The Realm of Culture and the Historical Process in which the Proletarian Becomes Self-Aware

Introduction

Although both proletarian self-consciousness and stoic consciousness can be called ideological, because they regard themselves to be autonomous and do not realize that their position is conditioned by historical circumstances, the distinction between the Hegelian and the Marxist project nevertheless comes sharply into focus if the question is raised as to how this ideological alienation can be overcome. Stoic consciousness is not a historical consciousness, but rather a theoretical construction. It is true that it is linked to historical conditions, but in a different sense to proletarian self-consciousness. In the case of stoicism, the historical conditions mean that consciousness is anchored in a culture: the concepts of stoic consciousness are mediated through labor. At this stage, though, it is only important to note that stoic consciousness has a cultural dimension. It is of central importance, however, that this consciousness is constructed in such a way so as to conceive of the reality of pure self-consciousness as a corporeal self-consciousness. Therefore, stoic consciousness is measured by a pure, supra-historical criterion: universal human freedom. As long as this universal freedom is not adequately realized, the project of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is not finished and the observed consciousness remains alienated. This is especially valid for stoic consciousness: for this self-consciousness the lord (the representation of pure self-consciousness) is not pure, but coincides with a specific culture (although the stoic consciousness itself is not aware of this concurrence). From this, Hegel can borrow the criteria for the further development of consciousness, leading to the sublation of alienation. The proletarian self-consciousness introduced by Marx, however, is thoroughly historical: it is Marx’s interpretation of the person who participates in the free market.

Proletarian self-consciousness cannot be measured by the supra-historical criterion of pure self-consciousness, of universal freedom or fundamental human autonomy. After all, Marx understands this autonomy as ideological. He thinks that pure freedom has to be revealed as an ideological abstraction, as the repression of natural life. Proletarian self-consciousness is completely alienated. The proletarian is completely reduced to a thing. This position evokes many questions. How can alienation ever be overcome if a position of total
alienation is the starting point? If human history is understood as the history of the ongoing division of labor, what meaning does it have to speak about human history beyond the highest stage of labor division—the separation of manual and intellectual labor? Is Marx’s criterion for alienation itself not elevated above historical development? I will return to all of these questions in the next chapter, in which the relation between Marx and Hegel is evaluated. In this chapter, I will make a case for the fact that, despite some discrepancies, Marx was nonetheless also inspired in the development of his theory of revolution by the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and particularly by the development of the *Realm of Culture*.

The Development in the Phenomenology of Spirit and European History

Although the forms of consciousness discussed in the *Self-Consciousness* chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* are obviously not historical forms, this does not mean that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* does not refer to historical relations at all. This is already clear as a result of the use of the term ‘stoic consciousness’: Hegel of course refers with this term to historical forms of stoicism. Therefore, historical references can be helpful in illustrating what is meant by some logically constructed forms of consciousness. However, the reference to historical relations acquires a more fundamental meaning when the transition is made to the *Spirit* chapter. In this chapter, Hegel offers a reconstruction of Greek/Roman Antiquity, of the Middle-Ages and of Modernity.\(^\text{56}\)

It is not difficult to understand why Hegel has to make a transition into a development which refers to real historical societies. We have investigated the manner in which Hegel develops the necessary conditions under which the unity of mind and body can be conceptualized. Hegel has explained how this unity has to be understood as the unity of consciousness and self-consciousness. He formulated the basic model of this unity as the lord/bondsman relation. The unity of mind and body presupposes a social organism and a social law which is observed by the human being in his role as bondsman. The concrete meaning of this role as bondsman can only become clear if it is possible to determine the content of social law. The content of the law, however, cannot necessarily be developed by Hegel. After all, the human being as bondsman is a self-conscious being. Therefore, he must self-consciously determine social law and not allow it to be prescribed by a philosopher. The