

In the Service of Narrative
Master and Servant in the Philosophy of Hegel
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Introduction: narratives of the servant and servants of narrative

The theme of this volume builds upon a paradox of historical understanding: the "narrative of the servant" is a child of the age of freedom. At the same time, both the thematization of the servant and the narrative aspect it takes in the approach of these essays reveals a relatively clear historical determination. This historical determination is double. On the one hand, the conceptualization of the narrative of the servant is dependant upon the state of the art of discursive analysis and upon the methodological understanding of the role of narrative in the analysis of history in general. On the other hand, the substantive history of the institution of service – as the contributions to this volume abundantly demonstrate – undergoes an immense transformation.

The first historical determination concerns the analytic consequences of the recent rise of discourse analysis in the field of historiography. This determination has three aspects. Firstly, the analytical presuppositions and methods of narrative analysis are historically determined. The famous "cultural turn" in the human sciences has produced a scientific consciousness of the contingency of narrative, of its status as form among forms, rather than a transparent purveyor of a formally unproblematic content. Secondly, the philosophy of the postmodern has in the last decades drawn attention to the logic of historical narratives and their conceptual and empirical dependency on a certain set of "master narratives," which dominate historiography in Western modernity.¹ Thirdly, the interpretive puzzles and polemics, which have surrounded the emergence of the Hegelian dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of 1806, must themselves be understood as embedded in a certain dialectic of freedom. By this we mean not merely the dialectic which organizes the relationship between the servant and his or her master – as the present volume abundantly documents – but also that between the historical interpreter and the object of his/her interpretation. In this Hegelian optic the very concept of the "narrative of the servant" must be understood as a player in the dialectic of historical hermeneutics.

The second historical determination of the "narrative of the servant" is the still richer transformation accompanying the introduction of the modern concept of *service*. It is clear that the practice of bondage and slavery are as old as social organization in general. For any system of social organization deploys a systematic differentiation of roles. The question of *what* task of service is to be carried out being always inseparable from the question of *for whom* and *by*

whom it is to be done. Yet near the close of the *Âge Classique* a significant mutation in the nature of the legitimization of such social organization introduces the *concept* of service the name of classifying between roles and the administration and control of them. Prior to the conceptual apparatus that at the dawn of the nineteenth century thematized the relationship between a wide constellation of concepts – individual, state, society, rights, etc. – neither “narrative” in our contemporary meaning, nor the “servant” understood as a morally impregnated valorization of individual, labour, and social structure would have been conceivable.²

Thus the notion of “service” is simultaneously articulated and declared in crisis by the late eighteenth-century conceptualization of political liberty against the backdrop of individual rights. From Locke to Hume, Franklin to Jefferson, Voltaire to Rousseau and Montesquieu, French, English and American political philosophies develop a radically new set of concepts, that through the complex changing winds of history and progress are forced into the European public sphere. Notions like “individual,” “society,” “liberty,” “right,” but also “reason,” “education,” “language,” “work” take on entirely new connotations and begin circulating in a public sphere that is itself radically transformed. Still, the greatest breakthrough of Enlightenment political philosophy is to establish the notion of *recognition* as a social and political norm. Recognition, in this sense, constitutes the space between selves, the space of individuality, and the intelligibility of collectivity understood as an assembly of individuals.

It is in this political, social and conceptual context that the concept of the servant emerges in a new incarnation. The servant is henceforth inseparable from a certain form of *contractual* relation between master and servant. This contractual relation can be understood in both a narrow and broad sense. In the narrow sense, the late eighteenth century marks the introduction of service as a *juridical* category, as a certain class of contract. Labour is henceforth understood as a contractual relation, and the labour of the servant is assimilated into that logic. In the broad sense of the notion of contract, any relation between prescient individuals or collectivities is understood on the basis of a certain set of equivalent rights and interests. These form the basis for the negotiation of a relationship of inequality through a symbolic “contract” re-establishing the equality of the relation through a translation of terms of value. In the modern era, the discourse of service is thus pried away from its own selfsameness. In the pre-Enlightenment era, the service that one was expected or forced to provide was identical not merely to one’s own social being, but with one’s own metaphysical self. The servant is henceforth in a personal, moral, social or economic relation, which inserts a transforming mediation – the contract – as the guarantor of the *validity* or *meaningfulness* of the activity. This space is the space of service, and it is the space of the analysis of the master and the servant undertaken by G. W. F. Hegel.

