Stubborn Attachment, Bodily Subjection

Rereading Hegel on the Unhappy Consciousness

a freedom still enmeshed in servitude
—Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*

The transition in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* from the section "Lordship and Bondage" to "The Freedom of Self-Consciousness: Stoicism, Skepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness"[1] is one of the least interrogated of Hegel's philosophical movements. Perhaps because the chapter on lordship and bondage secured a liberationist narrative for various progressive political visions, most readers have neglected to pay attention to the resolution of freedom into self-enslavement at the end of the chapter. Insofar as recent theory has called into question both the assumption of a progressive history and the status of the subject, the dystopic resolution of "Lordship and Bondage" has perhaps regained a timely significance.

Foucault suggested that the point of modern politics is no

longer to liberate a subject, but rather to interrogate the regulatory mechanisms through which "subjects" are produced and maintained. Although Foucault's vocabulary ought not to be conflated with Hegel's, his concern with the double-edged implications of subjection (*assujetissement:* the simultaneous *forming* and *regulating* of the subject) is in some ways prefigured in Hegel's account of the bondsman's liberation into various forms of ethical self-beratement. In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault limits the efficacy of prison reform: "the man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection [*assujettissement*] much more profound than himself."[2] The bondsman in Hegel throws off the apparently external "Lord" only to find himself in an ethical world, subjected to various norms and ideals. Or, to put it more precisely, the subject emerges as an unhappy consciousness through the reflexive application of these ethical laws.

The permutations of self-enslavement that Hegel describes appear to take the body as what must be negated, mortified, or subordinated to an ethical demand. The "terror" that seizes the bondsman with his recognition of freedom appears to culminate in the simultaneous fabrication of ethical norms and the beratement of the bodily condition of his own life. In this sense, "The Unhappy Consciousness" establishes a relation between self-enslavement as bodily subjection and the formulation of self-imposed ethical imperatives that prefigures Nietzsche's critique of the same in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and Foucault's appropriation of that critique. In the following citation from Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals,* one can discern a temporary convergence between the figures of self-enslavement in Hegel's "Unhappy Consciousness" and the moralized "man" of conscience in Nietzsche: "This *instinct for freedom* forcibly made latent . . . this instinct for freedom pushed back and re-

pressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself: that, and that alone, is what the *bad conscience* is in its beginnings."[3]

Underscoring the painful realization that "liberation" from external authorities does not suffice to initiate a subject into freedom, Foucault draws upon Nietzsche and, in particular, upon the self-incarcerating movement that structures modern forms of reflexivity. The limits to liberation are to be understood not merely as self-imposed but, more fundamentally, as the precondition of the subject's very formation. A certain structuring attachment *to* subjection becomes the condition of moral subjectivation. Consider the expanded text of Foucault's remarks on the prisoner's subjection, previously cited, in *Discipline and Punish*: "The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection [*assujettissement*] much more profound than himself. A 'soul' inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body."[4]

How precisely are we to read this "inhabiting" of the body by the soul? Can a return to Hegel help us to read it? What are the points of convergence and divergence in Hegel, Nietzsche, and Foucault on the structure of subjection? Hegel's account in "The Unhappy Consciousness" prefigures a critical discourse on ethical positions that not only seek to institute the denial or sacrifice of bodily life, but that fall into instructive paradoxes when they do. Hegel shows that if the suppression of the body requires an instrumental movement of and by the body, then the body is inadvertently *preserved* in and by the instrument of its suppression. This formulation prefigures the possibility of a convergence with Nietzschean, Foucaultian, and, as we shall

see, Freudian perspectives on self-abasement, which Hegel's text, in the transition to Spirit, forecloses. The reading that follows pursues the path that Hegel introduces only to foreclose. Arresting the text prior to its resolution into Spirit, this inquiry seeks to know whether a suppressed link with a Nietzschean and Freudian account of conscience is embedded in Hegel's chapter.

