characters in mid-life: Fauchon, Thérèse et Dominique Andrault, Savignan and his son Jacques, Mr. and Ms. Calvières, and Dom Bayle whose the last words at the end of the book give a conclusion to Bourget's thoughts on this specific problem human beings encounter when it comes to living the way they think. Dom Bayle says :

“Voilà pourquoi Savignan est puni par la *privation de la clarté* contre laquelle il a péché. Cette clarté lui reviendra peut-être. Sa douleur, ses remords, *son renoncement* à sa faute peuvent lui rendre la foi, et surtout l'intercession de son fils. *Mais il y faudra une lutte*. Voyez-vous, monsieur le vicaire, il y a un grand enseignement dans cette histoire. Comprenons-le bien. C'est la clef de tant d'énigmes, le mot de tant d'intelligences, de tant de destinées. Cet enseignement, c'est qu'il faut vivre comme on pense, sinon, tôt ou tard, on finit par penser comme on a vécu.”⁴

⁴ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.375

What is interesting in this passage is the following sentence: “Mais il faudra une lutte”. It recalls how much an individual has to fight, to struggle with his own sins to be able eventually to live according to what he thinks. This inward dialectic in the self-consciousness of an individual reflects what decisions we make when it comes to living according to our principles, to our values. Bourget’s story thus highlights a problem, an inward process already emphasized, explained by Hegel through the Master and Slave dialectic. Furthermore, Bourget, through the precise description of character’s features, offers a new understanding of Hegel’s dialectic.

We need here to pose our reinterpretation of Hegel’s Master-Slave dialectic. Through the XXth century till today, such a complex relationship has been understood as a struggle opposing two consciousnesses, two individuals, standing as *individual A* and *individual B* ; A and B are varied: it could be for instance respectfully a man and a woman as shown by Ogilvy ⁵, following up an interpretation initiated by Kojève ⁶ stressing the life-and-death struggle experienced by two distinct entities and which has influenced major thinkers such as Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* points out: “Most interpreters have seen Hegel as demonstrating that selfhood is a social fact. The child *develops a sense of self largely because others treat it as a self* – and the self will be socially constructed in different ways, depending on how it is treated. Selves are not born but made, in a dialectic process of interrelationships among selves. This ongoing process proceeds through “moments” that Hegel then identifies as stages on the way toward full self-consciousness.”⁷ Again here :

⁵ Ogilvy, James. “Mastery and Sexuality: Hegel's Dialectic in Sartre and Post-Freudian Psychology.” *Human Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1980, pp. 201–219.

⁶ Alexandre Kojève. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*. Cornell University Press. 1980

⁷ Vincent B. Leitch. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and criticism*, 2nd ed. Norton & Company. 2010. p.537

“This account [Hegel’s *Philosophy of spirit*] provides a memorable and persuasive model for understanding the *complex dynamics of intersubjective relationships*. Selfhood is a social product that individuals crave; *identity has to be constructed* through contentious interaction with and relation to others; this process makes us dependent on others, and thus inclined to resent and fear them.”⁸

In other words, Hegel’s dialectic is considered as a model, a way to build our own identity through the interactions we have with others, with another consciousness, another individual. However, an active and close reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* will show that the Lord-Bondsman dialectic is not about identity but about ethics.

Indeed, the major flaw in Kojève’s interpretation is the fact he missed a prominent step in Hegel’s demonstration: the split of the self-consciousness results in two consciousnesses that both belong to one individual’s self-consciousness: “However, if all men-or, more exactly, all beings in the process of becoming human beings-behaved in the same manner, the fight would necessarily end in the death of *one of the sexual adversaries* or of both.” On the contrary, Hegel stress:

“The *middle term is self-consciousness which splits into the extremes*; and each extreme is this exchanging of its own determinateness and an absolute transition into the opposite.” [...] We have now to see how the process of this pure Notion of recognition, *of the duplicating of self-consciousness in its oneness, appears to self-consciousness*. At first, it will exhibit the side of the inequality of the two, or the splitting up of the middle term

⁸ Vincent B. Leitch. p.538

into *the extremes* which, as extremes, are opposed to one another, one being only recognized, the other only recognizing”. ”⁹

Here again, it is important to see how the split in the self-consciousness gives birth to one recognized (negative one) and one recognizing (positive one): “ They are, *for each other, shapes of consciousness* which have not yet accomplished the movement of absolute abstraction, *of rooting-out all immediate being*”¹⁰. Hegel is dealing with Ethics here as he is explaining how the self-consciousness of an individual – where two consciousnesses stand, with one superior to the other – splits into two “*extremes*”, that we define as the *positive* and the *negative*, facing each other and struggling to dominate the other one. Self-consciousness is not facing another consciousness and is not trying to build its own identity, but is rather driven by two different poles whose balance, stability, is not achievable: the Master or *negative consciousness* commanding our bad behavior is predominant in our mind contaminated by *le démon de midi* ; therefore we cannot manifest an ethical behavior. The *positive consciousness*, the one commanding ethical behavior, and which recognized in a first time the negative one - the dominant one -, is working here in a religious field, to gain its independence and its being-for-self. Two separate individuals do not face each other but rather two consciousness in *one individual*: the negative consciousness, the dominant one, is responsible for bad, shoddy, faulty actions. On the other side, the second consciousness, the one who is dominated, is the positive one, the seat of positive actions, behaviors and thoughts.

We have now understood how the master and slave relationship work out and we need to figure out how Bourget’s novel echoes, highlights and extends our interpretation at a new level: *working* is not enough for the negative consciousness-slave to claim independence. Indeed, a

⁹ Vincent B. Leitch. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and criticism*, 2nd ed. Norton & Company. 2010. p.537

¹⁰ Vincent B. Leitch. pp 542-553

sacrifice is needed in the Being, in the real world to attain this status, to allow this positive consciousness to be fully autonomous, a true being-for-self. What needs to be sacrificed is a part of the Being, of the Nature, of the real world, and its death even turns out to be mandatory to gain freedom. The *démon de midi* is the literary expression of a reinterpreted dialectic. Bourget's story comes as a support, a ground we use to back our renewed dialectic, and shows how effective is our interpretation of Hegel's dialectic. Our analysis of Bourget's story thus aims to prove that the interpretation we have of this Master and Slave relationship is accurate: the main character, Savignan, is a relevant example of such inward struggle. Literature serves here as practical evidence of our comprehension of Hegel's dialectic.