The Enlightenment ideologies of rights and contracts, recognition and legitimacy, just as clearly constitute the foundation of modern democracy, the waning and disappearance of landed aristocracy, and with it the disappearance of domestic service in its most elegant and complex form.³ In this sense, the very project of studying the “narrative of the servant” reveals a profoundly Hegelian moment. This moment is, in true Hegelian fashion, in turn divided. It permits us to problematize the narrative of the servant along the two axes we have described above. Firstly, the historical setting of the emergence of the concepts of service and servitude precedes by roughly one generation that of the emergence of Hegel’s. In this sense the servant and the notion of servitude appear as fundamental themes in the work of Hegel. It is thus not by accident that the dialectic of master and slave issues as one of the fundamental conceptual structures of Hegel’s philosophy and enjoys, even today, a remarkable longevity. Secondly, the notion of narrative, though not expressed in the terms that have become proper to contemporary discourse-analytic, is clearly present in the dialectical evolution of his work. Narrative is the logic in which a given empirical phenomenon is embedded. It is the logical and expressive framework that determines the intelligibility of historical reality. The founding notion of contemporary discursive analysis is that narrative is the “packaging” of recounted historical reality. This packaging is itself an *objet retrouvé*. It is one form among others for the encapsulation of the historical past. As such it is never extra-historical, and never extra-dialectical. The narrative through which history is recounted itself belongs to history, and is thus subject to the same empirical variegations that make historiography an interpretive activity.⁴ In Hegelian terms, the relationship between the *form* of any truth – historical or otherwise – and its ostensible *content* is always dialectical. In other words, the two are opposed, but in their opposition they are mutually dependent. The “objective” reality or verity of the concept is always co-determined by the “subjective” nature of the form in which it is made an object for analysis. According to Hegel, there is not one reality but two: subjective and objective. Subjective reality is only intelligible when it is objective, and objective reality is only accessible through the subjectively determined interpretative methods of the historian.

The research project entitled “Narratives of the Servant,” of which the present article is a part, thus implies the discovery of its own existence as a narrative of service. According to the two types of reasoning proposed above he or she who interprets narrative also becomes in kind the servant of narrative. The “linguistic turn” of the middle of the last century brought narrative itself as a linguistic phenomenon under examination. The Hegelian discovery, hidden within the logic of the narrative of the servant, is that bringing analytic forces to bear on narrative as an object, reveals the subordination of the historian to the logic of the narrative.

G. W. F. Hegel: historical background

Georg Wilhelm Friederich Hegel was born in Stuttgart, the capital of Württemberg, in 1770; he died in Berlin in 1831. Hegel began his studies in theology in 1788 at the famous Theological Seminary of Tübingen, the seat of German religious orthodoxy at the time. The following year, the Bastille fell in Paris. It is at the Seminary that Hegel met and became friends with both Schelling and Hölderlin. They participated avidly with others in the formation of a political "club," which followed closely and regularly discussed the political and philosophical developments surrounding the Revolution in France, an activity which caused discomfort among the *status quo* of the seminary. At the same time, there was clearly little danger of the Revolution spreading to Germany. The conditions of economic and industrial development that formed the backdrop of the revolutionary upheaval in France were more or less absent in Germany. Though sympathy for the philosophical principles of the French Enlightenment were widespread, the material foundations of revolution were absent. This evolutionary perspective defining historical progress as a tension between the material and the conceptual was one that would form a germ of Hegel's dialectical theory of history.

Despite the relatively conservative theological perspective at the Seminary, Hegel devoted himself to the study of contemporary philosophical issues, studying Rousseau, for example, which he at the time preferred to the study of Kant. Having completed his studies in Tübingen in 1795, he took the first of a series of positions as private tutor in Bern and Frankfurt. In Bern (1793–96) he composed a number of fragments, articles and treatises around the notion of "popular religion (Volksreligion)", exploring the function of religious authority and its modes of transmission, placing special emphasis on Kant's "Religion with the limits of ordinary Reason" (1793). He also sought to find an application of the Kantian theoretical categories, which he had studied in Tübingen, to the social and political contexts that he found all around him. In Frankfurt he wrote a "Life of Jesus" and a number of pre-systematic pieces on the concepts of "Love and unification" seeing that opposition in terms of a tension between unity and individual recognition. By 1799 he had completed his long-developing theoretical rejection of Kantianism, employing rather elements of Kantian theory in the greater bulwark of a dialectical theory of reality, a movement clearly reflected in the evolution of his writings. Most commentators agree that by 1801, when Hegel received an appointment at the University of Jena at the behest of Schelling, he was well on his way to developing an original dialectical theory and to formulating the basic principles of the landmark *Phenomenology*.

