

## MASTER-SLAVE RELATIONSHIP IN HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

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This paper is concerned with a significant aspect of Hegel's philosophy which has a widespread influence on Marxism and Existentialism. To begin with I would prefer to discuss the concept of 'Time' by Hegel which provides a clue in understanding the nature and structure of 'Consciousness.' In pursuing this interpretation we need first to distinguish mathematical time, as the latter determines the stream of "world-spirit" or 'Consciousness' analysed in the *Phenomenology of Mind*. As we know, mathematical time deals with quantity and lifeless reality and is divided into equal units. Human time, by contrast, is qualitative consists of unrepeatable events in which every new event is richer in content than those antecedent to it. This concept of time is central to Hegel's philosophy. One can find explicit references to Hegel's concept of human time in the *The Phenomenology*, where he states that,

"Time appears as Spirit's destiny and necessity, where Spirit is not yet complete within itself."<sup>1</sup>

The revelation of Consciousness in the self-formative process of human history takes place in two different ways; First, Consciousness posits itself as something temporal and dynamic. Second, it objectifies itself and becomes a lifeless entity or something spatial. And then it stands as an opposition to that kind of spatial entity or 'Being' which is Consciousness in its otherness.

In this confrontation, Consciousness as an imperative condition for the sake of achieving self-realisation completely. As we see, Hegel's view of time is distinct from that which Kant has described in his *First Critique*. For Hegel, Time and Space are not subjective conditions of sensory experiences, but ontological, simply because time is the formative process of Consciousness

without which history is unthinkable and since that process takes place in the world, time is, then, not subjective. Conversely, one could also argue that since all the categories in Hegel's philosophy are real and 'Time' is one of them, then 'Time' is real or ontological. Temporality of Consciousness draws a line of demarcation between human beings and the given objects. Since Consciousness on this view is temporality, then, it is not something identical to itself like an inanimate entity. In other words, Consciousness is what it is not, because it is incomplete and dynamic and is in the state of constant change striving to fill itself with content. This movement of Consciousness is also self determined. The 'Other' is its own externalisation and for this reason there is no distinction between externality and internality of Consciousness. This significant characteristic of Consciousness provides the ground for freedom and quite essential for the category of 'True Infinite' in Dialectic Logic, where Hegel remarks;

"The Being of spirit may be understood by a glance at its direct opposition-matter. As the essence of matter is gravity, so, on the other hand, we may affirm that the substance, the essence of Spirit is freedom."<sup>2</sup>

As I understand them Hegel's notions of temporality and Consciousness have had a profound impact on the philosophies of Heidegger and Sartre. Human existence (*Dasein*), in Heidegger's philosophy, has been described as an ability to anticipate and direct one's self towards future possibilities and towards a realised end. This is what Hegel tries to generalise in his philosophy. But the intrinsic difference between Hegel and Heidegger arises with the notions of *Dasein*'s authentic mode of existence and individuality. History for Hegel is one of a collective Consciousness. It is a public history in which the individual is subordinated by the universal will and the parts are therefore determined by the whole. By contrast, Heidegger distinguishes between public life and the authentic mode of existence and, for him, public life gives an end to the authenticity of *Dasein*. In this context, freedom is an essential characteristic of the authentic being and history is the history of individuals rather than a universal will. The dynamics of human reality on this view stresses novelty and no historical event will remain eternally true. Human existence is nothing but a constant negation of itself and an external reality.

It has been mentioned before that consciousness and Being oppose each other and the oppositions in Dialectic Logic are identical and different, and contain each other. This kind of relationship suggests that Consciousness realises its distinction from and similarities to Being. As a result that alienated reality will be understood as nothing more than another form of Consciousness and for that reason it will be negated as an independent reality and preserved. The transformation of Being is initially accomplished theoretically, through the epistemological grasp of Being of different stages in Dialectic of Consciousness which has occupied the first half of the *Phenomenology*, and then, transformation of Being is accomplished practically in (Desire) by Labour. These two different ways namely, theoretical and practical, are necessarily connected and supplement each other. Theoretical appropriation is the conceptualisation of Being for the sake of change. This relationship between theory and practice, however, does not label Hegel a pragmatic philosopher like William James and John Dewey, because all kinds of knowing is not doing.<sup>3</sup> But at the same time, Hegel does not deny that knowledge can become a force or must become a force for social change. It should be remembered here that Karl Marx as one of the Hegelians, has put a great emphasis on the necessary relationship between theory and practice and firmly believed that theory be prior to practice, for example in *Das kapital* he remarks that,

