

HEGEL'S LEGEND OF SELF-DETERMINATION

"Freedom for Hegel is a faculty in human nature because man is Being-for-itself. This concept of freedom is described in his logic and has become a social power in the dialectic of Master-Slave. Whereas, Hegel's concept of mutual recognition and social justice in his Philosophy of Right is completely different and contradicts the previous ones. However, the deduction of mutual recognition is logically possible even in the dialectic of Master-Slave."

Ever since the rise of social philosophy human freedom has become a central issue, and that has divided the philosophers into two divergent camps, viz., Determinism and Indeterminism. The exposition of the first camp relies on the assumption that human life is conditioned by external forces (spiritual or physical). On the other side, the champions of Indeterminism attempt to break the chain of such external conditions by prevailing interpretative approach and arguments which depend on the belief that consciousness, unlike the physical objects, does not come under the sway of natural causes. Meanwhile some of them go further to trace out the ontological foundation of freedom through the denial of the existence of the supernatural being which determine human activities.

Hegel is one of the thinkers who has adopted a new approach which is entirely distinct from the dictums of both camps. As I understand, the legitimacy of freedom in Hegel's philosophy is

in the ontological status of man, and then from there we can talk about the interaction among individuals in society, and the possibility of social justice. In this regard the category of Being-for-itself¹ carries all the secret of Hegel's legend. Man as a conscious being is aware of the objects in the world as well as of his own existence, and then he is for himself. In this case all distinctions between consciousness and its object will be cancelled, man as a self-related being, as a unity becomes a self-determined being, having no external relation and condition. In this relation consciousness has no otherness, no limitation by anything other than itself and that is the necessary ground for freedom. The Cartesian Cogito for Hegel contains half truth; man is defined as a self-conscious being; not as a thinking being only. Then, since man is being-for-self, he is essentially free, or he is free by nature.

I disagree with Ritter to think that freedom to Hegel's philosophy is not a natural faculty but a structure of interaction between individuals in society and is the foundation of social justice.² It is more relevant to state that freedom is implicitly in human nature because man is for-himself, and it becomes explicit and actual when social life is established. That is what Hegel tries to sketch out with the concepts of Right and Duty and mutual recognition among individuals at another place.³ And Hegel's theory of social justice, which is interpreted by Ritter, is paradoxical to master-slave relation described in *the Phenomenology of Mind*.

Hegel has developed three theses on freedom at three different places :

- i) Freedom as self-determination.
- ii) Freedom as activity.
- iii) Freedom as social justice.

The first thesis represents freedom as a faculty of consciousness and as something in the nature of man. Hegel, as it is mentioned earlier, has described this point in his logic with the category of Being-for-self. And he has solved the problem of determinism ontologically by converting it into self-determinism through the identification of consciousness with reality, finite with infinite and, more generally, subject with object. For Hegel, infinity is not transcendental in the classical sense; as something static and inaccessible to human cognition. But it is in the process of going beyond the external conditions and determinations. Man, accordingly, as a self-determined being, is an infinite being.

Such a kind of freedom, which is in the nature of man, becomes real in activity and practical life, for whatever is implicit necessarily becomes explicit, this situation pursues human beings to work and negate the external limitations. The actual freedom depends upon the activity and labour of human beings to nullify and preserve the external reality. Consciousness struggles to modify its object and possess it, and for that it manifests itself as Desire.⁴ Hegel's concept of freedom here does not contradict the first thesis in *the Science of Logic*, but rather they supplement each other, they represent theoretical and practical aspects of one and the same term.

The dialectical movement of consciousness in *the Phenomenology of Mind* aims at the idealization of the external world through the process of its reduction into concepts, and finally consciousness arrives at the stage where all distinctions between them disappear. This process of conceptualization of the world is merely theoretical and incomplete. Its practical aspect is based on struggle of Desire to assimilate external reality. Consciousness, from one side, desires the given objects, and, on the other side, it is directed towards another desire. Both external limita-

tions viz. the given objects and another desire, are mere facts which cannot be denied. We are always in the world—among the others, and we transcend perpetually towards them. Desire towards another desire is for recognition.⁵ “I”, as an individual desire, want to be recognised by another desire as an autonomous being having my own values and principles. I should make another desire to accept my values as his own, and should surrender totally to me, otherwise my freedom with his presence as an other remains uncertain and threatened. Then, the self-conscious being acts to subjugate the given objects as well as another desire. This persuades both desires to face the battle of life and death. One of them risks life without fear and fights for recognition, whereas the other side does not go beyond life and the given objects, is afraid to die and prefers life in chains to death. At the end of the battle the recognized desire becomes the master and an independent being who possesses the given objects and another desire. The defeated desire, on the other hand, loses essentiality and becomes a slave.