1795–1801 thus represents a kind of philosophical gestation period for the diverse elements of what would become Hegel's philosophical system. In Jena he completed his first systematic work, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As the

legend goes Hegel was putting the last touches to the manuscript in 1806, when he witnessed Napoleon's entry into the town at the moment of the Battle of Jena, an event which immediately entered the annals of philosophical history through Hegel's comment to his friend Niethammer, that he had seen "the World-spirit on a horseback." The unrest in Jena forced Hegel to leave his university post and take up a position as editor of a newspaper in Bamberg, then as rector of the high school of Nuremberg, where despite his considerable pedagogical activity he managed to complete the two volumes of his *Science of Logic* (1812–1816). In 1816 Hegel received a post at the University of Heidelberg and was thereafter called to the University of Berlin in 1818. He died in the cholera plague in 1831.

Hegel's philosophical formation takes place across a turbulent period, both in terms of the dominant philosophical and theological paradigms of his time and in terms of the concrete political and social reality that is to be the final reference of any philosophy of history. During the period when Hegel was studying traditional German theology at Tübingen, the philosophical anchoring of European thought was profoundly shaken. The relation between the individual and the social collectivity of which s/he is a part can no longer be understood in the same manner. The individual is henceforth considered as sovereign object of a system of rights and obligations. By studying the nature of authority in religious systems, Hegel forms a new theory of collectivity, of likeness and difference, and, necessarily, a theory of the links that bind the identical while at the same time holding them separate in their differences. In concrete social settings this theory represents a kind of theory of contracts. Building to a considerable degree on Rousseau's notion of social contract, Hegel develops a theory of dominance and servitude as a kind of paradigm or model of all dialectical relations between different yet associated parts.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* in the Hegelian System

In order to understand this notion of dominance and servitude, the famous dialectic of master and servant, it is important to understand for the aspirations of Hegel's philosophical system, what he himself called the "System of Science." This expression is to be understood in both its registers: as a truly "scientific" system, in Hegel's special meaning of the word, and as the system which indeed characterizes science itself. Science, in Hegel's terms, is a certain systematization of both reason and empirical reality. It is a kind of reciprocal *rapprochement* of the rationalization of the empirical world, and empirical confirmation of the justification of reason. To use a typically Hegel formulation: science is the becoming-reason of the real and the becoming-real of reason.

We will return to the details of this dialectical puzzle in a moment. First, it is important to place the diverse elements of Hegel's *œuvre* in the context of the "System of Science." Hegel is known above all for four systematic works, in addition to the numerous influential lectures on the history of philosophy, the

history of religion and the philosophy of history published after his death. Those works are the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), the *Science of Logic* (1812–1816), the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817), and the *Fundamentals of the Philosophy of Right* (1821). Each work can be considered independent of the systematic ambition, but, at the same time, each plays a role with respect to the other. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* was first conceived as the theoretical introduction to the entire system, though it too clearly has a life of its own during composition. The *Logic* is conceived as the “theoretical” foundation for the *Phenomenology*. The *Philosophy of Right* is designed to continue the theoretical arch toward the applied questions of social and state organization, law, and finally history itself. The *Phenomenology* is in a much clearer sense a part of the *Encyclopedia* and the point of departure for the *Philosophy of Right*.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* holds the strange position of both a part of the system and a repetition or reproduction of the system in miniature. It is intended as a systematic totality in its logic, its psychological and sociological considerations, and its historical dimension. The *Phenomenology* is simultaneously three narratives. It is the narrative of the movement of logic itself; a mirroring of the logical foundation of reality understood as dialectical. It is also the narrative of the genesis and development of thought, from sensory perception, to consciousness to self-consciousness to Reason, to Spirit, to Religion, to Absolute Knowledge, etc. And it is the narrative of human history, or rather of Spirit in history. It thus begins with the very first movements of spirit, traversing the historical epochs of humanity, arriving at the present. It is Hegel’s conviction that reason and concrete empirical reality both obey the same iterable structure, that of the dialectic. The same or similar structural terms deploy themselves on all levels of cognition and reality. A history of the world can also function as the parable of reason, which can also function as a parable of the movement of individual consciousness.

The same can be said for the dialectic of master and servant. It constitutes on the one hand a concrete narrative of the contractual relation between a servant and his/her master. On the other hand and at the same time, the dialectic of master and servant is the narrative of movement of recognition in general, be it between individuals, social groups, or international diplomatic partners. And it is in turn and at the same time the structure of alterity in general, the structure of the relation between any one entity and its other, that to which it opposes itself.

The Hegelian Dialectic

At each individual level (each “dialectic”) the development of the Hegelian system has a triple structure. Some call this structure thesis, antithesis, synthesis. It is best described as: in-itself (*an-sich*), for-itself (*für-sich*), and in-and-for-itself (*an-und-für-sich*).