The first section of this essay offers a reading that accounts for how this paradox of bodily subjection is formulated in the transition from "Lordship and Bondage" to "The Unhappy Consciousness" in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the second section, I consider the restatements of that paradoxical formulation in psychoanalytic and Foucaultian terms. Without presuming a direct line of influence, I suggest both that Hegel's insights in "The Unhappy Consciousness" on the ineluctability of the attachment of and to the body in subjection are reiterated in Foucaultian frameworks, and that the Foucaultian account of subjection, despite its significant moves beyond dialectical logic, remains unwittingly tethered to the Hegelian formulation. Furthermore, Hegel tacitly presumes that subjection is understood as a self-negating *attachment* and, in this way, shares an operative assumption with the Freudian notion of libidinal investment.

Hegel and the Production of Self-Enslavement

In Hegel's *Phenomenology*, bodies are almost never to be found as objects of philosophical reflection, much less as sites of experience, for bodies are, in Hegel, always and only referred to indirectly as the encasement, location, or specificity of consciousness. By the time we arrive at the section on the unhappy consciousness, we, the readers, have already encoun-

tered the lord and the bondsman, and we have been given to understand these discrepant figures as differentially positioned with respect to bodily life. The bondsman appears as an instrumental body whose labor provides for the material conditions of the lord's existence, and whose material products reflect both the subordination of the bondsman and the domination of the master. In a sense, the lord postures as a disembodied desire for self-reflection, one who not only requires the subordination of the bondsman in the status of an instrumental body, but who requires in effect that the bondsman *be* the lord's body, but be it in such a way that the lord forgets or disavows his own activity in producing the bondsman, a production which we will call a projection.

This forgetting involves a clever trick. It is an action by which an activity is disavowed, yet, as an action, it rhetorically concedes the very activity that it seeks to negate. To disavow one's body, to render it "Other" and then to establish the "Other" as an effect of autonomy, is to produce one's body in such a way that the activity of its production—and its essential relation to the lord—is denied. This trick or ruse involves a double disavowal and an imperative that the "Other" become complicit with this disavowal. In order not to be the body that the lord presumably is, and in order to have the bondsman posture as if the body that he is belongs to himself—and not be the orchestrated projection of the lord—there must be a certain kind of exchange, a bargain or deal, in which ruses are enacted and transacted. In effect, the imperative to the bondsman consists in the following formulation: you be my body for me, but do not let me know that the body you are is my body. An injunction and contract are here performed in such a way that the moves which guarantee the fulfillment of the injunction and the contract are immediately covered over and forgotten.

At the close of the section on lordship and bondage, the bondsman labors away in a repetitive fashion on objects that belong to the lord. In this sense, both his labor and his products are presumed from the start to be other than his own, expropriated. They are given away prior to any possibility of giving them away, since they are, strictly speaking, never the bondsman's to give. And yet, this "contract" in which the bondsman substitutes himself for the lord becomes consequential; the substitution itself becomes formative of and for the bondsman. As the bondsman slaves away and becomes aware of his own signature on the things that he makes, he recognizes in the form of the artifact that he crafts the markings of his own labor, markings that are formative of the object itself. His labor produces a visible and legible set of marks in which the bondsman reads back from the object a confirmation of his own formative activity. This labor, this activity, which belongs from the start to the lord, is nevertheless reflected back to the bondsman as his own labor, a labor that emanates from him, even if it appears to emanate from the lord.

Can, then, the labor reflected back be said finally to be the bondsman's own? Remember that the lord has disavowed his own laboring being, his body as an instrument of labor, and has established the bondsman as the one who will occupy the lord's body for him. In this sense, the lord has contracted the bondsman as a surrogate or substitute. The bondsman thus belongs to the lord, but with a kind of belonging that cannot be avowed, for to avow the belonging would be to avow the substitution and, hence, to expose the lord as being the body which the lord apparently very much does not want to be. Hence, it is as a substitute in the service of disavowal that the bondsman labors; only by miming and covering over the mimetic status of that labor can the bondsman appear to be both