To which extent does Paul Bourget's story serves our interpretation of Hegel's dialectic? Does Bourget only offer evidences for our interpretation? Does he also feed, in return, the Master-Slave dialectic, through the thematic of the sacrifice?

I. The struggle between two consciousnesses

a. The status of the two consciousness in Savignan's mind

According to Hegel, our self-consciousness is split into *two extremes*. As we have shown in our introduction, these extremes are not two separate individuals but rather two extremes contained in one individual's self-consciousness: the positive consciousness and the negative consciousness. In Savignan's mind, the struggle, the fight between the two consciousness starts early in the novel as both want to be the dominant one, the Master. His mind is shared in two parts that fight each other. By this way, Bourget is showing how a dialectic of ethics is happening in someone's mind, especially when values are at stake. Savignan says : "cette autre phrase, si terrible et qui allait si loin qu'il en demeura épouvanté, même dans son délire. « Est-ce que je crois

encore?»¹¹ The main character wonders if his faith is still strong enough as he is surprised by the violence of the fight between the two consciousness present in his mind : “il en demeura épouvanté.”¹² The fight that will end up with the victory of the *negative consciousness*, becoming thus the recognized one, is tough but is a necessary step in Hegel’s dialectic. The words « aiguë », « détesté », « user en lui », « effriter la *croyance* » acknowledge the violence of this first stage in the dialectic: « Jamais le père n'avait senti d'une manière plus *aiguë* la contradiction de son état moral et de son devoir envers son enfant, jamais non plus *détesté* davantage l'esprit d'hérésie. Détour étrange du coeur : sa passion était en train *d'user en lui, d'effriter* la croyance »¹³. Both consciousness are struggling to shape and dominate Savignan’s mind. Such a process is not easy, discreet, smooth: it is a violent process where Master and Slave fight each other.

b. The dominant and the dominated consciousness

We have just seen that, through this struggle, a natural tendency in the mind of an individual infected by the *démon de midi* is to embrace “passions” even though this is not done without experiencing hard times to move away from the positive consciousness, which seat of the ethics. In other words, the *negative consciousness* is eventually naturally resent inward when we experience *acedia* whereas the *positive consciousness* is supposed to be freed through work over the time – we develop this in our part II and III.

So far, it is the negative consciousness which dominates. We have now to find evidence of its victory in Bourget’s novel to understand how it manifests itself in Savignan’s mind. Again, passion and expressions of violence (« *un cœur déjà meurtri* ») are used : « Mais Fauchon ? Est-il

¹¹ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914 p.67

¹² Paul Bourget. p.67

¹³ Paul Bourget. p.73

possible qu'il ait abusé de la confiance de cet égaré pour se faire aimer de cette jeune fille? Et il a plus de quarante ans ! » « Et toi-même ? » répondait la voix intérieure. « *Moi? Quand je commençais d'aimer Geneviève, j'étais jeune et elle était jeune.* » Triste raisonnement encore! Savignan sentait, lui aussi, ce qu'avait senti son fils en lisant *Hakeldama*, quelle profondeur prend la *passion* tardive, celle qui *ravage un cœur déjà meurtri par la vie*, et il le sentait par sa propre expérience. »¹⁴ The passion should however not be confused with negative consciousness: passion is the cause of the struggle, but negative consciousness is the entity that takes the decision to embrace the passion. Savignan is indeed conscious of his passion but eventually decides to give in to the temptation through his negative consciousness. The passion is the noema (νόημα) of the negative consciousness. This one is now dominating and is not recognizing the *positive one*.

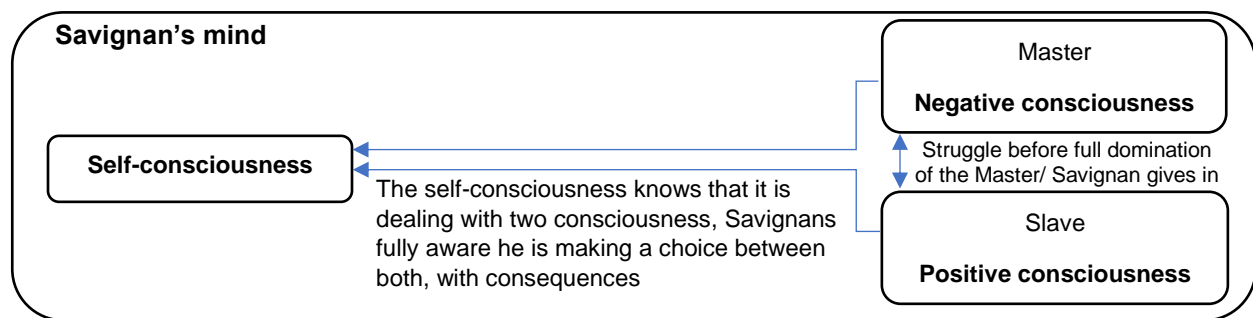
Bourget describes this Master-Slave or Negative/Positive consciousness dialectic: the violent process that was ongoing during the struggle is persisting even after the triumph of the Master: the relationship between the two consciousness is not peaceful, serene, calm, accepted yet. The positive consciousness is a nervous slave and not a quiet one: “Une comparaison s'instituait en lui, malgré lui, entre ce monde de l'idée, le seul où il eût vécu, depuis son désespoir de jeune homme, et le monde de *la passion* où la rencontre de Soléac l'avait *précipité* de nouveau. L'idée, c'est une image, une représentation abstraite. La passion, c'est du réel et qui *vous mord*, qui *vous brûle*. »¹⁵. Bourget is also using expressions underlining how violent is this negative consciousness when it comes to play its role as Master of his mind: « *précipité* », « *mord* », « *brûle* », « *Criminel* ». Penser qu'il sacrifiait à cette femme son salut éternel lui faisait davantage sentir, et avec un *criminel* délice, combien il l'aimait... »¹⁶. Then, the domination strengthens and a break, a

