

INTRODUCTION TO THE READING OF HEGEL

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LECTURES ON THE

Phenomenology of Spirit

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he will no longer have a Slave; and the Slave will cease to be Slave, because he will no longer have a Master (although the Slave will not become Master in turn, since he will have no Slave).

Now, according to Hegel, it is in and by the wars of Napoleon, and, in particular, the Battle of Jena, that this completion of History is realized through the dialectical overcoming (*Aufheben*) of both the Master and the Slave. Consequently, the presence of the Battle of Jena in Hegel's consciousness is of capital importance. It is because Hegel hears the sounds of that battle that he can know that History is being completed or has been completed, that—consequently—his conception of the World is a *total* conception, that *his* knowledge is an *absolute* knowledge.

However, to *know* this, to know that he is the thinker who can realize the absolute Science, he must *know* that the Napoleonic Wars realize the dialectical synthesis of the Master and the Slave. And to know this, he must know: on the one hand, what the *essence* (*Wesen*) of the Master and the Slave is; and—on the other—how and why History, which began with the "first" Fight for prestige, ended in the wars of Napoleon.

The analysis of the essential character of the Master-Slave opposition—that is, of the motive principle of the historical process—is found in Chapter IV. And as for the analysis of the historical process itself, it is given in Chapter VI.

History, that universal human process that conditioned the coming of Hegel, of the thinker endowed with an *absolute* Knowledge, a process that that thinker must *understand* in and by a *Phenomenology* before he can realize this absolute Knowledge in the "System of Science"—universal history, therefore, is nothing but the history of the *dialectical*—i.e., *active*—relation between Mastery and Slavery. Hence, History will be completed at the moment when the synthesis of the Master and the Slave is realized, that synthesis that is the whole Man, the Citizen of the universal and homogeneous State created by Napoleon.

This conception, according to which History is a dialectic or an *interaction* of Mastery and Slavery, permits us to understand the *meaning* of the division of the historical process into three great periods (of very unequal lengths, incidentally). If History begins with the Fight after which a Master *dominates* a Slave, the first historical period must certainly be the one in which human exist-

ence is entirely determined by the existence of the *Master*. Throughout this period, then, it is *Mastery* that will reveal its essence by realizing its existential possibilities through Action. But if History is only a dialectic of Mastery *and* Slavery, this latter too must be entirely revealed by being completely realized through Action. Therefore, the first period must be completed by a second, in which human existence will be determined by *slavish* existence. Finally, if the end of History is the *synthesis* of Mastery and Slavery, and the *understanding* of that synthesis, these two periods must be followed by a third, during which human existence, in some sense neutralized, synthetic, reveals itself to itself by actively realizing its own *possibilities*. But this time, these possibilities also imply the possibility of understanding oneself fully and definitively—that is, perfectly.

But of course, in order to write Chapter VI, in order to understand what History is, it is not sufficient to know that History has three periods. One must also know what each of them is, one must understand the *why* and the *how* of each of them and of the transition from one to another. Now, to understand this, one must know what is the *Wesen*, the essential-reality, of Mastery and Slavery, what is the essence of the two principles which, in their interaction, are going to realize the process being studied. And this analysis of the Master as such and of the Slave as such is made in Section B of Chapter IV.

Let us begin with the Master.

The Master is the man who went all the way in a Fight for prestige, who risked his *life* in order to be *recognized* in his absolute superiority by *another* man. That is, to his *real*, natural biological life he preferred something *ideal*, spiritual, *nonbiological*: the fact of being *anerkannt*, of being *recognized* in and by a *consciousness*, of bearing the *name* of "Master," of being called "Master." Thus, he "brought to light," proved (*bewährt*), realized, and revealed his *superiority* over biological existence, over *his* biological existence, over the natural World in general and over everything that knows itself and that he knows to be *bound* to this World, in particular, over the Slave. This superiority, at first purely *ideal*, which consists in the mental fact of being recognized and of knowing that he is recognized as Master by the Slave, is *realized* and materialized through the Slave's *Work*. The Master, who was

able to force the Slave to *recognize* him as Master, can also force the Slave to *work* for him, to yield the result of his *Action* to him. Thus, the Master no longer needs to make any effort to satisfy his (natural) desires. The *enslaving* side of this satisfaction has passed to the Slave: the Master, by dominating the working Slave, dominates Nature and lives in it as *Master*. Now, to preserve oneself in Nature without fighting against it is to live in *Genuss*, in Enjoyment. And the enjoyment that one obtains without making any effort is *Lust*, Pleasure. The life of the Masters, to the extent that it is not bloody Fighting, Fighting for prestige with human beings, is a life of pleasure.