“A spider conducts operations which resemble those of weavers, and a bee puts many of human architect to shame by the construction of its honey comb cell. But what distinguishes the worse architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in work. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence, it already existed ideally.”<sup>4</sup>

Generally speaking, Hegel's view of unification of Consciousness with Being can be understood on the grounds of his ontology, logic and epistemology. If we look at Consciousness and Being in the super triad of Hegel's ontology, we find them as two main oppositions having a dialectic relationship. On one side they appear to be identical because Being is the self-externalisation of Consciousness. Yet, on the other side they are different because being is the idea in its otherness and alienated from Consciousness. Logical unification consists in the application of the same dialectic relationship in the realm of logic.

Consciousness is taken as thesis and Being as antithesis. Thesis and antithesis in every triad are identical because the latter is derived from the former and then antithesis is something other than thesis. The contradictions between thesis and antithesis are superseded in their unity understood as synthesis. Epistemological unification is the theorisation of Being and is accomplished at the end of dialectic movement of Consciousness. In Dialectic of Consciousness being is apprehended conceptually and transformed into ideality. This Movement from reality to ideality renders another movement from ideality to a new reality. The first part of the *Phenomenology* treats four stages in which Consciousness develops itself and transforms its object epistemologically from "Sense-certainty" to "Perception", "Understanding" and "Reason", where the external reality is apprehended by Consciousness and loses its independence and otherness. In this new movement, Dialectic of Consciousness integrates into Dialectic of Labour or theory into practice with the help of 'Desire' (*Begierde*), which turns Hegel's philosophy from pure epistemological tendency to a pragmatic approach to reality. In Dialectic of Consciousness the external reality, as it is stated before, does not completely vanish but loses its independence. Paradoxically, the external reality must be both preserved and destroyed. Desire attempts to resolve this paradox by making the external reality its own, by taking possession of it. With this shift to practical ground we find ourselves confronted with new realities and are therefore more concerned with life and social conflict in history. Dialectic of Consciousness gives us an account of reality theoretically which does not ascertain complete negation of Being. Now, with Dialectic of Labour we discuss the initial attempts to specify a practical attitude of Consciousness in the world, and to find the relationship between what we know and what we do.

Humans are thinking-beings. In thinking, Consciousness reflects from itself, contemplates external reality and becomes aware of the objects in the world. Hegel's account of Consciousness is different from that offered by Descartes in his Second Meditation. Humans, in dialectic philosophy are not only thinking beings but also self-conscious. To be aware of the objects in the world should be accompanied by self-awareness. But then, what bring consciousness back to itself? Consciousness becomes aware of itself and sets out to prove its master of being by finding itself in a state of desire (*Begierde*), an intentional reflection in which Consciousness becomes aware of the objects

as well as aware of itself. When I feel thirsty and having desire to drink, I become aware of two things; the desired object and that I am thirsty.

The Concept of 'I' is revealed to me through my desire to drink and then I direct my negative power to master and to assimilate the desired object. In this case, 'Desire' becomes a power of negation and modifies the object into something mine. On the other hand this desire utilises human knowledge for the transformation of the given reality into commodities and tools. Here I would like to mention that the category of 'Desire', in some ways, resembles the concepts of *Eros* in Plato's *Symposium*, 'will' for Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and the existential of '*Sorge*' in Heidegger's philosophy. Consciousness as Desire is a vacuum striving to fill itself. The need for a positive content pushes Consciousness to appropriate the desired object but the absence of that positive content is the same in all sentient beings. Then, what is the difference between animal desire and human desire?