This triple structure is perhaps easiest to understand on the level of consciousness, in which one conscious individual meets another. It is on this plane that the most simple, anthropological structure of self and other is played out. It is on this level that the dialectic of master and servant is mostly clearly and literally played out.

In-itself (thesis). Consciousness *in-itself* is consciousness which thinks of itself in terms of itself; consciousness for which there is no other, no external object of comparison, no *other*. It is consciousness radically different from *self-consciousness*.

Consciousness of as itself. I think of myself as myself in terms of myself.

For-itself (antithesis). Consciousness *for-itself* is consciousness that is outside itself, capable of regarding itself from that exterior position. It is consciousness that knows itself *objectively*, without that knowledge being called self-consciousness. It is consciousness of the other as other, thinking the other completely in terms of the other. Consciousness for-itself sees itself as radically other, without having any suspicion that that other is also the same. It is, in other words, a radically contradictory situation, but one which is theoretically prior to the situation of the consciousness that is both itself and knows itself to be itself.

In-and-for-itself (synthesis). Consciousness *in-and-for-itself* is the synthesis of the two prior moments. It is simultaneously consciousness which thinks of itself strictly in terms of itself *and* consciousness which thinks of itself as an objective other. It is thus the moment of tension between the other as self and the other as other. Through the process of self-understanding, and self-projection the three phases of any conceivable moment of subjectivity are present: subjectivity; objectivity; subjectivity-objectivity.

The master-servant dialectic expresses *in general* this process as one that takes place whenever two self-conscious individuals meet each other. Each thinks of the other first in terms of itself alone; it is then forced to think of the other in terms of the other, through a process of projection as other; then there is a synthesis of the two positions in which the combined position raises itself above the two inferior ones to the level of insight into the *relation* between two conscious individuals.

This structure of opposition can just as well be described in anthropological terms. The *first phase* is thus that of simple or radical *confrontation* in which a kind of perfect symmetry is in place. The one regards the other as pure other, regards it from an absolutely self-interested and self-guided point of view, based on models of understanding and paradigms of knowledge that are perfectly self-centered and self-based. The other is a pure object, like a stone to the geologist. There is no mental interaction, no judgement, no feedback, no inter-subjectivity. The *second phase* is that of the master and servant proper. It is the phase of domination and submission in which the asymmetry of the two individuals is perceived and concretized. Here the self regards itself from the point of view of the other. A measurement is made, an

evaluation of the *objective* difference between the conscious individuals is ascertained. There is still no inter-subjectivity, there is only a perception of the other as other, as not-I, as a non-individual, as an object who is thus the object of my power or, depending on the point of view, in whose power I am the object. The *third phase* is the moment of inter-subjectivity, of recognition, and of comparison of the bases of judgement of the difference and similitude of the two conscious individuals. The third phase is a moment of symmetry, but this time on a higher level, encompassing both subjective positions and both objective observations. The *experience* of the other is understood simultaneously as the experience of the self, and the experience of the self as the experience of the other. The dissymmetry of the second phase is discovered as part of a larger, higher logic. The notion of inequality is discovered as dependent upon the judgement of equality of the anterior phase. Both the master and the servant discover their respective mastery or servitude as part and parcel of cooperation.

Translations

Native Germans and non-German readers alike will doubtless agree that Hegel's use of German is unusually difficult. The difficulties encountered by most readers confronted with Hegel's philosophy are thus compounded by the opacity of his expression. Unfortunately, these difficulties also mask the true innovation of his work. Hegel's language walks the delicate line between being impenetrable and being revolutionary. He strives – often with great success – to draw the philosophical consequences from the very nature of language. Thus, in one sense, he cultivates multi-valence, indeed he bases many of the crucial moments of his arguments about the dialectical nature of reality on the dialectical nature of meaning. The most important and well-known example is “*Aufhebung*,” a term which simultaneously means to preserve, to transform and to annihilate. Hegel seeks to capture the image of dialectical movement by showing – in part through the layering of language itself – how one entity is both destroyed and preserved as its own negation in the movement of the dialectic. “Freedom,” for example is never quite the opposite of “bondage,” their opposition is never complete. When considered in the light of the dialectical progression, say from the *perception* of freedom to the *concept* of freedom, the latter functions as a repository of both the positive notion of freedom and the positive presence of the negation or non-presence of bondage. The dialectical passage from bondage to freedom, takes place through the *Aufhebung* of the former in the latter, that is, its negation and preservation.