¹⁴ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.11

¹⁵ Paul Bourget. p.66

¹⁶ Paul Bourget. p.118

disruption in the relationship happens: Savignan's mind is fully embedded into a new realm, he chose to fully embrace his new self to fully, a self-consciousness dominated by the negative consciousness: "Cette discipline de sa sensibilité suivait Savignan, même dans cet abandon total à la *passion* qu'il subissait, qu'il consentait. Non seulement il *ne luttait plus*, mais il *voulait pleinement, résolument* ce qu'il était. »¹⁷. Again, passion is not Master: passion is an object (that belongs to the Being, to the world) the negative consciousness decides, voluntarily, to accept. Savignan, firmly and resolutely, makes the decision through his negative consciousness to persuade himself that he can behave the way he desires, not the way he used to think. At this point, we have to stress that Savignan is fully aware he is enduring the domination of the negative consciousness and that another consciousness, the positive one, is standing, as a slave : « Toi-même, avant-hier, tu soutenais à dom Bayle que l'on peut *penser d'une manière et agir d'une autre*. Tu disais : penser, remarque, et non pas sentir. On agit toujours comme on sent, d'après la qualité de son être intime. »¹⁸. We can draw a scheme to offer a view of Savignan's mind.



One of the consequences of this choice, of this negative consciousness, is the way he is perceived by the others when they learn about his affair with a married woman, about his vile behavior. What makes his dominant consciousness a negative one is not only the inherent and

¹⁷ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.89

¹⁸ Paul Bourget. p.57

reprehensible actions he pursues but also the way he is viewed by men or women who support ethics. In that respect, Mr. Calvières, betrayed by Ms. Calvières, claims that :

« Ça n'est pas vrai qu'il est un *Tartufe*, un *infâme Tartufe*? Hé bien, cette infamie, on la saura. On la saura. Et, cela, *l'hypocrisie, la tartuferie*, chez nous, en France, ça ne se pardonne pas. Je vous en réponds, moi, que son histoire fera du bruit. »¹⁹.

The word « hypocrisie » is determinant to understand the whole process at stake: a hypocrite is a man who knows what is a doing but still, is subordinated to his negative consciousness.

c. The tryptic in Savignan's mind

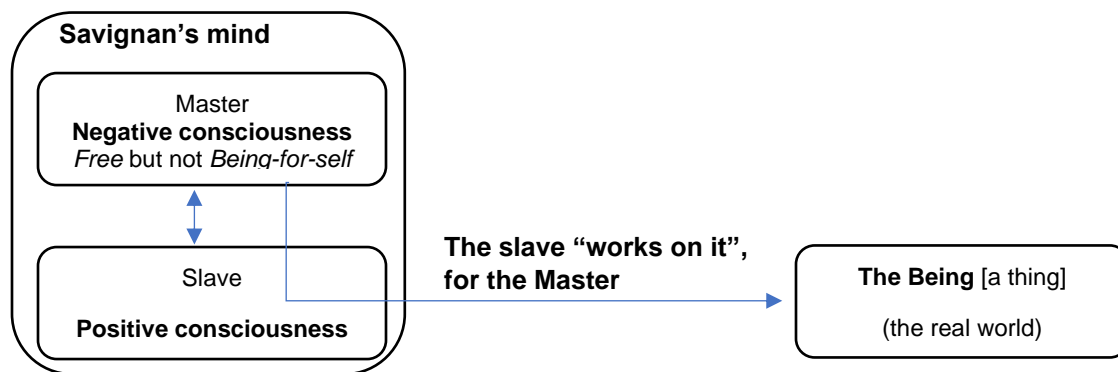
The tryptic in Savignan's mind is a prominent articulation since Bourget helps us to figure out, to understand what the Being could be in real life. Hegel wrote that:

“The lord relates himself mediately to the bondsman *through a being* [a thing] that is independent, for it is just this which holds the bondsman in bondage; it is his chain from which he could not break in the struggle, thus proving himself to be dependent, to possess his independence in thinghood. [...] Equally, the lord relates himself mediately to the thing through the bondsman; the *bondsman*, qua self-consciousness in general, also relates himself negatively to the thing, and takes away its independence; but at the same time the thing is independent *vis-à-vis* the bondsman, whose negating of it, therefore, cannot go to the length of being altogether done with it to the point of annihilation; in other words, he only *works on it*.”²⁰

¹⁹ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.259

²⁰ Vincent B. Leitch and al. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and criticism*, 2nd ed. Norton & Company. 2010. p.533

Thus, we understand that, in Hegel’s dialectic, the negative consciousness needs the Slave to relate to the Being and needs it to relate to the Slave who, himself, is bound to the Being and works on it. Therefore, commanding the slave allows the master to command the Being. In our model, we have the Being [a thing] which is the real world where comes from passion but also religion and moral principles. The Master commands the Slave through the Being, which, in return, feeds the Slave. Again, Hegel adds “Desire failed to do this [the sheer negation of the Being by the Lord] because of the thing’s independence ; but the lord, *who has interposed the bondsman between it and himself*, takes to himself only the dependent aspect of the thing and has the pure enjoyment of it. The aspect of its independence he leaves to the bondsman, who *works on it*.”²¹



To some extent, we can assimilate this dialectic to a biological relationship: the Master is the mind that orders his stomach to digest the Being. The Slave - as stomach - is working directly on the digestion, but is still commanded by the mind who cannot, in practice, work on the Being. The Master cannot actually survive without the action of the stomach - Slave. Without the Being, the two consciousness are useless because the Being is the material with which both are dealing : the Slave – positive consciousness deals directly with it, under the control of the Master.

