Introductory Seminar to Hegel 13/13
October 8, 2025

Steve Bannon: "I am a Leninist."

Interviewer: "What on earth do you mean?"

Steve Bannon: "Lenin wanted to destroy the state and that's my goal too. I want to bring everything crashing down and destroy all of today's establishment."

— Steve Bannon, interview with Ronald Radosh (2016)

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Extract from "Colliding Theory and Praxis," in Harcourt, *Critique & Praxis*

In the early 1970s, Michel Foucault took part in a prison resistance movement and worked with others to organize the GIP. The form that Foucault's political action took was the direct product of his confronting critical praxis with critical theory. At the same time, his critical praxis would fundamentally confront and reshape his philosophical work.

The *Prisons Information Group* ("GIP") was imagined in direct opposition to popular tribunals, in part (at least for Foucault) as a result of his theoretical work in *The Archeology of Knowledge*. To see this, one need only examine the following three dimensions of the GIP.

First, by contrast to alternative forms of engagement, such as a formal commission of inquiry or a popular tribunal (originally proposed and extensively debated with other Maoists), the GIP was organized so as to allow incarcerated persons to be heard—rather than be spoken for. This involved a number of subelements, including:

- *The (relative) anonymity of the organizers*: Rather than have a named and appointed spokesperson, along the model of Sartre as prosecutor and judge of a popular tribunal, the effort went toward diffusing authority and avoiding designated speakers. Still today, few of the central figures are known—Danièle Rancière, Christine Martineau, Jacques Donzelot, and Jean-Claude Passeron would all be participants, working on the original survey, but they remain somewhat anonymous. Domenach, Foucault, and Vidal-Naquet signed the original manifesto, but practically all the other communiqués were unnamed, signed generically by the GIP.
- *The leaderlessness of the organization*: Insofar as the objective was to make it possible to hear the incarcerated persons and their families, rather than to speak on their behalf, there was a concerted effort not to identify or allow leadership positions within the GIP.
- *The choice not to say what to do, but to allow the voices of the prisoners to be heard*: As the GIP manifesto declared, "It is not for us to suggest reform. We merely wish to know the reality. And to make it known almost immediately, almost overnight, because time is short." The effort throughout was "about letting speak those who have an experience of prison."

Second, by contrast to the original impetus of the *Gauche prolétarienne*, the GIP challenged the distinction between political and common-law prisoners. Whereas at first the Maoist militants attempted to obtain political prisoner status for their colleagues, the GIP took the position that *all* prisoners were political prisoners: that the prison and the penal system were political institutions. This confrontation also was in continuity with Foucault's critical theory of penal law. It intersected with his 1972 lectures, *Penal Theories and Institutions*, where Foucault had developed a political theory of penal law. One can see how this affected the praxis of the GIP from the initial manifesto onward, where the object of the political intervention became the prison *tout court*, not the detention of militants only, or of political prisoners.

Finally, the GIP intervention ended at the moment of the creation of an autonomous—actually the first—organization of and for prisoners, the *Comité d'action des prisonniers* (CAP). The central mission of the GIP (namely, creating the conditions of possibility so that the voices of the incarcerated could be heard) was achieved when the prisoners formed their own association—thereby triggering, with elegance, the dissolution of the GIP.

In this sense, the unique praxis of the GIP emerged from the conflict of earlier practices with discourse analysis, more specifically with Foucault's writings ranging from the *History of*