Less direct, but crucial for our purposes is the ambiguity involved in the opposition between the terms “master” and “servant.” In the most dominant English language translation of the *Phenomenology* by A.V. Miller, the original German “Herr” and “Knecht” are rendered as “lord” and “bondsmen.” This convention is identical to that favoured by other English language translators of

Hegel, such as Baillie [1946] and Miller [1977]. The original French language translation of the *Phenomenology* by Jean Hyppolite renders the pair with “maître” and “esclave,” which Cherniak & Heckman, translators of Hyppolite's famous *Genèse et structure de la 'Phénoménologie de l'esprit'* render in turn “master” and “slave.” Kojève, Sartre, and more recently Jacques d'Hondt, also render the pair as “maître” and “esclave,” while Jarczyk & Labarrière, the most authoritative French Hegelian commentators of the today, render “Herr” and “Knecht” as “maître” and “serviteur.” It is above all by convention with respect to the programme of our seminar “Narratives of the Servant” – and incidentally in line with Jarczyk & Labarrière that I have chosen to use the terms “master” and “servant” here.

The dialectic of master and servant

The dialectic of master and servant is situated in the section “self-consciousness,” which follows as the dialectical counterpart to the first section, “consciousness,” itself divided into three dialectically organized sub-sections. In this way, the dialectic of master and servant is merely one phase in a multi-layered process. Its coherence depends on both the structural makeup of the development that precedes it, and the dialectical consequences it produces later in the text and in Hegel's system.⁵

Phase I: symmetry

The dialectic begins with the stable symmetry of self and other. And yet this symmetry, the lead-up to the dialectic, is a part of the dialectic and thus contains the seed of non-symmetry and imbalance. The lead-up to the appearance of the master and the servant is part of the dialectic. It is integrated in the second major dialectical triad of the *Phenomenology*, “The Truth of Self-Certainty” (104–38). Building upon the “consciousness” established in the preceding section, the first lines of the text explore the immediate consequences of the self, its certitude, and relation to others. Through this reflection upon its nature, consciousness discovers its calm uni-vocal existence, the “placid unity” (111) interrupted or problematized by the discovery of the other, any other, even otherness itself, which opposes it. Consciousness is the very “in-itself,” which we mentioned above, but it is also that “for the which an other (the *in-itself*) is; and it is for consciousness that the in-itself of the object, and the being of the object for an other, are one and the same” (104). The other is what permits consciousness, this “in-itself,” to be itself, while at the same time it is what permits this other to be itself. Thus, concludes Hegel, “self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for an other” (111). In other words, I am myself only when I am recognized by another. If no one ever spoke to me or acknowledged me, I simply would not be as self-consciousness.

Clearly this doubles the problem. The structural logic by way of which the self is capable of understanding itself as self, as individual and unique, unlike any other, is the very basis of consciousness (179). Indeed it is the assurance (self-assurance) of this singularity that makes the self a self. It is vital for the existence of consciousness. The complication lies in the epistemological and metaphysical personality of alterity. In order to be a conscious self, the self sees itself as a conscious self. It regards itself as an other, as an object of the very consciousness which it is concerned with establishing. In other words, the constitution of the self requires that that self is an other, an other for which the same rules of self-constitution necessarily apply. The same structure of self-perception, self-understanding, and self-constitution applies for the other point of view. The experience of the two self-consciousnesses is like a double-mirror. At first glance, we are identical. I cannot perceive differences before I have acknowledged that you are an other. In other words, it is the otherness of the other that permits me to affirm that it is identical to me, that it is indeed me. My first question was: Are you me? But in asking a question about a thing, about a given object, I am at least admitting the possibility that this thing is not me, not the same, but rather a thing, an other. If we are the same, and I am to have knowledge of it, then I obliterate the possibility of that sameness. If we are identical then the individuality of our individual identities is invalid, if it ever existed at all. Thus there is ambiguity, tension and – importantly for the greater context of Hegel's work – pathos. The observation and recognition of the other person, the other self-consciousness is also symmetrical. It is also mirrored or double. Both of the self-conscious individuals recognizes the other recognizing the other. It consists of mutual and equal recognition.