In order to understand the difference between these two kinds of desire, one must make a distinction between two kinds of objects. The corporeal objects which are for biological needs and the non- corporeal objects. Consciousness desires the objects in the world, appropriates and uses them. This type of desire is not distinct from animal desire but the needs of individual Consciousness are fulfilled through association with other individual Consciousness as Hegel says, "Self-Consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-Consciousness."<sup>5</sup> This kind of desire which is for recognition distinguishes human desire from animal desire. I desire that my freedom and my values be recognised by other. Desire for recognition is a major reason for the fight to death and the division of society into antagonistic classes. Findlay believes that a self-conscious being desires another self- conscious being because he/she sees herself in the other, "a more adequate exemplification of itself where a phenomenal object is living; a living thing has something of the perpetual direction toward self which is characteristic of the self- conscious subject and therefore serves to mirror the latter."<sup>6</sup> This description of human relationship in the *Phenomenology*, however, contradicts Hegel's theory of Right and Duty in the *Philosophy of Right*. The *Phenomenology* portrays terror and fight to death as a necessary condition for human freedom. Whereas Hegel's interpretation of rights and duty stresses mutual recognition among the individuals and gives no indication to this hostile situation.<sup>7</sup> Mutual recognition

is a reciprocal relationship through which each person is committed to treat others as 'persons' or as self-conscious beings rather than objects. This idea has also inspired thinkers such as Heidegger and Sartre, in their discussions on authenticity and Commitment. Sartre, for example, believes that our recognition of others as human beings includes their freedom and in Heidegger's philosophy, the individuals are authentically bound together only when each one of them recognises the freedom of the other. The *Phenomenology*, as a philosophical description of human history, deals with inequalities and non-mutual recognition. In this kind of interpersonal relationship, when the recognition is not mutual, the recognised-desire treats the recognising-desire as a mere object and puts itself in a position of a sadist who requires the victim to become an object and no longer the source of threat and challenge.

Let us say, two self-conscious beings meet for the first time. As soon as they confront each other the problem of the certainty of their freedom becomes problematic, because both of them have their own point of view on the world and are free to do so prior to this confrontation with the other's otherness. And, hence, they seek recognition of each other's freedom. But since both of them are self-conscious beings, holding similar claims and demands, recognition will not be an easy task and it can be achieved only in a fight to death. Fighting out the battle is the only way an individual could come to self-Consciousness or to the knowledge of freedom. Each of these individuals tries to negate the other by killing and risking its own life but the fight between them does not lead to the death of one of the adversaries, because the recognised individual requires a witness rather than a corpse. Killing the other destroys that witness and then recognition becomes impossible<sup>8</sup>. For this reason the recognised-desire (the master) does not kill the vanquished, and the recognising-desire (the slave) cannot transcend his/her animal desire to risk life for freedom. She prefers servitude to death and his life will be determined only by her desire to live.<sup>9</sup> This relationship between two individuals is the result of an attempt by Consciousness to negate the external reality and to achieve recognition.

Therefore, Hegel has arrived at a conclusion, that an individual's desire needs another desire for self-certainty and freedom as a witness, "Self-Consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say it is only by being acknowledged and recognised"<sup>10</sup>. In this regard an individual's desires are not

a threat for each other, but necessary too. They provide objective certainty and recognition for each other. The existence of other is essential and at the same time a threat; essential, as one needs recognition by others, and a threat, in the sense that others bring limitation and obstacles to one's freedom. Recognising someone as another human being like myself is recognising that, this human being has power to have his/her own desire and his/her own point of view. This significant property the other possesses is an ability to both escape from and challenge me. The best way to express this interpersonal relationship is in Sartre's statement in *No Exit*, that 'Hell is the other people'. Another motif behind human's desire for another desire is that desire for natural objects suffers frustration and cannot negate the totality of Being, simply because desire depends upon its object to exit. Desire is always desire for something, and since desire makes human beings conscious of themselves, then the moment our desire for an object is extinguished we cease to be self-conscious beings. Our animal desire is temporal and ends with the negation of the object. We want our desire to become constant, and that is possible only when we have a constant object for it; an object that cannot be negated completely. A constant object of desire cannot be a corporeal entity, but another living being like myself. As a desire-object, the other does not vanish and my desire therefore continues. Accordingly, animal desire brings frustration to the structure of human existence and that makes us, as Sartre says, a 'useless passion'.