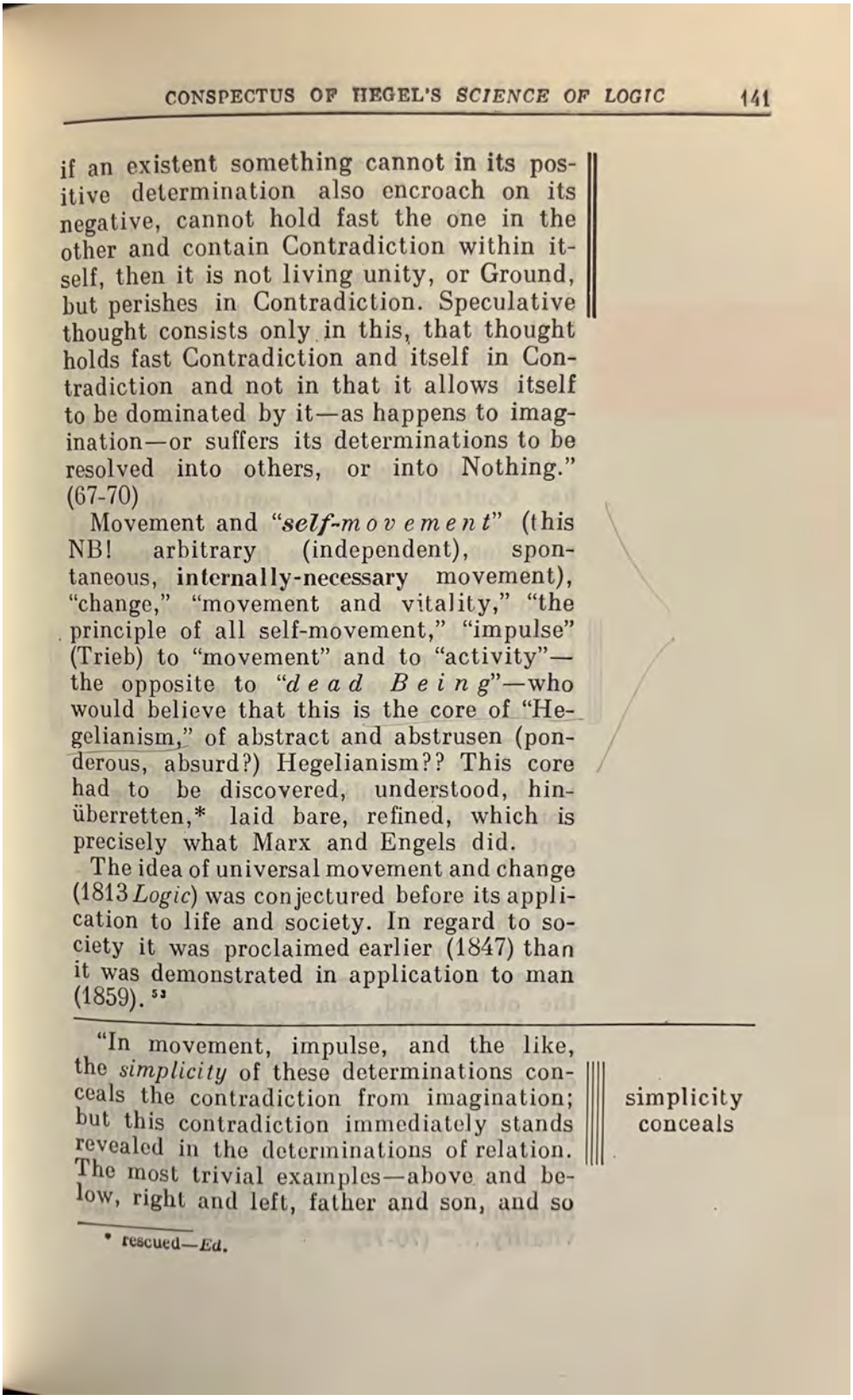
Madness to *The Archaeology of Knowledge* to *The Order of Discourse*. As Foucault himself confided to Daniel Defert, his involvement in the GIP was, in his words, "*dans le droit fil de l'Histoire de la folie*" ("in a straight line emanating from *The History of Madness*").

The feedback loop was also remarkable. Foucault's political praxis pushed his theoretical reflections toward both the idea of a "political economy of the body" and the need to supplement the archaeological approach with a more genealogical analysis of power. In effect, Foucault's theoretical work in the early 1970s informed his political engagement, but reciprocally, his political praxis reshaped his theoretical writings. Foucault's practical engagements reshaped his thinking and significantly influenced the writing of his book on prisons, *Discipline and Punish* (1975)—which Foucault himself explicitly recognized in the work itself. You will recall the telling passage in *Discipline and Punish,* cited earlier, where Foucault writes: "That punishment in general and the prison in particular belong to a political technology of the body is a lesson that I have learnt not so much from history as from the present. In recent years, prison revolts have occurred throughout the world."