active and autonomous. Indeed, the object emerges as the objectification of the bondsman's labor, and thus as an instance of that labor, a congealing and reflection of that labor. But what, then, does the object reflect? Is it the autonomy of the bondsman? Or is it the dissimulated effect of autonomy that results from the contract made between lord and bondsman? In other words, if the bondsman effects autonomy through a miming of the lord's body, a miming which remains hidden from the lord, then the "autonomy" of the slave is the credible effect of this dissimulation. The object of labor thus reflects the autonomy of the bondsman to the extent that the object, too, covers over the dissimulation which is the activity of the bondsman. In his work, then, the bondsman discovers or reads his own signature, but what is it that marks that signature as his own? The bondsman discovers his autonomy, but he does not (yet) see that his autonomy is the dissimulated effect of the lord's. (Nor does he see that the lord's autonomy is itself a dissimulation: the lord effects the autonomy of disembodied reflection and delegates the autonomy of embodiment to the bondsman, thus producing two "autonomies" that appear at the outset radically to exclude one another.)

But here a question emerges: Does the bondsman's activity remain fully constrained by the dissimulation by which it is mobilized? Or does this dissimulation produce effects that exceed the control or dominion of the lord?

If the bondsman is to recognize the marks made on the object as his own, then that recognition must take place through an act of reading or interpretation by which the marks (*Zeichen*) that the bondsman sees are somehow understood to represent the bondsman. It is not that the activity must be witnessed, but that the *signs* produced must be read as an effect of the effectivity that designates the bondsman, must in some

way be understood to refer retroactively to the bondsman as signatory. If we are to understand the forming of the object as the inscribing of the bondsman's signature, the formative principle of the object *to be* the formation of his signature, then the bondsman's signature designates a domain of contested ownership. This is *his* mark, which he can read (we shall let the bondsman occupy the site of presumptive masculinity), and so the object appears to belong to him. Yet this object marked by him, which has his mark on it, belongs to the lord, at least nominally. The bondsman signs, as it were, for the lord, as a proxy signatory, as a delegated substitute. Thus the signature does not seal ownership of the object by the bondsman, but becomes the site for the redoubling of ownership and, hence, sets the stage for a scene of contestation.

The mark or sign on the object is not simply the property of the bondsman—this object with his mark on it implies for him that he is a being who marks things, whose activity produces a singular effect, a signature, which is irreducibly his. That signature is erased when the object is given over to the lord, who stamps it with *his* name, owns it, or consumes it in some way. The working of the slave is thus to be understood as a marking which regularly unmarks itself, a signatory act which puts itself under erasure at the moment in which it is circulated, for circulation here is always a matter of expropriation by the lord. The slave, of course, from the start has been working for another, under the name or sign of some other, and so has been marking the object with his own signature under a set of conditions in which that signature is always already erased, written over, expropriated, resignified. If the bondsman writes over the signatory of the lord, temporarily reversing the subordinate position of the proxy to the original, the lord reappropriates the object by writing over the sig-

nature of the bondsman. What emerges is less a palimpsestic object—like Kafka's topographies—than a mark of ownership produced through a set of consequential erasures.

Significantly, the bondsman nevertheless derives a sense of self-recognition at the end of the chapter, but not by reading back his signature from the object. After all, that signature has been written over by the signature of the lord. He recognizes himself in the very forfeiture of the signature, in the *threat to* autonomy that such an expropriation produces. Strangely, then, a certain self-recognition is derived from the radically tenuous status of the bondsman; it is achieved through the experience of *absolute fear*.

This fear is a fear *of* a certain loss of control, a certain transience and expropriability produced by the activity of labor. Here the logic of the bondsman's activity appears curiously to converge with that of the lord. Earlier it seemed that the lord occupied the place of pure consumption, appropriating and extinguishing all that the bondsman made. The bondsman, by contrast, achieved the experience of self-reflexivity through working on and creating an object that bore the marks of his being, and thereby understood himself as a being who forms or creates things which outlast him, a producer of permanent things. For the lord, occupying the position of pure consumption, objects were transitory, and he himself was defined as a series of transitory desires. For the lord, then, nothing seemed to last, except perhaps his own consuming activity, his own endless desire.