²¹ Vincent B. Leitch. pp.544-545

As things are, we see that the Master-Slave dialectic needs a third entity to exist: the Being or the real world, as we see it in our exteriority; the Being is the source of the struggling – consciousness were fighting each other's to be served by it. Then the negative consciousness, through its victory, is able to be served by the positive consciousness. This service from the slave takes the form of a work in the real world. Being a master means eventually mastering the Being - the reality of the world - through the slave, as the CEO of coal company would do through his workers. It is the Being that feeds the negative consciousness.

Savignan is fully aware of this third entity in the *Play of Forces* and Bourget even gives an image of this external force, “la masse d'eau trop lourde, qui rompt la digue à la moindre fissure.”. To put it simply, any cracks in our positive consciousness, in our principles, will be leveraged by our negative consciousness to demolish our *positive wall* and let the passion infiltrate, take power, quickly, of our self-consciousness :

“Cette impression dominait tout, maintenant: la stupeur devant la foudroyante rapidité de cette *catastrophe morale*. De quoi lui avait servi son catholicisme? Il ne s'en rendait pas compte : son aventure s'expliquait bien simplement par l'antique adage, *Optimi pessiina corruptio*, soit que l'invisible *esprit du mal déploie plus de force* contre les plus belles âmes, aux *heures de trouble*, soit que *nos renoncements répétés* accumulent en nous des réserves de désirs. Ce serait alors la masse d'eau trop lourde, qui rompt la digue à la moindre fissure. »²² The positive consciousness, slave, is now commanded by its master and therefore is bound to Being, to the real world. In other words, positive consciousness works on it.

²² Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.121

II. Troubles in Savignan's mind

a. The negative consciousness-master objectifies the positive one..

The negative consciousness has taken more risks through the death-and-life struggle, has won the status of Master, then hold the Slave chained to the Being to its own benefit and is therefore objectifying the positive consciousness. The objectification of the Slave corresponds to the realm of the negative consciousness: “Ne sacrifiait-il pas Dieu, délibérément, à une créature? Ne se complaisait-il pas à cette immolation, plus criminelle peut-être que la révolte d'un Fauchon? Ne goûtait-il pas une espèce de *délice impie dans cette apostasie*, qu'il ne s'avouait pas? Il la vivait. Il ne se disait plus : « Est-ce que je crois encore? » Réellement, *il commençait à ne plus croire*.”²³. Savignan is moving away from his positive consciousness, a set of principles he had built over a long time, slowly, patiently.

By comparing God and Ms. Calvières through Savignan's voice Bourget emphasizes the power of the Master in Savignan's mind: the negative consciousness is so dominant that even the divine law has no effect upon him. Objectifying the positive consciousness means that the Master is using it to benefit from the real world. When Savignan is facing a tricky situation, when he has to decide whether or not he will see and have sex with Ms. Calvières, his positive consciousness tells him to follow his principles, his moral – in this case, his religion – and not to follow his passion. But when it comes to enforce his decision, his self-consciousness is subordinated to his negative consciousness, to the *démon de midi*. He is aware of this subordination but does not have the capacity to reverse it as his positive consciousness is dominated, slave. The negative consciousness *is even the self-consciousness* at this point since it gained full power and recognition from the

²³ Paul Bourget. p.128

positive consciousness; but is it a being-for-self though? Is this full recognition verified over the time? Does the struggle stop or continue?

b. ...but thus is not certain anymore to be a being for self..

Hegels writes that “In this recognition the unessential consciousness is for the lord *the object*, which constitutes the truth of his certainty of himself. But it is clear that this object does not correspond to its Notion, but rather that *the object* which the lord has achieved his lordship has in reality turned out to be something quite different from an independent consciousness. What now really confronts him is not an independent consciousness, but a *dependant one*. He is, therefore, *not certain of being-for-self as the truth of himself*. On the contrary, his truth is in the reality the unessential consciousness and its unessential action.”²⁴. We have seen that after the life-and-death struggle, the negative consciousness was dominant, recognized and had then objectified the slave, the positive consciousness. The Master is still commanding here, but does he have a full recognition over the time, is he sure of being-for-self?

The answer is no. The first clue given by Bourget is the fact that this shameful relationship between Savignan and Ms. Calvières cannot be open, visible, and should be kept secret. Thus, the negative consciousness, although dominant, is facing the reality of the Being, of the real world: ethics can be removed *ad infinitum*: “Elle répéta : « Le secret ! » avec un accent où frémissait toute son âme. « C'est si doux, le *secret*, le *mystère*, que personne ne sache, d'avoir dans son existence *un asile, un sanctuaire* où s'enfermer ! » ²⁵ . Here, we can assess that Ms. Calvières is, like Savignan, enjoying her life but has to keep it secret: because of the unrelenting gaze of civil society, she cannot fully enjoy what is unethical, even though she wants it. Bourget is accurately

²⁴ Vincent B. Leitch and al. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and criticism*, 2nd ed. Norton & Company. 2010. p.545

²⁵ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.84

using the vocabulary of retreat in order to show us the misery, the distress of Ms. Calvières: « un asile », « un sanctuaire ». Passion is actually a vehicle that leads individuals in kind of spiritual prison. Ms. Calvières' negative consciousness is responsible of her vile decisions and there is consequently no freedom in such life. Without respect of the rules and principles set by the positive consciousness she goes through a fake happiness and experiences "l'asile" - a mental asylum.

We have assessed yet that, according to Hegel, the Master needs the Slave in order to access Being, to access the reality of the world. It is because he commands a Slave that is working for him that he has no access. A slave is for instance working for the dominant consciousness as a coal-worker for his boss. The Master has no access to the real world, he is bound to the worker to *live*. However, in our interpretation of Hegel's dialectic, why the negative consciousness *has to use* the positive consciousness to access the world?

In Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel : Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* and most interpretations that deals with the building of our identity, the Master can use the Slave as he is recognized by it. Not using the slave would be synonym of a loss of recognition though. But, in our interpretation, does it still make sense for the negative consciousness *to use* the positive consciousness? What would be the interest for an individual to access the reality of the world through his positive consciousness since the dominant one, the commanding one, is still the negative consciousness and has no interest in letting the slave access the world? Why would the negative consciousness not remove the positive consciousness and decide to be the only one to make decisions that impact Being? Would it not be possible directly to access – and all the time - the real world without having to use the Slave?