The creative tension and effect of praxis on theory operated on a number of levels. First, Foucault's practical engagements helped refocus his theoretical analysis on the materiality and the bodies of the prisoners—the bodies that form both the locus of punishment and the source of resistance. What *Discipline and Punish* succeeds in doing is to augment the traditional Marxian political economy with what Foucault referred to expressly as "a political economy of the body." Second, the GIP engagement helped refocus his analysis of the relationship between juridical forms and truth—which was the very project he set for himself at the Collège—on the juridical form of *imprisonment* that is tied inextricably to the form of *examination*. Third, it revealed to Foucault that his archeological approach was not entirely sufficient for the task he had set for himself, and a genealogical method was necessary. The firsthand experience of the prison and witnessing of the routinized, homogenous uniformity of isolated confinement, intolerable prison conditions, and the day-in-and-day-out repetitiveness and recurrence of prison life manifested to Foucault the difference from the ideals of the prison reformers of the eighteenth century, thereby revealing to him that an archaeological approach alone was insufficient, and a genealogical method was necessary. Archeology would have entailed the derivation of the prison from the theories of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reformers. Foucault discovered that that was impossible, and instead he had to seek its development in a genealogy of morals. You can hear this first in 1973, in his lectures on *The Punitive Society,* where you get a clear turn to the penitential; and of course, we received the full articulation in 1975.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, the GIP engagements turned Foucault's attention to the productive aspects of penality. Right after he visited Attica Prison in New York State in April 1972—his first direct access to a prison, an experience which he describes as "overwhelming"—Foucault shifted the focus of his analysis. Upset and "undermined" by this visit, Foucault began an analytical transition towards the "positive functions" of the penal system: "the question that I ask myself now is the reverse," he explained at the time. "The problem is, then, to find out what role capitalist society has its penal system play, what is the aim that is sought, and what effects are produced by all these procedures for punishment and exclusion? What is their place in the economic process, what is their importance in the exercise and the maintenance of power? What is their role in the class struggle?" […]

Lenin, *Conspectus of Hegel's Science of Logic (1914-1915)*



if an existent something cannot in its positive determination also encroach on its negative, cannot hold fast the one in the other and contain Contradiction within itself, then it is not living unity, or Ground, but perishes in Contradiction. Speculative thought consists only in this, that thought holds fast Contradiction and itself in Contradiction and not in that it allows itself to be dominated by it—as happens to imagination—or suffers its determinations to be resolved into others, or into Nothing." (67-70)

Movement and "***self-movement***" (this NB! arbitrary (independent), spontaneous, **internally-necessary** movement), "change," "movement and vitality," "the principle of all self-movement," "impulse" (Trieb) to "movement" and to "activity"—the opposite to "*dead Being*"—who would believe that this is the core of "Hegelianism," of abstract and abstrusen (ponderous, absurd?) Hegelianism?? This core had to be discovered, understood, hinüberretten,* laid bare, refined, which is precisely what Marx and Engels did.

The idea of universal movement and change (1813 *Logic*) was conjectured before its application to life and society. In regard to society it was proclaimed earlier (1847) than it was demonstrated in application to man (1859).[53]

"In movement, impulse, and the like, the *simplicity* of these determinations conceals the contradiction from imagination; but this contradiction immediately stands revealed in the determinations of relation. The most trivial examples—above and below, right and left, father and son, and so

simplicity conceals

* rescued—*Ed.*

Lenin, *On the Question of Dialectics* (1915)

The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts (see the quotation from Philo on Heraclitus at the beginning of Section III, "On Cognition," in Lasalle's book on Heraclitus) is the *essence* (one of the "essentials," one of the principal, if not the principal, characteristics or features) of dialectics. That is precisely how Hegel, too, puts the matter (Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* continually *grapples* with it and *combats* Heraclitus and Heraclitean ideas).

The correctness of this aspect of the content of dialectics must be tested by the history of science. This aspect of dialectics (e.g. in Plekhanov) usually receives inadequate attention: the identity of opposites is taken as the sum-total of *examples* ["for example, a seed," "for example, primitive communism." The same is true of Engels. But it is "in the interests of popularisation..."] and not as a *law of cognition* (and as a law of the objective world).

> In mathematics: + and —. Differential and integral.
> In mechanics: action and reaction.
> In physics: positive and negative electricity.
> In chemistry: the combination and dissociation of atoms.
> In social science: the class struggle.

The identity of opposites (it would be more correct, perhaps, to say their "unity,"—although the difference between the terms identity and unity is not particularly important here. In a certain sense both are correct) is the recognition (discovery) of the contradictory, *mutually exclusive*, opposite tendencies in *all* phenomena and processes of nature (*including* mind and society). The condition for the knowledge of all processes of the world in their "*self-movement,*" in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites. Development is the "struggle" of opposites. The two basic (or two possible? Or two historically observable?) conceptions of development (evolution) are: development as decrease and increase, as repetition, *and* development as a unity of opposites (the division of a unity into mutually exclusive opposites and their reciprocal relation).

In the first conception of motion, *self* - movement, its *driving* force, its source, its motive, remains in the shade (or this source is made *external*—God, subject, etc.). In the second conception the chief attention is directed precisely to knowledge of the source of *"self"* - movement.

The first conception is lifeless, pale and dry. The second is living. The second *alone* furnishes the key to the "self-movement" of everything existing; it alone furnishes the key to "leaps," to the "break in continuity," to the "transformation into the opposite," to the destruction of the old and the emergence of the new.