At first glance, it seems that the Master realizes the peak of human existence, being the man who is fully satisfied (*befriedigt*), in and by his real existence, by what he is. Now in fact, this is not at all the case.

What is this man, what does he *want* to be, if not a Master? It was to become *Master*, to be *Master* that he risked his life, and not to live a life of pleasure. Now, what he wanted by engaging in the fight was to be recognized by *another*—that is, by someone *other* than himself but who is *like him*, by *another man*. But in fact, at the end of the Fight, he is recognized only by a *Slave*. To be a *man*, he wanted to be recognized by another man. But if to be a man is to be *Master*, the Slave is not a man, and to be recognized by a Slave is not to be recognized by a *man*. He would have to be recognized by another Master. But this is impossible, since—by definition—the Master prefers death to slavish recognition of another's superiority. In short, the Master never succeeds in realizing his end, the end for which he risks his very life. The Master can be satisfied only in and by death, *his* death or the death of his adversary. But one cannot be *befriedigt* (fully satisfied) by what *is*, by what one *is*, in and by *death*. For death *is* not, the dead man *is* not. And what *is*, what lives, is only a Slave. Now, is it worthwhile to risk one's life in order to know that one is recognized by a *Slave*? Obviously not. And that is why, to the extent that the Master is not made brutish by his pleasure and enjoyment, when he takes account of what his *true* end and the motive of his *actions*—i.e., his warlike actions—are, he will *not*, he will *never* be *befriedigt*, satisfied by what *is*, by what *he* is.

In other words, Mastery is an existential impasse. The Master

can either make himself *brutish* in pleasure or *die* on the field of battle as Master, but he cannot *live consciously* with the knowledge that he is *satisfied* by what he *is*. Now, it is only conscious satisfaction, *Befriedigung*, that can complete History, for only the Man who *knows* he is *satisfied* by what he is no longer strives to go beyond himself, to go beyond what he is and what is, through Action that transforms Nature, through Action that creates History. If History must be *completed*, if absolute Knowledge must be possible, it is only the Slave who can do it, by attaining Satisfaction. And that is why Hegel says that the "truth" (= revealed reality) of the Master is the Slave. The human ideal, born in the Master, can be *realized* and revealed, can become *Wahrheit* (truth), only in and by Slavery.

To be able to stop and understand himself, a man must be *satisfied*. And for this, of course, he must *cease* to be a Slave. But to be able to cease being *Slave*, he must have *been* a Slave. And since there are Slaves only where there is a Master, Mastery, while itself an *impasse*, is "justified" as a *necessary* stage of the historical existence that leads to the absolute Science of Hegel. The Master appears only for the sake of engendering the Slave who "overcomes" (*aufhebt*) him as Master, while thereby "overcoming" himself as Slave. And this Slave who has been "overcome" is the one who will be satisfied by what he *is* and will understand that he is satisfied in and by Hegel's philosophy, in and by the *Phenomenology*. The Master is only the "catalyst" of the History that will be realized, completed, and "revealed" by the Slave or the ex-Slave who has become a Citizen.

But let us first see what the Slave is in the *beginning*, the Slave of the *Master*, the Slave not yet satisfied by the Citizenship that realizes and reveals his Freedom.

