

3 day midnight, 10/28/58

Dear JB:

That interesting chat with you and the right of way to Hegel made me too impatient to wait for Friday and home and I ran to the PHENOMENOLOGY OF MIND instead. Here, first, are the parts from "Spirit in Self-Estrangement--the Discipline of Culture" which I thought might be of value to you in the analysis of certain personalities in Vietnam, which Hegel characterized as "The Noble Type of Consciousness": (p.526)

"The noble type of consciousness, then, finds itself in the judgment related to state-power in the sense that this power is indeed not a self as yet but at first is universal substance, in which, however, this form of mind feels its own essential nature to exist, is conscious of its own purpose and absolute content. By taking up a positive relation to this substance, it assumes a negative attitude toward its particular content and individual existence, and let them disappear. THIS TYPE OF MIND IS THE HEROISM OF SERVICE; (my emphasis, rd) the virtue which sacrifices individual being to the universal and thereby brings this into existence; the type of personality which of itself renounces possession and enjoyment, acts for the sake of the prevailing power, and in this way becomes a concrete reality... The result of this action, binding the essential reality and self indissolubly together, is to produce a 2-fold actuality--a self that is truly actualized, and a state-power whose authority is accepted as true."

p.528: "Such a type is the shughty vassal; he is active in the interests of the state-power."

p.529: "This estrangement, however, takes place in language, in words alone, and language here assumed its peculiar role... it is the power of utterance qua utterance which, just in speaking, performs what has to be performed... Speech, however, contains this ego in its purity; it alone expresses I, I itself."

p.541: "This type of spiritual life is the ABSOLUTE AND UNIVERSAL INVERSION OF REALITY AND THOUGHT, THEIR ENTIRE ESTRANGEMENT THE ONE FROM THE OTHER; IT IS PURE CULTURE. (my emphasis, rd) What is found out in this sphere is that neither the concrete realities, state power and wealth, nor the determinate concepts, good and bad, nor the consciousness of good and bad (the consciousness that is noble and the consciousness that is base) possesses real truth; it is found that all these elements are inverted and transmuted the one into the other, and each is the opposite of itself."

Now, JB, when Hegel begins to find the opposite also within the Noble Consciousness, he is ready to move from Spirit in Self-Estrangement to the "truly new social order" if I may dare call his unity of human and divine in the Absolute Idea that, and of course neither in Viet Nam nor in China or Burma which interested me have they gone beyond the first sentence of that last paragraph on "pure culture." Rather it is more still in what Hegel calls "Evil and Forgiveness" after which he passes on to religion and works of art, citing the witches scene in MACBETH of irreconcilable promises to Macbeth and Macduff; "Double-tongued equivocal character of what they have out as certainty." (How that Hegel could write!)

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To return to the "Noble Consciousness", you know that I give the following rough divisions to Hegel's nomenclature; "Consciousness" is, more or less equivalent to the first stage of development of an individual and that of the first period of civilisation--slavery; "Self-Consciousness", the equivalent to feudalism--that's where that remarkable passage on "Lordship and Bondage" where the serf first gets "a mind of his own" as against the sort of luxuriating self-hypnosis and smug satisfaction of the lord. "Reason" is the stage of capitalism--it is where he treats of the French Revolution; "Absolute Freedom and Absolute Terror", and where "the Unhappy Consciousness or Alienated Soul" (that I'm always having fun in when I analyze the modern radical who cannot find his place inside or outside the bourgeois fold) is transformed into "The Law of the Heart and the Frenzy of Self-conceit." Now I generally here think of the labor bureaucrat who has sacrificed his "whole life" and yet remains unappreciated by the masses. But you may here see other parallels, so I'll quote the section from p.397:

"The heart-throb for the welfare of mankind passes therefore into the rage of frantic self-conceit, into fury of consciousness to preserve itself from destruction; and to do so by casting out of its life the perversion which it really is, and by straining to regard and to express that perversion as something else."

It is this "Law of the Heart and Frenzy of Self-Conceit" which becomes transformed, in the next stage of development and alienation--spirit or the equivalent roughly to the new society that is about to be built but has still to go through purgatory before reaching Absolute. So that (p.511) "The equilibrium of the whole is not the unity which abides by itself, nor its inwardly secured tranquility, but rests on the estrangement of its opposite. The whole is therefore, like each single moment, a self-estranged reality." (p.513; "The sphere of spirits at this stage breaks up into two regions. The one is the actual world, that of self-estrangement, and the other is that which spirit constructs for itself in the ether of pure consciousness, raising itself above the first. The second world, being constructed in opposition and contrast to that estrangement, is just on that account not free from it." And here follows all that I began with on the previous page.

If you had given me more than a minute's encouragement to talk on Hegel, can you imagine for how many more pages I would have raved on! So seldom people let me talk about this most contemporary philosopher, dismissing his profundities as "gibberish" and their gibberish as rhetoric. Ah, well, I can't go on & on, but if ever you come to Detroit and I have a whole evening, Lord preserve you, do please let us know if you come to Ann Arbor --it's only an hour from Detroit and my husband and I would be happy to drive out for you and bring you to Detroit.

*Your friend,  
Yours truly,  
[Signature]*