Still one may not understand why an individual subjugates another individual for recognition? or why it is necessary for the desire to put themselves into the fight and engage themselves into an anti-social situation for recognition? The answer to this question for Hegel is quite simple. He believes that a self-conscious being seeks satisfaction only in another self-conscious being, because he/she needs objective certainty. A human being, who lives in solitude, is independent and has his/her own values, but how far is he/she certain about his/her freedom? As we see the problem of certainty gives birth to the conflict for recognition. And then recognition, in human history, has not been obtained without struggle, because both adversaries have claimed equal demands. One of the major clues in understanding this problem is Hegel's category of Being for-self, used to define Consciousness.<sup>12</sup> Since human beings are being-for-self, or self-determined, then, they are free. Actual freedom is grounded on certainty and certainty is possible only by the recognition or negation of the other as an

external threat. Consequently, subjugation of one desire by another, becomes the negation of external conditions as obstacles for one's own freedom. When the other is subjugated there will be no more fear or trembling, because the other does not stand as a threat to our freedom. What Hegel has explained in the *Phenomenology* is a historical phenomenon. His views are descriptive as well as critical. He attempts to clarify the contradictions in every stage throughout history and reaches new stages where the contradictions are superseded and new ones are born. The fight to death is dialectical like all other historical stages. The recognised-desire, which becomes the master at the end of the battle, sublates all contradictions with the recognising-desire (the slave) by making it dependent and therefore deprived of freedom.

Just what are the interpersonal relationships between these two types of desire at the end of this fight? But before discussing this point it should be noted that the existence of the 'Other' in Hegel's philosophy is a necessary condition for the self-realisation of every individual: I become fully aware of myself and can be certain that my freedom is objective only when the other recognises my freedom. Consequently, the absence of the other brings uncertainty to me about my freedom. The master, as we have seen, does not kill the slave but keeps him/her as a mediator between Being and himself. And this mediation is created by the slave through his labour. The slave becomes the power of negativity in the labour which transforms Being into a world desired by the master and for the master. Everything in the life of a master is the product of slave's labour, but nothing is owned by a slave.

According to Hegel, fight to death has created two unequal antagonistic classes in history. The master (the recognised desire) becomes idle and does not work but owns everything, the slave on the other hand, does everything but owns nothing. The alienation of the slave from the product of labour is an historical phenomenon and is rooted in the fight for recognition. This concept of alienation has become a foundation stone for Marx's interpretation of capitalism and his theory of surplus value. Alienation, for Marx, is also a social phenomenon and the main characteristic of a society predicated on class, particularly capitalism. And hence it can be eliminated by the abolition of the class system.



The recognition of the master by the slave enables the master to self-consciously acknowledge his objective freedom. But such a claim is incorrect and freedom becomes an illusion for the master for five reasons;

First :

The master needs the slave for recognition. That is what objective certainty means here. But this recognition is not reciprocal, as the master is recognised by someone whom he does not recognise, thus recognition from one side is not sufficient.<sup>14</sup> The master wants to act as a self-conscious being by directing desire towards another self-conscious being. But the case here is completely different. The slave is not considered by the master to be a self-conscious being and is reduced to thing hood. The desire of the master is now, directed towards an object and s/he is recognised by an object. The master is wrong in thinking that s/he is recognised by another self-conscious being. His objective certainty is not confirmed and he never gets satisfaction by being recognised by a slave.

Second :

There is no master without a slave. A person becomes a master only when he is recognised by a slave. Accordingly, the master depends on the slave to become a master. That may be called formal dependence.

Third :

On the other hand, the master depends upon the slave materially. His life and enjoyment are totally bound by the products of the slave. Whatever he possesses is produced by the slave. The master therefore, is not an independent being, but dependent on the slave formally as well as materially.

Fourth :

We have mentioned before that the master is idle, his relation to Being is mediated by the labour of the slave. The slave, on the contrary, is active and has direct relation with Being. The relationship of the slave with Being is dialectical, because Being is negated and transformed by his/her labour. The main force behind the negation of Being is the slave and not the master. It is true that the slave works for the master, but projects him/her self in the work and transcends the given reality.

Fifth :

Human beings become self-conscious through Desire and become slaves due to the fear of death or the apprehension of Nothingness. Death is a necessary condition for the revelation of one's existence or one's authenticity. If we agree with Heidegger, it is the slave and not the master who realises him/her self as nothingness and becomes self-conscious through the realisation of death. Nothingness and labour bring back the slave into him/her self. It is here, in this regard, Hegel considers the slave to be the agent of social revolution.