The moral value we gave to both consciousness in our interpretation make the relationship between the *negative one* and the *positive one* more troubling. At first glance, it does not make

sense to use our positive consciousness to deal with the real world as our negative consciousness has control. Nevertheless, the need of the positive consciousness by the negative actually makes sense when we understand that, through this dialectic of ethics, the negative consciousness is not prevailing all the time. It would be indeed not accurate to state that an individual's mind is subordinated to a negative consciousness all the time. In the example of Savignan, although his negative consciousness caused an awful decision that moves him away from his faith, he is still a father who is making day-to-day relevant decisions in order to guarantee his living. Negative consciousness needs thus the positive consciousness – understood as a practical consciousness – to carry out basic actions.

Therefore, the positive consciousness is *engaged* with the Being and bound to the negative consciousness. Here starts the trouble. We come to assess that the negative consciousness is not certain of *being-for-self*, of being fully recognized as the master since it must use the positive consciousness. As things are, the Master still needs the Slave to perform its activities. Here, at this point, it can be felt that the negative consciousness is not anymore a sheer force totally dominating. Indeed, the negative consciousness cannot perform its domination over Savignan's mind without the contribution on a daily basis of wise decisions formulated by the positive consciousness. In other words, a *Play of forces* between both, a back and forth relationship, the dialectic, is still working. To put it simply, the positive consciousness provides a living for the negative consciousness. The latter is commanding but is totally bound to the positive one in order to survive.

c. whereas the positive consciousness-slave is fighting for being-for-self

The dominated consciousness is bound to the Master, but is still struggling to be independent and *being-for-self* in Savignan's mind. We have assessed the natural flaws highlighted by Bourget in the negative consciousness. His novel gives thus a new and better understanding of the abstruse role of the Being which is not fully defined in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The Being is a chain used by the Master to benefit from the work of the positive consciousness according to Hegel but Bourget reveals that the Being is also reflecting the consequences of the acts that stem from the Master's decisions. Savignan is a "Tartuffe" for Mr. Calvières. Moreover, Ms. Calvières has to hide her feelings to enjoy them, like a drug addict enjoying her dope in prison.

The slave is never dead in Hegel's dialectic, and what Bourget is also showing is that, even before *working on the Being*, the Slave is still fighting on an ongoing basis to gain its independence from the Master. Savignan is often shameful of the way he thinks. He does not decide to sever his relationship with Ms. Calvières so far but he often acknowledges that he is struggling with his own sins: « « Celui qui a regardé la femme d'autrui avec concupiscence a déjà commis l'adultère. » Mêler à une pareille complicité des paroles d'apologétique, défendre une religion de renoncement et d'ascétisme avec la même voix qui venait de murmurer des paroles d'amour, cette *profanation* lui répugnait. Il ne pouvait pas plus discuter avec Geneviève qu'écrire sur Hakeldama, sans tomber dans *cette honte de l'hypocrisie* dont il avait une *horreur grandissante*. »²⁶

An interesting clue that Bourget stresses is that Savignan's behavior is comparable to Tartuffe's, one of the most famous theatrical comedies (1664) by Molière. This comparison between Savignan and Molière's character shows that a self-consciousness dominated by a

²⁶ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.216

negative consciousness, i.e by a *noema* called passion, is actually an hysterical and hypocritical way of thinking. Bourget often use the expression « Tartuffe » to show how Savignan' self-consciousness is actually still struggling in this Master-Slave dialectic:

« Allait-il, lui aussi, après tant d'autres, *suppléer aux manquements* dans la vie intérieure, par des soulèvements dans la vie extérieure? Ainsi commencent les hypocrisies systématiques qu'avait flétries, la veille, le perspicace dom Bayle. Une fois de plus, l'amant de Geneviève se dit, avec toute l'énergie dont il était capable : « *Je ne serai pas un Tartuffe* ». Ces mots avaient deux traductions : » Je ne verrai plus Geneviève. " C'était l'une. L'autre était : « *Je n'écirai plus de pages religieuses...* ". »²⁷

These words from Savignan show that the Master-Slave relationship is not stable at all over the time. The *ethical problem* that happened with the *démon de midi* does not end up with the victory *ad vitam æternam* of the negative consciousness. It is rather a temporary triumph from the Master that is not fixed over the time. Doubts, interrogations in Savignan's mind reveal that the Slave works on his independence, against his Master, before even "working on the Being"²⁸: « La veille, on s'en souvient, quand il écoutait la messe, à Saint- Sulpice, gêné jusqu'à la honte par l'admiration et le respect de Dominique, il s'était dit : "Je ne serai pas un hypocrite. Je n'écirai plus de pages religieuses..." »²⁹ . It is important to note though that these reasonable thoughts are not followed by any effect, any wise decisions. The Slave is working hard to fight the Master but the negative consciousness is still controlling the self-consciousness. This work to attain his independence and being-for-self takes different forms with Savignan. His decency makes him shy when he faces

²⁷ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.42

²⁸ G. W. F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford University Press, 1977

²⁹ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.58

Genevieve Calvières: « *Une pudeur* pourtant se mêlait à son désir, qui lui défendait, par ce matin de fusion de leurs deux âmes, cette allusion à l'heure où il posséderait de nouveau Geneviève, — une *réserve* qui le faisait reculer, en ce moment, devant les caresses les *plus légères*. »³⁰

Bourget uses specific expressions to highlight the work of the Slave fighting the Master effectively - without success though as the decision to relinquish Ms. Calvières has still not been taken by Savignan. The words: « défendre », « réserve », « reculer », « pèlerinage » indicate that the Master is definitively not acknowledged as a *being-for-self* by the positive consciousness: “Le *désir d'un pèlerinage* aux demeures du *saint Cardinal* de Vapologia n'était pas nouveau chez Jacques. Mais qu'il l'eût énoncé à nouveau, juste à cette minute, avait accru chez Savignan l'impression que des forces mystérieuses agissaient autour de lui, et qu'il en était à un tournant décisif de sa destinée. »³¹