Man became a Slave because he feared death. To be sure, on the one hand this fear (*Furcht*) reveals his dependence with respect to Nature and thus justifies his dependence with respect to the Master, who *dominates* Nature. But on the other hand, this same fear—according to Hegel—has a positive value, which conditions the Slave's *superiority* to the Master. Through animal fear of death (*Angst*) the Slave experienced the dread or the Terror (*Furcht*) of Nothingness, of his nothingness. He caught a glimpse of himself as nothingness, he understood that his whole existence was but a

"surpassed," "overcome" (*aufgehoben*) death—a Nothingness maintained in Being. Now—we have seen it and shall see it again—the profound basis of Hegelian anthropology is formed by this idea that Man is not a Being that *is* in an eternal identity to itself in Space, but a Nothingness that *negates* as Time in spacial Being, through the *negation* of this Being—through the negation or transformation of the given, starting from an idea or an ideal that does *not* yet *exist*, that is still nothingness (a "project")—through negation that is called the *Action (Tat)* of Fighting and of Work (*Kampf und Arbeit*). Hence the Slave, who—through fear of death—grasps the (human) Nothingness that is at the foundation of his (natural) Being, understands himself, understands Man, better than the Master does. From the "first" Fight, the Slave has an intuition of the human reality, and that is the profound reason that it is finally he, and not the Master, who will complete History by revealing the truth of Man, by revealing his reality through Hegelian Science.

But—still thanks to the Master—the Slave has another advantage, conditioned by the fact that he *works* and that he works in the *service (Dienst)* of *another*, that he *serves* another by *working*. To work for *another* is to act contrary to the *instincts* that drive Man to satisfy his *own* needs. There is no *instinct* that forces the Slave to work for the Master. If he does it, it is from *fear* of the Master. But *this* fear is not the same as the fear he experienced at the moment of the Fight: the danger is no longer *immediate*; the Slave only *knows* that the Master can kill him; he does not *see* him in a murderous posture. In other words, the Slave who *works* for the Master represses his *instincts* in relation to an *idea*, a *concept*.² And that is precisely what makes his activity a specifically *human* activity, a *Work*, an *Arbeit*. By acting, he negates, he transforms the given, Nature, *his* Nature; and he does it in relation to an *idea*, to what does not *exist* in the biological sense of the word, in relation to the idea of a *Master*—i.e., to an essentially *social*, human, historical notion. Now, to be able to transform the natural given in relation to a *nonnatural* idea is to possess a *technique*. And the

² According to Hegel, Concept (*Begriff*) and Understanding (*Verstand*) are born of the Slave's Work, whereas sensual Knowledge (*sinnliche Gewisheit*) is an irreducible given. But one could try to deduce *all* human understanding from Work.

idea that engenders a technique is a *scientific* idea, a scientific concept. Finally, to possess scientific concepts is to be endowed with Understanding, *Verstand*, the faculty of *abstract* notions.

Understanding, abstract thought, science, technique, the arts—all these, then, have their origin in the forced work of the Slave. Therefore, the Slave, and not the Master, is the one who realizes all that has to do with these things; in particular Newtonian physics (which so impressed Kant), that physics of Force and of Law, which—according to Hegel—are in the final analysis the force of the victor in the Fight for prestige and the law of the Master who is recognized by the Slave.

But these are not the only advantages procured by Work; Work will also open the way to Freedom or—more exactly—to liberation.

Indeed, the Master realized his freedom by surmounting his *instinct* to live in the Fight. Now, by working for *another*, the Slave too surmounts his *instincts*, and—by thereby raising himself to thought, to science, to technique, by transforming Nature in relation to an idea—he too succeeds in dominating Nature and his "Nature"—that is, the same Nature that dominated him at the moment of the Fight and made him the Slave of the Master. Through his Work, therefore, the Slave comes to the same result to which the Master comes by risking his life in the Fight: he no longer depends on the given, natural conditions of existence; he *modifies* them, starting from the idea he has of himself. In becoming *conscious* of this fact, therefore, he becomes conscious of his *freedom (Freiheit)*, his autonomy (*Selbständigkeit*). And, by using the *thought* that arises from his Work, he forms the abstract *notion* of the Freedom that has been realized in him by this same Work.