The self is thus constructed through its relation with an other. Consequently the individuality of the individual self is at best problematic, at worst entirely impossible. It is safe to say that the extremely complex nature of the relation between self and other – the preoccupation of modern philosophy since Descartes – will not be resolved here. We can however suggest the following: the self is always divided, and this division has consequences for the self-understanding and self-knowledge of the individual. The preparatory phase in any dialect of self and other is the growing insight into this kind of metaphysical schizophrenia. The Sage is the one who acquires absolute insight and necessarily, at that precise moment of that insight, becomes utterly divided, utterly schizophrenic. As we will see, this movement of perception will mark the transition from symmetry to asymmetry, from mirror-image mutual recognition to inequality of recognition, and ultimately to the relationship proper between the master and the servant (111–12). For on the one hand, the individual self-consciousness requires the other self-consciousness in order to be itself, on the other hand it is also *individual*. It is singular. Each individual is an individual to the degree s/he understands him or herself to be that, places him or herself in the environment as individual, as an individual knowing itself as an individual

immediately related to its surroundings. Or, to use the technical jargon: each one is *in-itself*; for each, the other is *for-itself*. But being bound in immediacy, each is not yet in-itself and for-itself. It does not yet have a full relationship to itself as both subject and object.

A moment of "dialectic" contradiction is thus produced. By "dialectic" we mean that the contradiction is not a complete and absolute opposition between two entities that are perfectly opposed. According to Hegel, even two entities that are opposed in one given framework are collected together in the thought of their opposition. Once we think or objectify the opposition between two entities, the entities are not absolutely opposed but rather opposed only in the sense that they are conceived or conceptualized in opposition. A concept – the concept of opposition – is always in place, functioning as a higher order bridge between the entities. Between this higher level and the level on which the entities exist, there is thus a tension between unity and disunity, between sameness and difference. The one individual needs the other to be itself, and its own individuality is completely threatened by this dependence on the other. The two are both drawn together by the unity, by their shared objective understanding that they are one and the same, identical, and torn apart by the individuality of the positions which permit the higher thought of their unity.

This situation leads to a moment of combat, indeed of putting one's life on the line (113–14). Each seeks the death of the other, in order to establish his/her individuality. "Thus, the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle." According to Hegel the two individuals struggle, independently, in order to reaffirm his/her uniqueness, to raise his/her certainty of him/herself to the level of "truth." In Hegelian terms, each individual (or each entity) is in-itself, self-present, self-known – conscious – but each individual seeks to be for-itself, to know itself objectively as what it truly is. Each individual's perception is thus to eliminate the other, to displace what seems to be the only hindrance to objective self-knowledge. As long as the other exists, the full presence of the one will be impossible, will remain outside of itself. It must take that being back from the other. It must transform the other from dialectical, partial negation to complete negation.

Clearly such an elimination of the other would however be an error. As we have seen, the being of any one individual depends for existence on the being of the other to which it is opposed. Or to cast the conflict in more anthropological terms, the death of the one threatens the liberty of the other to be his or herself (114). Each of the individuals is blind to the fact that murder is suicide. Fortunately such a total negation is conceptually impossible, as we have seen above. The complete annihilation of the one part would be conceptually impossible, though on the strictly anthropological level quite possible. Not matter how completely the other is destroyed, the thought of the murder, the fact of the act of destruction cannot be destroyed. What Hegel calls "abstract

negation' – the total negation of the other – is conceptually impossible. It is not a negation "coming from consciousness" (since consciousness, as the psychoanalytic tradition testifies, destroys nothing). The lesson for the individual is that self-consciousness has two sides: it is both pure or absolute self-consciousness (without an object), and immediate self-consciousness (of an object). The one side of self-consciousness (the pure or abstract) is embodied by the master, the other by the servant (115). Cognitively (or psychoanalytically) both sides are present in any one self-conscious individual at any given time. In terms of the parable of the master and slave, however, the asymmetry of the social and power relations is played out by two different beings.

Phase II: asymmetry

We thus arrive at opening of the master and servant relationship properly speaking. Moreover, with the "action" of the dialectic moved to the human theatre, its specifically tropological or narratological character also becomes more evident. This phase of the dialectical development is an anthropologization of the dialectic of master and servant, and for this reason will be the basis of the Kojevian reading of Hegel, to which we will return in a moment. In terms of representation, the subjective, then inter-subjective relations of the dialectic serve as the basis or *significat* for the human narrative which occupies the plane of the *signifiant*. In other words, human action in the anthropological sense is already a representation, already a narrative of a structure of human existence which precedes it.

Let us return to the dialectical structure of master and servant. As with the relationship of consciousness in general, the master has a double relation to the world: to itself immediately, and to itself as mediated other. The master is, on the one hand, in-itself, that is sovereign alone as master. Mastery is a unique position and, on one level, cannot be understood otherwise. On the other hand, and once again as an embodiment of the inter-subjective structure we explored above, the master exists only through another consciousness whose nature it is to be bound up with the world of things (the servant).