According to Hegel, the terror of death has played its role twice in human history. In the first instance, terror gave rise to the institution of slavery and in the second case, it became the foundation for religion.<sup>15</sup> We are not mistaken if we say that Hegel's view on the role of fear in 'Unhappy Consciousness' resembles Freud's interpretation of religion. A religious slave is incapable of solving social contradictions and accepts a new subordination; submission to a metaphysical master. In both cases, historical as well as metaphysical, the slave attempts to escape the reality of death. The contradictions in religion are between eternity and temporality and these contradictions are superseded in the personality of Christ. Let us say that Christianity has given a solution and has superseded the contradictions between the infinite and the finite beings. Then what is the solution for historical slavery? or how are we to reconcile Mastery with Slavery?

Hegel answers this question by giving us evidence and facts from history when the Roman Emperor accepted Slave ideology and became a Christian. As Hegel says, the war among the states results in the stimulation of the weaker ones by the stronger ones. The strongest among them will be able to survive and expand their power beyond current territory and becomes an Empire. The citizens of the Empire (not the slaves) will no longer be obsessed by the notion of war as all external threats vanish. The Empire, in this case, intends to arrange mercenaries to protect itself. Hence, the master does not claim superiority over the slave. Superiority of the master is given in war for recognition, but there is no more war and the master becomes a peace-loving master. In this way, there will be no distinction between the master and the slave, neither of them risk life in a new fight for recognition, and the master has no hesitation to accept slave's ideology.<sup>16</sup> A Christian master is without a slave, and a Christian slave is without

a master. But there is no master without a slave and no slave without a master, for this reason, they are pseudo-master and pseudo slave. The master without slave is what Hegel calls the Bourgeois, the business man in a new form of community. A bourgeois is a master in the sense that he does not work under compulsion for others and owns private property. But since he does not possess any slave and does not risk life in a fight for recognition, then he is not a real master. On the other hand a bourgeois, like a slave is determined by animal desire and works for capital. Again, one can say that the freedom of the bourgeois master is an illusion, because s/he works for property and becomes the slave of capital.<sup>17</sup> The acceptance of the reality of death and the risking of life is the only way of self-emancipation from slavery. The moment the slave realises this and is ready for a new fight the possibilities of socio- historical mobilisation arise in the life of community. According to Hegel, the realisation of death took place and was secularised among the intellectuals in the French revolution and finally human history was completed by the revealed God manifested in Napoleon, who consolidated a new form of society on the principle of reason where a social order is built on the rational autonomy of the individual. Human history reached its final stage of culmination and self-Consciousness, and obtained absolute knowledge because all distinctions between Consciousness and Being were abolished and unification was accomplished and that was the end of history. The French Revolution, however, disappointed Hegel at the end. The downfall of this revolution was in its failure to do away with dispotism and a self- destructive freedom. Individuals carried out terror against the state and the power of the state was subordinated by the power of individuals. The state, by contrast, as a universal form of "World-Spirit" must be superior to the power of individuals and the individuals must bear the relation of duty to the state.

#### NOTES

1. Hegel. G. W. F. *The Phenomenology of Mind*. translated by J. B. Baillie. New York: Harper & Row publishers. 1967. p. 800.
2. Hegel. *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences. Part One. Foreworded by J. N. Findlay*. London : Oxford University Press. 1985. p. 141.
3. Soll, Ivan. *An Introduction of Hegel's Metaphysics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1969. p. 6.

4. Marx, Karl. *Capital*. Moscow: Progressive Publisher. 1974. p. 71.
5. Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Mind*. p. 173.
6. Findlay. *Hegel : A Re-examination*. London : George Allen and Unwin. 1958. p. 94.
7. Hegel. *Philosophy of Right*. translated by T. M. Knox. Oxford University Press. 1971. pp. 37-40.
8. Soll. Ivan. *op.cit.*, p. 20.
9. Kaufmann, Walter. *Hegel : Reinterpretation*. New York : Garden City. 1965. p. 153.
10. Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Mind*. p. 229.
11. Hegel. *Encyclopedia*. p. 141.
12. Hegel. *The Phenomenology*. p. 233.
13. Kojève, Alexander. *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press. 1980. p. 19.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
15. Hegel considers Christianity to be slave ideology in the *Phenomenology*, but he contradicts himself in the *Encyclopedia* where he says'', the real ground why there are no more slaves is Christian Europe is only to be found in the very principle of Christianity itself, the religion of absolute freedom. Only in Christendom man is respected as man, in his infinitude and universality. (see: *Encyclopedia. Zusatze*, p. 227)
16. Kojève. *op.cit.*, p. 65.