It is indeed through a pilgrimage that Savignan is willing to save his soul : in other words, to fight his sins, his Master, his negative consciousness, Savignan *forces back into himself*, he *withdraws into himself* and is looking to be freed. « C'est que l'honnête homme en lui continuait bien à se révolter contre une dualité qu'il qualifiait de duplicité. »³²

Hegel wrote: “But just as lordship shown that its essential nature is the reverse of what it wants to be, so too servitude in its consummation will really turn into the opposite of what it immediately is; as a *consciousness forced back into itself*, it will withdraw into itself and be transformed into a truly *independent consciousness*.”³³ However, we have just seen through our previous examples that it is not sufficient for Savignan to withdraw into himself to be transformed

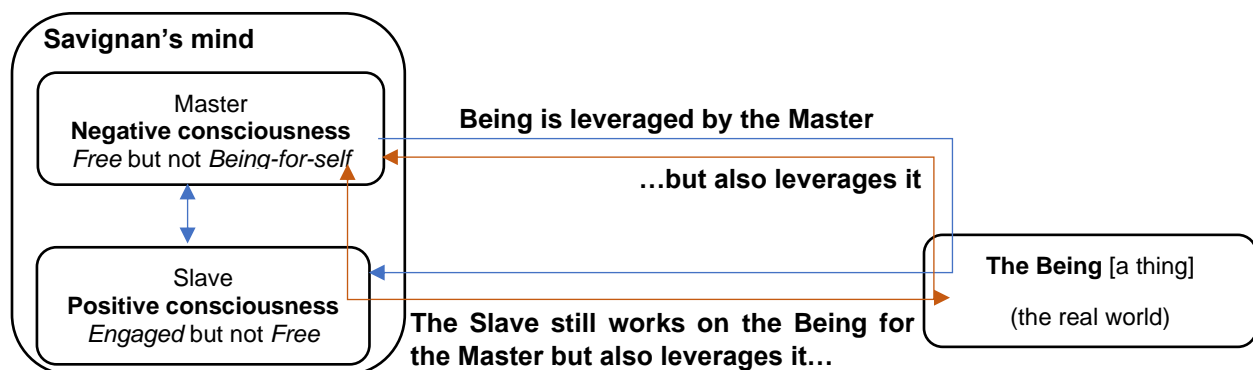
³⁰ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.89

³¹ Paul Bourget. p.207

³² Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.59

³³ Vincent B. Leitch and al. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and criticism*, 2nd ed. Norton & Company. 2010. p.545

“into a truly independent consciousness” as he has not taken the decision to break up with Ms. Calvières yet. Bourget’s character works hard to gain his independence but is not eventually able, through his positive consciousness, to reverse the hierarchy in the Master-Slave relationship and to achieve a true independence. The key solution to this dialectic should come from the Being that serves both consciousnesses. The Being strengthens the negative consciousnesses by offering a powerful object, the passion, that prevents Savignan’s positive consciousness effectively to make the decision to relinquish Ms Calvières. The Being also strengthens the positive consciousness though as the reality of the world is a mirror that fuels Savignan’s mind with the effects of negative consciousness’s decisions. When Savignan and Ms. Calvières act badly, the reality of the world offers to the positive consciousness an overview of the consequences - Ms. Calvières’ anger, her inability to have an open relationship – providing new incentives, strengths, to reverse the dialectic and be freed.



Although the Being is a powerful force, the Slave struggles with the Master in Savignan’s mind to gain independence.

Furthermore, Hegel writes that a “consciousness forced back into itself” gain independence but is not *being-for-self*: “the fear of the lord is indeed the beginning of wisdom, consciousness is not

therein aware that is being for self. Through work, however, the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is.”³⁴. For Hegel, it is by “fashioning the thing, [that] he [the Slave] becomes aware that being-for self belongs to *him*, that he himself exists essentially and actually in his own right.”³⁵ Thus, Hegel makes a distinction between independence and *being-for-self*. Independence should be attained when our “consciousness forced back into itself” and *being-for-self* (a superior level of ethics compared to independence) should be attained through work, the Slave realizing at this point that he is the sheer force and a *being-for-self*. Nonetheless, Bourget’s novel, through our previous examples, provides a new account of Hegel’s ethics as it suggests that the work of the Slave/Bondsman is not enough to gain *freedom* and *being for self*.

Even when Savignan is thinking about making a pilgrimage, to limit or stop his shameful relationship with Geneviève Calvières, he actually doesn’t take such a decision. When facing the *démon de midi* the power of his positive consciousness is limited - he only planned this vague religious trip. The simple objects – religious advices from the monk Dom Baye, pressure from his relatives – offered by the Being are not enough to let his positive consciousness become independent. Savignan needs a swift and tough action from the Being as simple pressures from the society, from the real world, have never been able significantly to strengthen his positive consciousness to reverse the dialectic.

³⁴ Vincent B. Leitch. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and criticism*, 2nd ed. Norton & Company. 2010. p.546

³⁵ Vincent B. Leitch. p.546

III. The switch between the two consciousnesses through the death

a. The death of Jacques, an evidence of the insufficiency of the work

As Savignan is reluctant to shatter the Master-Slave dialectic in favor of the Slave, the Being, as a force in itself will be the source of an new *ethical problem* that will adjust the dialectic and flip the hierarchy.