The essential characteristic of the servant, on the other hand, is its relation to nature, to the world of things, to what Hegel calls "thing-ness." This "thing-ness" cuts both ways. On the one side, the master is absolute and sovereign, with no inter-subjective dimension, and thus a thing: absolute, impenetrable power. On the other side, the servant relates to the world of objects, which it is his/her to handle, transform and mediate to the master. At the same time, the master relates to the servant as to a thing. This is his/her power over it. The master has power over the thing. This is the privilege won in the struggle of conscious beings. This also means that the master has power over the servant. Furthermore, though the master relates to the servant as to a simple thing, the master cannot relate immediately to nature, to the world of objects. The master can only relate to objects of the world of things through the mediation of the servant. The object

of the master's desire is only available through the servant. The master's only relation to the world of things, to the thing, is negation: simple and pure consumption.

The fundamental difference between the master and the servant is in respect to the object (let's say a piece of bread). The thing is independent of the servant. S/he can never negate it, only work on it, transform, pass it on. The master on the other hand, can only negate it, utterly consume it. For the master, desire wasn't enough. The thing was independent. So at this point the servant is interposed between master and the object of the master's desire. Now the master need only be concerned with the part of the object which is dependent upon him/her. The independent, irreducible part is the servant's problem, the object of his/her labour.

The relation between master and servant is now asymmetrical. The servant is a mirror that reflects the master. But the master is a mirror that reflects only his or her own image. The master exists for him/herself. S/he is pure negative power for whom the thing is nothing (115–16).

Phase III: re-establishment of symmetry

For the master the servant is a mere object, a thing, consciousness without consciousness, an inessential consciousness. This objectification – necessary objectification – leads to the dialectic reversal that should be predictable by now (116–17). The hindrance that the objectification is a philosophical version of a common pragmatic situation: non-correspondence between the subjective and the objective, between concept and thing. There is no correspondence between the servant as *for-itself* – as s/he wishes to see him/herself – and the servant as *in-itself* – as it is seen objectively, externally from the perspective of the master.

The crux of the matter is that the recognition on the basis of which the master achieved mastery is not carried out through an *independent* consciousness. The master was not a sovereign being that chose to acquire a servant by an act of pure will. In other words, the mastery of the master is *dependent*, it is not at all sovereign or autonomous. On the contrary, the mastery of the master was and could only be attained through the relation to the servant, through a kind of negotiation with the servant, represented in its most extreme form by the "struggle unto death," which we evoked earlier. What's more, the reality of the servant is clearly not the same as that of the master. As noted above, the servant's reality is *immediately* the master and *immediately* the natural world. The master's reality is *immediately* the servant, but only *mediately* the natural world. The master is dependent on the servant's relation to the natural, objective world in order to survive. In its "dependence," the servant has more of a relationship to the world of things than the master does (117).

The practical consequence of this asymmetry of dependence is that the servant grows and develops by virtue of his/her labours, while the master atrophies through inactivity. To put it lightly: the master gets lazy, and loses

skills by simple inactivity. Meanwhile, the slave grows stronger and more skilled. The slave is gradually being "transformed into a truly independent consciousness." Another, more metaphysical aspect of the servant's growing independence is his relationship to his own death. In the life-and-death struggle between the two conscious individuals, the master won the confrontation because the servant surrendered. At the same time, given that it was the servant who surrendered, it was only the servant who met the critical point, only the servant who truly faced death. The truth for the servant is the master as independent reality. But the servant is also familiar with pure negativity – death – in a way the master can never be. The servant is not fully aware of this negativity, doesn't understand the how or why of his/her experience of limits. But the servant "owns" this experience irrevocably. The master on the other hand, does not possess this experience of the absolute. Thus the servant occupies a superior situation in the sense that s/he has confronted absolute negativity: death, even though this experience is useless, given that s/he has no consciousness or understanding of it. On one level "absolute negativity" belongs more to the servant; on another it is not his/hers at all (117).

The key to the servant's transformation is work. Work involves discipline and skill. As the slave becomes disciplined and skilled, his/her powers, in real terms, begin to match those of the master, then surpass them. Through work, the servant becomes conscious of what s/he truly is. In Hegelian terms: the servant has being-for-itself, but has no awareness of it. Through work, through fashioning the thing – making bread or shoeing the horse – the servant's own being-for-self becomes an object for him/her, through his/her refusal to accept the form of that being-for-self. This is the significance – the negative significance – of fear. In fear the servant's independence, its "being-for-self" is present in the servant him/herself. By fashioning the thing, s/he becomes aware that being-for-self belongs to him/her, that s/he exists "essentially and actually in his/her own right." The servant thus gains independence as a craftsman, and thereby gains a mind and will of his/her own.