To be sure, in the Slave properly so-called this *notion* of Freedom does not yet correspond to a true *reality*. He frees himself mentally only thanks to *forced* work, only because he is the Slave of a Master. And he *remains* in fact this Slave. Thus he frees himself, so to speak, only to be a Slave freely, to be still more a Slave than he was before having formed the *idea* of Freedom. However, the insufficiency of the Slave is at the same time his perfection: this is because he is not actually free, because he has an *idea* of Freedom, an idea that is *not* realized but that can be realized by the conscious and voluntary transformation of given existence, by

the active abolition of Slavery. The Master, on the other hand, is free; his idea of Freedom is not *abstract*. That is why it is not an *idea* in the proper sense of the word: an *ideal* to realize. And that is why the Master never succeeds in going beyond the freedom that is realized in *himself* and the insufficiency of *that* freedom. Progress in the realization of Freedom can be carried out only by the Slave, who begins with a *nonrealized* ideal of Freedom. And it is because he has an *ideal*, an *abstract* idea, that progress in the *realization* of Freedom can be completed by an *understanding* of Freedom, by the birth of the *absolute Idea* (*absolute Idee*) of human Freedom, revealed in and by absolute Knowledge.

Generally speaking, it is the Slave, and only he, who can realize a *progress*, who can go beyond the *given* and—in particular—the given that he himself is. On the one hand, as I just said, possessing the *idea* of Freedom and *not being* free, he is led to transform the given (social) conditions of his existence—that is, to realize a historical progress. Furthermore—and this is the important point—this progress has a meaning for him which it does not and cannot have for the Master. The Master's freedom, engendered in and by the Fight, is an impasse. To realize it, he must make it recognized by a *Slave*, he must transform whoever is to recognize it into a *Slave*. Now, my freedom ceases to be a dream, an illusion, an abstract idea, only to the extent that it is *universally recognized* by those whom I recognize as worthy of recognizing it. And this is precisely what the Master can *never* obtain. His freedom, to be sure, is recognized. Therefore, it is *real*. But it is recognized only by Slaves. Therefore, it is insufficient in its reality, it cannot *satisfy* him who realizes it. And yet, as long as it remains a Master's freedom, the situation cannot be otherwise. On the other hand, if—at the start—the Slave's freedom is recognized by no one but himself, if, consequently, it is purely *abstract*, it can end in being *realized* and in being realized in its *perfection*. For the Slave *recognizes* the human reality and dignity of the Master. Therefore, it is sufficient for him to impose his liberty on the Master in order to attain the definitive Satisfaction that *mutual* Recognition gives and thus to stop the historical process.

Of course, in order to do this, he must fight against the Master, that is to say—precisely—he must cease to be a Slave, surmount his fear of death. He must become *other* than what he is. Now, in

contrast to the warlike Master who will always remain what he already is—i.e., Master—the working Slave can change, and he actually does change, thanks to his work.

The human Action of the Master reduces to risking his life. Now, the risk of life is the same at all times and in all places. The risk itself is what counts, and it does not matter whether a stone ax or a machine gun is being used. Accordingly, it is not the Fight as such, the risk of life, but *Work* that one day produces a machine gun, and no longer an ax. The purely warlike attitude of the Master does not vary throughout the centuries, and therefore it cannot engender a historical change. Without the Slave's Work, the "first" Fight would be reproduced indefinitely: nothing would change in it; it would change nothing in the Master; hence nothing would change in Man, through Man, for Man; the World would remain identical to itself, it would be Nature and not a human, historical World.

Quite different is the situation created by Work. Man who works *transforms* given Nature. Hence, if he repeats his act, he repeats it in *different* conditions, and thus his act itself will be different. After making the first ax, man can use it to make a second one, which, by that very fact, will be another, a better ax. Production transforms the means of production; the modification of means simplifies production; and so on. Where there is Work, then, there is necessarily change, progress, historical evolution.³

Historical evolution. For what changes as a result of Work is not only the natural World; it is also—and even especially—Man himself. Man, in the beginning, depends on the given, natural conditions of his existence. To be sure, he can rise above these conditions by risking his life in a Fight for prestige. But in this risk he somehow negates the *totality* of these conditions, which are still the same; he negates them *en masse*, without modifying them, and this negation is always the same. Accordingly, the freedom that he creates in and by this act of negation does not depend on the particular forms of the given. It is only by rising above the given conditions through negation brought about in and by *Work*

³ A manufactured object incarnates an idea (a "project") which is independent of the material *hic et nunc*; that is why these objects can be "exchanged." Hence the birth of an "economic," specifically human World, in which money, capital, interest, salary, and so on appear.

that Man remains in contact with the concrete, which varies with space and time. That is why he changes himself by transforming the World.

