

G.W.F. HEGEL: “Freedom of Self-Consciousness: Stoicism,” from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Chapter IV, B (1807).

Translated by KENLEY R. DOVE

The Philosophical Forum, Volume 37, Issue 3, Fall 2006, Pages 318–320.

G.W.F. HEGEL: “FREEDOM OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS: STOICISM”
FROM THE *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*, CHAPTER IV, B (1807)
TRANSLATED BY KENLEY R. DOVE

[197]* To the independent self-consciousness [lordship] its essence is on the one hand merely the pure abstraction of *the I* and on the other—since it develops and differentiates itself—this differentiation does not become to it an objectlike essence existing *in itself*; hence this self-consciousness does not become an I that is truly differentiated in its simplicity or an I that remains the same in this absolute differentiation. By contrast, the self-suppressed consciousness [servitude] in its formative activity [or making] comes to have the form of the crafted thing as its object, and in the lord it also sees what is for-it as a consciousness. But to the servile consciousness as such these two moments—*its self* as independent object, and this object as a consciousness that is thereby of its own essence—are bifurcated. But since the *form* and *for-itself-ness* are the same *for us* or *in themselves*, and consciousness is the *in-itself-ness* in the concept of the independent consciousness, the aspect of *in-itself-ness* or *thingliness*, which form attains in work, is the same substance as consciousness, and a *Gestalt* of self-consciousness has emerged that is new to us; a consciousness to which the essence is itself as infinity, or the pure movement of consciousness; a consciousness that *thinks*, which is a free self-consciousness. For the I that is properly said *to think* does not do so as an *abstract I* but as an I which at once signifies *in-itself-ness*, is its object, or so relates to the objectlike essence that it signifies the *for-itself-ness* of the consciousness for which it is.—The object to *thinking* does not move in representations or shapes but in *concepts*, that is, in a differentiated *in-itself-ness* which is, for consciousness, at the same time undifferentiated from it. What is *represented, shaped, entity*, as such, has the form of being something other than consciousness; but a concept is at once an *entity*—and this difference, so far as it is in the concept, is its determinate content—but because this content is at once something conceptualized, it remains *immediately* conscious of its unity with this determinate and differentiated entity; not as with a representation, whereby it must make a special effort to remember that the representation is *its* representation; instead the concept is to me immediately *my* concept. In thinking I *am free*, because I am not in an other, but remain straightaway by my self, and the object, which is the essence to me, is, in undivided unity, my *for-itself-ness*; when I move in concepts I move in myself.—In the determination of this *Gestalt* of self-consciousness it is essential to remember that it is *thinking* consciousness *in general*, or that its object is an *immediate* unity of *in-itself-ness* and *for-itself-ness*. The consciousness so called, which takes off from itself, becomes to itself an *element* that is *in itself*; but it is at first this element to itself as a universal essence in general, not this objectlike essence in the development and movement of its manifold being.

[198] This freedom of self-consciousness, since it has made its appearance in the history of spirit as a known phenomenon, is well known as *Stoicism*. Its principle is that consciousness is a thinking being and that something only matters for it, or is true and good, so far as consciousness relates to it as a thinking being.

* Bracketed numbers [197–201] refer to the corresponding paragraphs in the Miller and Pinkard translations.

[199] Life in its many-sided self-differentiating propagation, individuation, and complication is the object with which desire and work are engaged. This many-sided business has now been drawn into a simple differentiation, which is to be found in the pure movement of thought. What matters now is no longer the difference that might be posited by its *own* or an *alien consciousness* as a *definite thing* or as a *consciousness of a definite natural existence* [*Dasein*], as a feeling, or as a *desire* and *purpose for the same*, it is rather only the difference, which is *thought*, or not simply differentiated by me. This consciousness is accordingly negative vis-à-vis the relationship of lordship and servitude; it is its business neither, as in lordship, to have its truth in the servant nor, as in servitude, to have its truth in the will of the lord and in service to him, but rather, whether on the throne or in chains, to be free however dependent its individual condition of existence might be, and to *withdraw* into a sustaining lifelessness that keeps it from the perpetual motion of existence and from action and passion, and keeps it in *the simple essentiality of thought*. Stubbornness is the freedom that fastens onto a single task and remains *within* servitude; Stoicism, on the other hand, is the freedom that directly returns from the state of servitude into the *pure universality* of thought; it comes on the scene as a universal form of the world spirit only in a period of universal fear and servility which is also a period of universal culture, when cultivation has risen to the level of thought.

[200] Now whether the essence to this self-consciousness is neither other than it nor the pure abstraction of the I, but rather an I that implicates otherness, as a thought difference, still, this its essence is an *abstract* essence. The freedom of self-consciousness is *indifferent* vis-à-vis natural existence, which *it accordingly freely lets go*, and the reflection is *doubled*. Freedom in thought has only *pure thoughts* for its truth, which is without the fullness of life; and it is also merely the concept of freedom, not living freedom itself; for to it the essence is merely *thinking* in general, the form as such, which has retreated into itself from the independence of things. But because individuality as acting presents itself as living, or because it, as living, should grasp the living world as a system of thought, there would have to be a *content* of what is good for this individuality, and of what is true in *thought itself* for that propagation; that is why there would be *throughout* no other ingredient than the concept, which is the essence, in whatever *is for consciousness*. Still, as the concept separates itself as an *abstraction* from the manifold of things, it has *no content inherent in itself*, but rather a *given* content. Consciousness indeed cancels content as an alien *being*, because it thinks this content; but the concept is a *determinate* concept, and this its *determinacy* is what is alien, which is ingredient in it. That is why Stoicism proverbially lands in perplexity whenever it was asked for its *criterion* of truth, i.e., for a *content* of *thought itself*. To the question, *what* is good and true, it time and again gave *empty* thought as its answer; the true and good should consist in rationality. But this consistency of thinking is just the same pure form all over again, which determines nothing; generalizing words about the true and good, about wisdom and virtue, which are as far as it can go, may well be generally edifying, but because they can lead in fact to nothing but contentless comments, soon produce boredom.

[201] This thinking consciousness, determining itself as abstract freedom, is merely an incomplete negation of otherness; by *retreating* from existence merely into itself, it has brought off nothing by way of an absolute negation of the existence ingredient in itself. To be sure, content counts to it merely as thought, but also as *determinate* thought, together with determinateness as such.

Venice