The unity (coincidence, identity, equal action) of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory, relative. The struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute, just as development and motion are absolute.

Lenin, *The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up* (1916)

The dialectics of history are such that small nations, powerless as an *independent* factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a *part* as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the *real* anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make its appearance on the scene.

[…] We would be very poor revolutionaries if, in the proletariat's great war of liberation for socialism, we did not know how to utilise *every* popular movement against *every single* disaster *imperialism* brings in order to intensify and extend the crisis.

[…] It is the misfortune of the Irish that they rose prematurely, before the European revolt of the proletariat had *had time* to mature. Capitalism is not so harmoniously built that the various sources of rebellion can immediately merge of their own accord, without reverses and defeats. On the other hand, the very fact that revolts do break out at different times, in different places, and are of different kinds, guarantees wide scope and depth to the general movement; but it is only in premature, individual, sporadic and therefore unsuccessful, revolutionary movements that the masses gain experience, acquire knowledge, gather strength, and get to know their real leaders, the socialist proletarians, and in this way prepare for the general onslaught, just as certain strikes, demonstrations, local and national, mutinies in the army, outbreaks among the peasantry, etc., prepared the way for the general onslaught in 1905.

Lenin, *State and Revolution* (1917)

In [*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*], Marxism takes a tremendous step forward compared with the *Communist Manifesto*. In the latter, the question of the state is still treated in an extremely abstract manner, in the most general terms and expressions. In [*The Eighteenth Brumaire*], the question is treated in a concrete manner, and the conclusion is extremely precise, definite, practical and palpable: all previous revolutions perfected the state machine, whereas it must be broken, smashed.

This conclusion is the chief and fundamental point in the Marxist theory of the state. And it is precisely this fundamental point which has been completely ignored by the dominant official Social-Democratic parties […]

The Communist Manifesto gives a general summary of history, which compels us to regard the state as the organ of class rule and leads us to the inevitable conclusion that the proletariat cannot overthrow the bourgeoisie without first winning political power, without attaining political supremacy, without transforming the state into the "proletariat organized as the ruling class"; and that this proletarian state will begin to wither away immediately after its victory because the state is unnecessary and cannot exist in a society in which there are no class antagonisms. The question as to how, from the point of view of historical development, the replacement of the bourgeois by the proletarian state is to take place is not raised here.

This is the question Marx raises and answers in 1852. True to his philosophy of dialectical materialism, Marx takes as his basis the historical experience of the great years of revolution, 1848 to 1851. Here, as everywhere else, his theory is a summing up of experience, illuminated by a profound philosophical conception of the world and a rich knowledge of history.

Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel and Haiti* (2000)

Why is ending the silence on Hegel and Haiti important? Given Hegel's ultimate concession to slavery's continuance—moreover, given the fact that Hegel's philosophy of history has provided for two centuries a justification for the most complacent forms of Eurocentrism (Hegel was perhaps always a cultural racist if not a biological one)—why is it of more than arcane interest to retrieve from oblivion this fragment of history, the truth of which has managed to slip away from us?

There are many possible answers, but one is surely the potential for rescuing the idea of universal human history from the uses to which white domination has put it. If the historical facts about freedom can be ripped out of the narratives told by the victors and salvaged for our own time, then the project of universal freedom does not need to be discarded but, rather, redeemed and reconstituted on a different basis. Hegel's moment of clarity of thought […] would need to be juxtaposed to the moments of clarity in action: the French soldiers sent by Napoleon to the colony who, upon hearing these former slaves singing the "Marseillaise," wondered aloud if they were not fighting on the wrong side; the Polish regiment under Leclerc's command who disobeyed orders and refused to drown six hundred captured Saint-Domiguans. There are many examples of such clarity, and they belong to no side, no one group exclusively. What if every time that the consciousness of individuals surpassed the confines of present constellations of power in perceiving the concrete meaning of freedom, *this* were valued as a moment, however transitory, of the realization of absolute spirit? What other silences would need to be broken? What *un*disciplined stories would be told?

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A note from Professor Stathis Gourgouris: ON THE HEGELIAN BIND

"Truly to escape Hegel involves an exact appreciation of the price we have to pay to detach ourselves from him. It assumes that we are aware of the extent to which Hegel, insidiously perhaps, is close to us; it implies a knowledge, in that which permits us to think against Hegel, of that which remains Hegelian. We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us."

> — Michel Foucault, *Discourse on Language, Inaugural Lecture at the Collège de France, 1970-1971.* tr. A. M. Sheridan Smith [1970]
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