These two positions, however, are not radically opposed to one another, for each in a different way experiences only and always the loss of the object and, with that loss, the experience of a fearful transience. Work is, for Hegel, a form of desire, a form which ideally suppresses the transitory character of

desire; in his words, "work is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off" (118/153). To work on an object is to give it form, and to give it form is to give it an existence that overcomes transitoriness. The consumption of the object is the negation of that effect of permanence; the consumption of the object is its *de*formation. The accumulation of property, however, requires that formed objects be possessed rather than consumed; only as property do objects retain their form and "stave off fleetingness." Only as property do objects fulfill the theological promise with which they are invested.

The bondsman's fear, then, consists in the experience of having what appears to be his property expropriated. In the experience of giving up what he has made, the bondsman understands two issues: first, that what he is is embodied or signified in what he makes, and second, that what he makes is made under the compulsion to give it up. Hence, if the object defines him, reflects back what he is, is the signatory text by which he acquires a sense of who he is, and if those objects are relentlessly sacrificed, then he is a relentlessly self-sacrificing being. He can recognize his own signature only as what is constantly being erased, as a persistent site of vanishing. He has no control over what he puts his name to or over the purposes to which he seeks to fasten his name. His signature is an act of self-erasure: he reads that the signature is his, that his own existence appears to be irreducibly his own, that what is irreducibly his own is his own vanishing, and that this vanishing is effected by another—that is, that this is a socially compelled form of self-erasure. Not only does he labor for another, who takes the yield of his labor, but he gives up his signature for the signature of the other, no longer marking ownership of his own labor in any way.

This expropriation of the object does not negate the bondsman's sense of himself as a laboring being, but it does imply that whatever he makes, he also loses. The determinate thing that the bondsman makes reflects the bondsman himself as a determinate thing. But because the object is given away, he becomes that which can be forfeited. If the object is the congealing or forming of labor, and if the labor is that of the bondsman, then the determinate and transient character of the thing will imply the determinate and transient character of the bondsman. The laboring body which now knows itself to have formed the object also knows that it is *transient*. The bondsman not only negates things (in the sense of transforming them through labor) and is a negating activity, but he is subject to a full and final negation in death. This confrontation of death at the end of the chapter recalls the life-and-death struggle at its beginning. The strategy of domination was meant to replace the life-and-death struggle. But in the earlier version death happened through the violence of the other; domination was a way of forcing the other to die *within* the context of life. The failure of domination as a strategy *re*introduces the fear of death, but locates it as the inevitable fate of any being whose consciousness is determined and embodied, no longer as a threat posed by another. The bondsman verges on this shattering recognition of his own death in the last paragraph of the chapter, but he recoils from recognizing death, attaching himself instead to various attributes of his own, taking up a posture of smugness or stubbornness, clinging to what appears to be firm about himself, firmly clinging to himself, in order not to know that death threatens every aspect of his own firmness: "since the entire contents of its natural consciousness have not been jeopardized, [*Indem nicht alle Erfüllungen seines naturlichen*

Bewusstseins wankend geworden] determinate being still *in principle* attaches to it; having a mind of one's own is self-will, a freedom still enmeshed in servitude" (119/155).

The unhappy consciousness emerges here in the movement by which terror is allayed through a resolution of stubbornness or, rather, through the action by which terror of bodily death is displaced by a smugness and stubbornness that, in the next chapter, is revalued as religious self-righteousness. This sanctimonious self is not *without* terror: its reflexivity is self-terrorizing. The body which the bondsmen emblematized as a laboring instrument is recast at the end of the lordship and bondage chapter as a transient object, subject to death. The recognition of the body's death is averted, however, for a mode of living in which the body is ceaselessly dying away: hence, the move from the servitude of the bondsman to that of the unhappy consciousness. The bondsman takes the place of the lord by recognizing his own formative capacity, but once the lord is displaced, the bondsman becomes lord over himself, more specifically, lord over his own body; this form of reflexivity signals the passage from bondage to unhappy consciousness. It involves splitting the psyche into two parts, a lordship and a bondage internal to a single consciousness, whereby the body is again dissimulated as an alterity, but where this alterity is now interior to the psyche itself. No longer subjected as an external instrument of labor, the body is still split off from consciousness. Reconstituted as an interior alien, the body is sustained through its disavowal as what consciousness must continue to disavow.