The scheme of historical evolution, therefore, is as follows:

At the start, the future Master and the future Slave are both determined by a given, natural World independent of them: hence they are not yet truly human, historical beings. Then, by risking his life, the Master raises himself above given Nature, above his given (animal) "nature," and becomes a human being, a being that creates itself in and by its conscious negating Action. Then, he forces the Slave to work. The latter changes the real given World. Hence he too raises himself above Nature, above his (animal) "nature," since he succeeds in making it other than it was. To be sure, the Slave, like the Master, like Man in general, is determined by the real World. But since this World has been *changed*, he changes as well.⁴ And since it was *he* who changed the World, it is *he* who changes himself, whereas the Master changes only through the Slave. Therefore, the historical process, the historical becoming of the human being, is the product of the working Slave and not of the warlike Master. To be sure, without the Master, there would have been no History; but only because without him there would have been no Slave and hence no Work.

Therefore—once more—thanks to his Work, the Slave *can* change and become other than he is, that is, he can—finally—cease to be a Slave. Work is *Bildung*, in the double meaning of the word: on the one hand, it forms, transforms the World, humanizes it by making it more adapted to Man; on the other, it transforms, forms, educates man, it humanizes him by bringing him into greater conformity with the *idea* that he has of himself, an *idea* that—in the beginning—is only an *abstract idea*, an *ideal*. If then, at the start, in the given World the Slave had a fearful "*nature*" and *had* to submit to the Master, to the strong man, it does not mean that this will *always* be the case. Thanks to his work, *he* can become other; and, thanks to his work, the *World* can become other. And

⁴ Animals also have (pseudo) techniques: the first spider changed the World by weaving the first web. Hence it would be better to say: the World changes essentially (and becomes human) through "exchange," which is possible only as a result of Work that realizes a "project."

this is what actually took place, as universal history and, finally, the French Revolution and Napoleon show.

This creative education of Man by work (*Bildung*) creates History—i.e., human *Time*. Work is Time, and that is why it necessarily exists *in* time: it requires time. The transformation of the Slave, which will allow him to surmount his dread, his fear of the Master, by surmounting the terror of death—this transformation is long and painful. In the beginning, the Slave who—by his Work—raised himself to the abstract *idea* of his Freedom, does not succeed in *realizing* it, because he does not yet dare to *act* with a view to this realization, that is to say, he does not dare to fight against the Master and to risk his life in a Fight for Freedom.

Thus it is that, before *realizing* Freedom, the Slave imagines a series of ideologies, by which he seeks to justify himself, to justify his slavery, to reconcile the *ideal* of Freedom with the *fact* of Slavery.

The first of these Slave's ideologies is Stoicism. The Slave tries to persuade himself that he is *actually* free simply by *knowing* that he is free—that is, by having the abstract *idea* of Freedom. The *real* conditions of existence would have no importance at all: no matter whether one be a Roman emperor or a Slave, rich or poor, sick or healthy; it is sufficient to have the *idea* of freedom, or more precisely, of autonomy, of absolute independence of all *given* conditions of existence. (Whence—in parentheses—the modern variant of Stoicism, of which Hegel speaks in Chapter V: freedom is identified with freedom of *thought*; the State is called free when one can *speak* freely in it; so long as *this* freedom is safeguarded, nothing need be changed in that State.)

Hegel's criticism, or, more exactly, his explanation of the fact that Man did not stop at this Stoic solution which is so satisfying at first sight, can appear unconvincing and bizarre. Hegel says that Man abandons Stoicism because, as a Stoic, he is *bored*. The Stoic ideology was invented to justify the Slave's inaction, his refusal to *fight* to *realize* his libertarian ideal. Thus this ideology prevents Man from acting: it obliges him to be content with *talking*. Now, says Hegel, all discourse that remains discourse ends in *boring* Man.

This objection—or explanation—is simplistic only at first sight. In fact, it has a profound metaphysical basis. Man is not a Being