The Kojévian reading of the dialectic of master and slave

It is safe to say that Alexandre Kojève was responsible for the re-birth of Hegelian studies within French philosophical circles, and for the opening of a new type of interpretation in the Anglo-Saxon circles. He held an extremely influential series of lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the École pratique des Hautes Études in Paris during the interwar period, at a moment when the meaning of history, the value of socialism, and the validity of philosophy in general, all faced hard times.⁶ His re-reading of Hegel in an anthropological light gives clear new meaning to both Hegel's text and the context in which he was reading it. Kojève's lectures focus almost exclusively on the *Phenomenology* and moreover build upon the dialectic of master and

slave as the foundational and structuring passage of the work. He makes that dialectic the leitmotiv for his reading of the entire work, beginning with a detailed lecture of the text, then returning to it in nearly every passage as a kind of key to the work in general, and an understanding of both European history and the present day.

Still, it is not enough that Kojève builds his reading of the *Phenomenology* on the dialectic of master and servant, he also radicalizes his only lecture on the dialectic, forming it in the most severe terms and drawing the sharpest consequences. The radicalization grows out of Kojève's emphasis on a certain number of central terms in Hegel's text: labour, desire, nature, animality, and, above all, recognition. For Kojève the dialectic of master and servant represents the moment of differentiation between animal desire and human desire. The dialectic is the demonstration of fallibility of the structure of domination and the centrality of the concept of recognition. According to Kojève, the master is not at all what s/he meant to become when s/he began the struggle with the other: a person recognized by another person. In other words if the individual can only be satisfied by recognition, whoever tries to do it by being the master will always fail. As we have seen, the person who finds satisfaction is always the servant (or the person who has gone the way of servitude, or who "dialectically sublated" his/her servitude).

The "truth" of the master is the servant and the work of the servant.

In effect, others only recognized the master through his/her consumption of the products of the labour of the servant.

The service of labour is [...] the source of all human, social and historical progress. History is the history of the working servant. And to see this, it suffices to consider the relation between the master and the servant (that is the first result of the "first" human, social, historical contact) not from the point of view of the master, but from that of the servant.⁷

The master forces the servant to work. And by working the servant becomes the master. S/he started as the servant of nature, by showing solidarity with it, and by subordinating his/herself to the laws of nature, by accepting the "instinct of conservation." Through work, the servant becomes the master of nature, thereby liberating his/herself from his/her own nature, from the instinct which held it attached to nature. Work liberates the slave from nature and thus from his/herself.

Kojève's reading has important implications for the notions of modernity and especially technology. The servant reigns – or will reign one day – in the world of technology through his/her work. This "mastery," born of labour and of the transformation of the world and of human beings in the world, is nothing like the mastery of the master. The future and history do not belong to the master-

warrior, who either dies or survives indefinitely in his/her self-contained identity. The future and history belong to the servant.

[The servant], by transforming the given world through his/her labour, transcends the given and what is in itself determined by the given. S/he thus surpasses the given world, by surpassing the master, who is linked to the given, which he leaves – since s/he doesn't labour – intact. If the anguish of death incarnated for the servant in the person of the master-warrior is the condition *sine qua non* of historical progress, it is only the labour of the servant which realizes and perfects it.⁸

Conclusion

Thus work transforms the world and "civilizes" it, "educates" those who wish to work and repress their instinct to "consume" the raw object "immediately." It is thus only through work that humans can realize themselves objectively as humans. Only through producing an artificial object does the individual become something other than a "natural being."

Only in this real object, does the individual find its subjective existence. The master is the catalyst of the historical process, but s/he does not participate actively in this process. Without him/her, the process would not be possible. Work creates an objective real world, a non-natural world, a cultural world, historical and human world. In this world, humans live a life essentially different than the animal world. So real human autonomy and authentic liberty are only possible through servitude, by surmounting the anguish of death, and the work done in the service of an other.

¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1979.

² Reinhard Koselleck, *Aufklärung* in von Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (Hsgbr) *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* im Auftrag des Arbeitskreises für Moderne Sozialgeschichte e.V. Band nr 1, 1972.

³ Cf. for example the striking illustration contained in Ishiguro Kazuo, *The Remains of the Day*, London, Faber and Faber, 1989.

⁴ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form. Narrative Discourse and Historical Interpretation*, London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.

⁵ We refer here to both G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (trans. A.V. Miller), Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 1977. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Werke 3, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1972. Page numbers refer to the English, then to the German original text.

⁶ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de la Phénoménologie de l'esprit*, Paris, Gallimard.

⁷ Kojève, p. 26.

⁸ Kojève, p. 28.