What is the form that this self-subjection takes in the section on the unhappy consciousness? In the first instance, it is a form of stubbornness (*eigensinnigkeit*). It has a "mind of one's own" or "self-will," but one which is nevertheless still a form

of servitude. Consciousness clings or attaches to itself, and this clinging to consciousness is at the same time a disavowal of the body, which appears to signify the terror of death, "the absolute fear." The unhappy consciousness requires and engages this attachment by invoking an imperative. Its fear is allayed by legislating an ethical norm. Hence, the imperative to cling to oneself is motivated by this absolute fear and by the need to refuse that fear. Inasmuch as it is an *ethical* injunction, this imperative is the disarticulated refusal of absolute fear.

The section on the unhappy consciousness explains the genesis of the sphere of the ethical as a defense against the absolute fear by which it is motivated. The fabrication of norms out of (and against) fear, and the reflexive imposition of those norms, subjects the unhappy consciousness in a double sense: the subject is subordinated to norms, and the norms are subjectivating, that is, they give an ethical shape to the reflexivity of this emerging subject. The subjection that takes place under the sign of the ethical is a flight from fear, and so is constituted as a kind of flight and denial, a fearful flight from fear that covers its fear first with stubborness and then with religious self-righteousness. The more absolute the ethical imperative becomes, the more stubborn or *eigensinnig* the enforcement of its law, the more the absoluteness of the motivating fear is at once articulated and refused. Absolute fear is thus displaced by the absolute law which, paradoxically, reconstituted the fear as a fear *of* the law.

Absolute fear would jeopardize all determinate things, including the determinate thingness of the bondsman. The flight from that fear, a fear of death, vacates the thinglike character of the subject. This entails vacating the body and clinging to what appears to be most disembodied: thought. Hegel introduces stoicism as a kind of defensive clinging, one that separates

the activity of thinking from any content. For Hegel, stoicism withdraws into a subjective and rational existence that has as its highest aim the absolute withdrawal from existence per se, including its own. This task turns out to be self-refuting, of course, insofar as even self-refutation requires a persistent self to enact the withdrawal from its own and other existences. Because the conceptual act of negation always presupposes a position from which that negation takes place, stoicism ends up underscoring the very positivity of the self that it sought to deny. Skepticism follows upon stoicism for Hegel because skepticism begins by presupposing the insuperability of the thinking subject. For skepticism, the self is a perpetually negating activity, actively refuting the existence of everything as its own constitutive activity.

Skepticism negates the domain of alterity by trying to show that any given determination of logical necessity turns into its opposite and, hence, is not what it is. The skeptic traces and focuses on this constant vanishing of determinate appearance without taking into account the dialectical logic that orchestrates and unifies these various oppositions. Hence, nothing is what it is, and there is no logical or empirical ground accessible to the skeptic on which the domain of alterity might rationally be known. The skeptic's thinking becomes a frantic effort to make every given determination disappear into some other one, so that this constant appearing and vanishing proceeds according to no order or necessity. The skeptic, like some new historicists among us, ends up producing contradiction for its own sake: significantly, Hegel argues that this production of chaos (understood as ceaseless contradiction) is *pleasurable* inasmuch as the skeptic is always able to undermine the position of his philosophical opponent.

This kind of pleasurable and incessant refutation is still a

form of stubbornness or *eigensinnigkeit*: "it is in fact like the squabbling of self-willed children [*eigensinniger Jungen*] who by contradicting themselves buy for themselves the pleasure [*die Freude*] of continually contradicting one another" (126/162). The skeptic overrides his own contradictoriness in order to take pleasure in forcing others to witness their contradictions. But this pleasure, a form of sadism, is short-lived, for the stubborn and persistent character of the skeptic's efforts will doubtless be challenged when the skeptic encounters another like himself. If another skeptic exposes the first skeptic's contradictions, then the first skeptic is forced to take account of his own contradictoriness. This understanding of his own contradictoriness will initiate for him a new modality of thought. At this point, the skeptic becomes self-conscious of the constitutive contradiction of his own negating activity and the unhappy consciousness emerges as an explicit form of ethical reflexivity.