Fauchon, the priest, learnt about the Savignan/Calvières affair and decided to publish the letters the two lovers sent to each other. Savignan's son Jacques will die, killed by the priest as he tried to get back the letters – the proof of his father's misconduct. The consequences of Savignan's affair would have been terrible: a shameful reputation that would have killed his career and his life as a so-called devout catholic. Bourget even gave clues of such an end when he writes : « Il se mit à rechercher les chapitres du second livre des Rois où il est parlé de *l'adultère de David avec Bethsabée*. Il les lut avec une terreur grandissante jusqu'au verset final : " Et Nathan dit à David : *Jéhovah a pardonné ton péché*; tu ne mourras point. Mais parce que tu as fait, par cette action, mépriser Jéhovah par ses ennemis, *le fils qui t'est né mourra*. »³⁶ . In other words, if you do not behave according to what you trust (God in Savignan's case, but *Ethics* in general), if you live without any considerations for rules and guidelines, the reality of the world will, one day, operate forced changes in your self-consciousness, smash the *démon de midi* and change the hierarchy of the dialectic. If your inability to correct your own vile behavior persists over the time, the whole world will feed your positive consciousness suddenly to make you aware of the Ethical problem you are experiencing. What is interesting however with Bourget is that the State of the law is not

³⁶ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.230

invoked to regulate such behavior. Judges, justice, Police, are not called in the novel by Bourget. It is not by repression but rather by the ultimate sacrifice of Jacques life that they are all saved:

“Il murmura dans un *halètement* : — « Adieu, papa. . . *J'offre mon sacrifice . . . pour toi . . . pour ton âme . . . pour que tu te reprennes, pour que tu reviennes...* Je l'offre *pour elle*. . . " Ses yeux regardaient dans la direction de Thérèse. « *Pour qu'elle revienne..* Je l'offre pour vous, mon cher maître, *pour que vous reveniez*. " Il se tournait vers Fauchon : « *Pour vous tous*. " Et les ténèbres commençant de le gagner, il dit encore : — « Personne n'est coupable de ma mort... N'accusez personne. Et avec force : « Mais revenez, *revenez tous* ! »³⁷

Jacques gives us here an example of a sacrifice aimed at saving those whose positive consciousness was too weak to switch the Master with the Slave. In some ways, Jacques's sacrifice recalls what we know of Jesus-Christ who dies for the redemption of those who had also a weak positive consciousness. Savignan was relying on his book to escape the temptation, the passion: “Savignan, lui, ne voyait que le fait brutal : sa doctrine n'avait pas tenu contre sa tentation »³⁸; in contrast, « Jacques Savignan est mort en *offrant son sacrifice* pour ceux qu'il aimait. »³⁹ What Bourget is adding to Hegel 's dialectic is prominent: withdrawing into yourself and working on the Being, in the real world, will not allow you to be free, or *being-for-self*. The true salvation will come from the sacrifice of those individuals who care about others. In our dialectic of ethics, a weak positive consciousness is not able, by itself, to attain freedom and *being-for-self*. The positive consciousness actually needs what the Being is ready to offer: the service/sacrifice of another individual who cares about you. The death of Jacques means that your positive consciousness

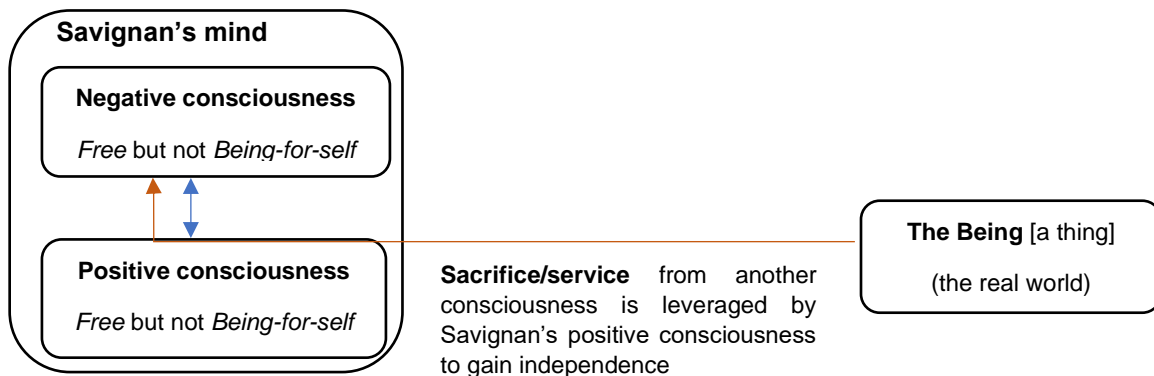
³⁷ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.353

³⁸ Paul Bourget. p.76

³⁹ Paul Bourget. p.371

needs the service of another consciousness who is already free and *being-for-self* to free in order to free your self-consciousness.

By contrast, Hegel thinks that the *desire* is not strong enough to flip the two consciousness and that *work* could produce the intended effect: free the positive consciousness and make it a *being-for-self*: “*Desire* has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object and thereby its unalloyed feeling of self. But that is the reason why this satisfaction is itself only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence. *Work*, on the other hand is *desire held in check*, fleetingness staved off; in other words, *work forms and shapes the thing*.”⁴⁰ (p546). As we have shown previously, this is not working as Savignan’s consciousness was not able to break free from its shackles.



⁴⁰ Vincent B. Leitch and al. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and criticism*, 2nd ed. Norton & Company. 2010

b. The positive consciousness becomes *being-for-self* through rehabilitation

In the aftermath of Jacques's death, the positive consciousness in Savignan's mind is reflecting upon his son's death: he stays alone in his home. He should be now ready to attain the status of *being-for-self*. Savignan's positive consciousness is indeed free but not *being-for-self* yet. In order to do so, he has to relinquish Ms. Calvières. By this way, he will make his positive consciousness a *being-for-self*. Following Jacques's funeral, Savignan says: « Je sens cela et je suis dans *la nuit*. Je ne comprends pas. Je ne sais pas. La foi complète me reviendra. Je le désire tant! *J'en suis sur*. »⁴¹ The main evidence of the successful change in the Master-Slave dialectic is the decision of Savignan to leave his beloved one *ad vitam aeternam*. He is willing to *live according to his principles*, instead of *thinking according to the way he lives*. He writes a letter to Ms. Calvières to make sure that she understands his decision: “Si je vous revoyais, il serait là. Il me regarderait, comme il m'a regardé, en offrant pour moi son *sacrifice*, pour mon âme, pour que je ne vous revisse plus. C'est cela qu'il a voulu dire. Il me le redirait, du fond de sa tombe, et vous me verriez *défaillir de douleur* devant vous, me haïr de tant vous aimer, vous en haïr vous-même. Ce serait *l'enfer ici-bas*. Ne m'y entraînez pas. Je vous répète que *je n'ai plus la force*. »⁴² (