Hegel has not supported the dialectic of master—slave by any argument, and the commentators have interpreted this antisocial phenomenon differently. Findlay, for example, has given the metaphor of mirror, that if the recognizing desire is a living object, and exactly the same like the recognized desire, then it sees itself in it the way it sees itself in a mirror.⁶ This interpretation, as Ivan Soll remarks, is too epistemological,⁷ and Findlay has not given arguments from the original text of Hegel to support his metaphor of mirror. If a desire wants to see itself in another desire, then why should they fight for subjugation? Alexander Kojève has come with another interpretation, but it is not satisfactory too. He says,

“ To desire Being is to fill oneself with his given Being, to enslave oneself to it. To desire non-Being is to liberate

oneself from Being to realize one's autonomy, one's freedom. To be anthropogenetic, then, desire must be directed towards another desire, another greedy emptiness, another "I".⁸

I disagree with Kojève on the point that desire for Being is enslavement, and for non-Being is liberation, because human activism is directed to modify Being into a humanistic world. Kojève is right when he says that by going beyond Being we achieve freedom in the sense that we negate the independent status of Being, but that is applicable and true also to the negation of non-Being. The dialectic of labour is the birth-place of freedom, by no means that brings enslavement to human life. Freedom, for Hegel, without this practical aspect, without the modification of Being, is purely subjective and is without content. Then, what is the secret behind the subordination of one desire by another desire?

The secret, as I have mentioned before, lies in the category of Being-for-itself, and its essential characteristic. Since consciousness as being-for-itself, is free by nature, it should not be limited by external condition, "... the other's reality is presented to former as an external other, as outside itself; it must cancel that externality."⁹ To be actually free desire must negate all kinds of limitations. Consequently, I, as being-for-itself, ascertain my freedom by subjugating another desire and forcing my adversary to recognise me as his master and the only free being.

The third thesis deals with Hegel's concept of social justice and theory of Right. Social Justice is the realization of freedom, and freedom is constructed on the mutual recognition among the individuals in society. That is what Ritter has developed in his essays on Hegel's philosophy of Right.¹⁰ The concept of mutual recognition contradicts the two previous theses which

are given in *the Science of Logic* and *the Phenomenology of Mind*. Hegel could easily talk about such recognition even in the dialectic of Master-Slave, and sweep out the anti-social character of recognized desire in his social theory through the deduction of True Infinite of desire.¹¹

The relation between two individual desires resembles the relation between Something and Other,¹² Something is determined by an other but both of them like all opposition in dialectic are identical and different. The determination of something by an other turns to self-determination. Here, we have the same logical ground for the identification of two desires, The subordination of one man by another, the disunity among individuals will be moulded in harmonious community. Another desire, at this stage, is not an external limitation, but a necessary condition for freedom.

Department of Philosophy
University of Karachi,
KARACHI-32.
(Pakistan)

MUHAMMAD KAMAL

NOTES

1. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, Part I, trs. by W. Wallace. Forwarded by J. N. Findlay, Oxford University Press, London, 1985, Section 96, p. 141.
2. See : Ritter, Joachim; *Hegel and the French Revolution*, Essays on the Philosophy of Right, translated with an introduction by Richard Dien Winfield. The MIT Press, London, 1984, pp. 48-50.
3. See : Hegel; *Philosophy of Right*, trs., by T. M. Knox, Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, London, 1962. pp. 37-40.
4. See : Hegel; *The Phenomenology of Mind*, translated with an introduction to the Torchbook edition by George Lichtheim, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1967, p. 220.

5. *Ibid*, p. 231.
6. See : Findlay, J. N ; *Hegel; A Re-examination*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1958, p. 94.
7. Soll, Ivan ; *An Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics*, Forwarded by Walter Kaufmann, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1969, p. 16.
8. Kojeve, Alexander ; *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trs., by James H. Nicholas, edited by Allan Bloom, Cornell University Press, London, 1980, p. 40.
9. Hegel, *op. cit.*, p. 233.
10. See; Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, pp. 37-40,
11. True Infinite is one of the most important categories in Hegel's logic see; the *Encyclopedia*, section 93, p. 187.
12. Hegel, *the Encyclopedia*, Section 92, p. 136.

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