We see that the pain caused by the death of his son has been the first step towards the independence of his positive mind. Furthermore, his definitive rupture with Ms. Calvières lays a foundation for his rehabilitation, his access to *being-for-self*: “J'en suis là. Je vous répète : Par pitié, ne m'écrivez pas. Ne me cherchez pas. Rentrez. Adieu, adieu, mon aimée! »⁴³. The official break with her is the peak of a long-term ethical process which started with doubts, a latent work and multiple

⁴¹ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.368

⁴² Paul Bourget. p.367

⁴³ Paul Bourget. p.368

interrogations by his positive consciousness. Although the negative consciousness is still free, it is not a Master anymore, is not able to block the decisions formulated by the positive consciousness, by the former slave. When Savignan says « je n'ai plus la force », he affirms that the negative consciousness, the former Master, is no longer dominating. The previous realm commanded by the Master no longer exist. There is no more Master, neither a negative master, nor a positive Master. The dialectic is not fixed anymore : « Il n'y a plus rien, rien, rien! Alors, il vaut mieux supprimer les événements, s'abriter dans la monotonie des anciennes habitudes, écarter ainsi la curiosité des indifférents. »⁴⁴ It is now for Savignan a new era. He will have to work for a long time to maintain this *being-for-self* as the monk Dom Bayle points out : « Sa douleur, ses remords, son renoncement à sa faute peuvent lui rendre la foi, et surtout l'intercession de son fils. Mais il y faudra une lutte. »⁴⁵

c. A dialectic of ethics that never ends

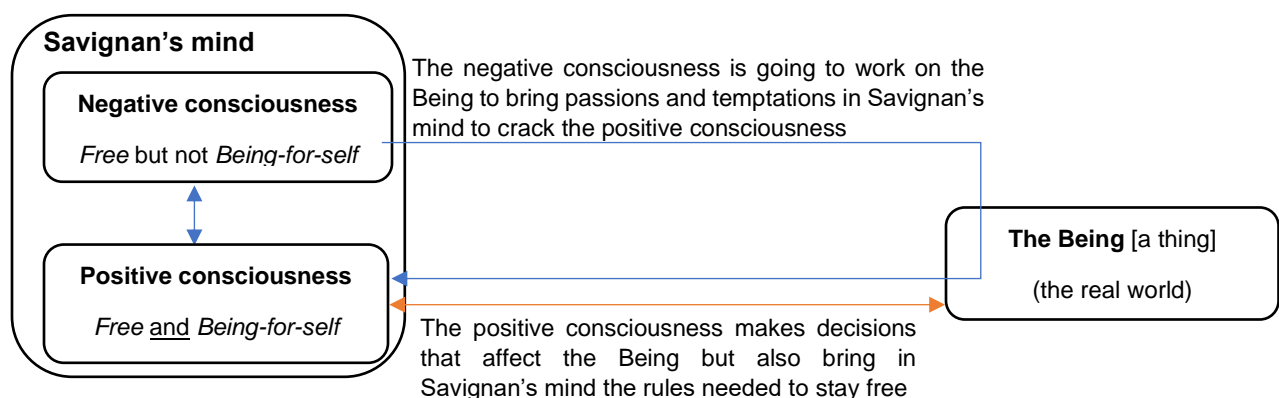
The monk Dom Bayle showed us more about Savignan and highlighted how much the main character is responsible for the long domination of his negative consciousness: « Au lieu que Savignan, lui, avait la lumière. Il l'a toujours eue. Il a failli en pleine conscience. Ces fautes-là sont les grandes fautes. »⁴⁶ Even though Savignan's mind enjoys now a sheer positive consciousness defined as a *being-for-self*, the monk recalls that Savignan knew what he was doing: passion does not blind us, passion is a *noema* submitted to our mind. It is up to us to decide whether or not we follow our principles, whether or not we give the necessary strength to our positive consciousness to fight the negative one, to fight the *démon de midi* which pops up in our mind in the middle of

⁴⁴ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.366

⁴⁵ Paul Bourget. p.375

⁴⁶ Paul Bourget. p.375

our life with Bourget. With Savignan, we found a common example of an individual who fails to follow Ethics, an individual whose positive consciousness was not strong enough to leverage the advice and societal pressures given the Being: “[Ils] étaient tentés, comme je vous le disais à Clermont, sans me savoir si bon prophète, par cet égarement du milieu de vie que j’appelle le *Démon de midi*. »⁴⁷ This dialectic never ends though as we have now a positive consciousness which is free and *being-for-self*, but for how long? A new « masse d'eau lourde » is going to face our mind soon. We have to make sure that our positive consciousness is, on an ongoing basis, strong enough to do not crack. There is no more Master in our dialectic of Ethics. This one is rather now an open circle, *fed* by the Being and *revolutionizing* around our self-consciousness. The key here is to understand the mechanisms of our new dialectic of Ethics to be able to regain our freedom and our *being-for-self* when we experience a new *démon de midi*, a new temptation. Contrary to Hegel, we pose that our consciousness can be too weak to gain freedom by itself, by its own work, and therefore it needs the help or assistance or sacrifice of an individual belonging to the real world, to the Being. By this way, the positive consciousness, reflecting/working on this help, will become a *being-for-self* and escape *acedia*.



⁴⁷ Paul Bourget. *Le démon de midi*. Plont-Nourrit. 1914. p.375

Obviously, the dialectic of Ethics we now offer, based on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Bourget's *Le démon de midi* can be applied in many fields beyond the religious one, for instance in businesses, administrations, sport leagues, etc. Indeed, the *Démon de midi* is in Bourget's the manifestation of a mid-life crisis but, in truth, the concept of *acedia* can be applied to any moment of our life when we feel that our principles can decline.

In the end Bourget's story not only illustrated our interpretation of Hegel's dialectic, but gave us the proof we needed to go further and built a new theory of the building of Ethics in individual's mind.

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