In a sense, the childish and stubborn pleasure that the skeptic takes in watching another fall turns into a profound unhappiness when he is, as it were, forced *to watch himself* fall into endless contradictions. Here the distance afforded by watching seems essentially linked to the sadism of the pleasure and to the posture of the skeptic as one who exempts himself through visual distance from the scene that he witnesses. The sadistic pleasure involved in watching another becomes, in the mode of unhappiness, a displeasurable watching of oneself.[5] Witnessing implies a mimetic reduplication of the self, and its "dispassion" is belied by the passion of mimeticism. The self who shored up its identity by encouraging others to fall into contradiction suddenly sees itself as one of those others; this viewing of oneself at a distance not only initiates the unhappy consciousness but also inverts the skeptic's pleasure into pain.

The sadism directed toward the other is now turned back on consciousness itself (postponing for the moment whether the pleasure in sadism is also rerouted against consciousness). As a dual structure, the unhappy consciousness takes itself as its own object of scorn.

The philosophical elaboration of this scorn takes the following form: consciousness is now divided into two parts, the "essential" and "unchangeable," on the one hand, and the "inessential" and "changeable," on the other. The watching self, defined as a kind of *witnessing* and *scorning*, differentiates itself from the self witnessed as perpetually falling into contradiction. This watching becomes a way of *re*establishing the visual distance between a subject aloof from the scene and the subject in contradiction. In this case, however, the witnessing and scorning self cannot deny that the contradictory self is its own self; it knows that the contradictory self is *itself*, but in order to shore up an identity over and against it, it renders this contradictory self into an *in*essential part of itself. It thus parts with itself in order to purify itself of contradiction.

As a result, the unhappy consciousness berates itself constantly, setting up one part of itself as a pure judge aloof from contradiction and disparaging its changeable part as inessential, although ineluctably tied to it. Significantly, the activity that in skepticism begins as childish sadism becomes reformulated as ethical self-judgment in the context of the unhappy consciousness: as adult to child, then, the unchangeable consciousness "passes judgment" on the changeable. Implicit in this dual structuring of the subject, however, is the relation between thought and corporeality, for the unchangeable will be a kind of noncontradictory thought, the pure thought sought by the stoics, and the contradictory domain will be that of alternating qualities, the changeable domain of appearance, what

pertains to the subject's own phenomenal being. The child who "watches" is transfigured into the judge who "passes judgment," and the aspect of the self on which it passes judgment is steeped in the changeable world of bodily sensation.

Unhappy consciousness seeks to overcome this duality by finding a body which embodies the purity of its unchangeable part; it seeks to come into relation with "the Unchangeable in its incarnate or embodied form." To do this, the subject subordinates its own body in the service of the thought of the unchangeable; this subordinating and purifying effort is that of *devotion* (*Andacht*). Yet, predictably, this effort to deploy the body in the service of thinking the unchangeable proves impossible. Devotion turns out to be pure self-feeling, what Hegel disparagingly refers to as "the chaotic jingling of bells, or a mist of warm incense, a musical thinking" (131/168). As self-feeling, it is the feeling of the body compelled to signify the transcendent and unchangeable, a feeling which nevertheless remains ensconced in the bodily feeling that it seeks to transcend. Indeed, self-feeling refers only and endlessly to itself (a transcendentalized form of *eigensinnigkeit*), and so is unable to furnish knowledge of anything other than itself. Devotion, then, which seeks to instrumentalize the body in the service of the unchangeable, turns out to be an immersion in the body that precludes access to anything else, indeed, an immersion that takes the body to be the unchangeable and so falls into contradiction.

Although devotion appears to be a form of self-immersion, it is also a continuation of self-beratement as self-mortification. This self-feeling, precisely because it does not reach the unchangeable, becomes itself the object of derision and judgment, marking the continuing inadequacy of the self in relation to its transcendent measure. The transcendent is what is always

missed, and so haunts this consciousness as a figure of what is permanently inaccessible, forever lost. In the mode of devotion, then, "consciousness . . . can only find as a present reality the grave of its life" (132/169–70). In a transposition of figures, the body survives, and all that is left of the transcendent ideal is a "grave." Whereas devotion, then, begins as an effort to subordinate the body to a transcendent object, it ends by taking the body, that is, self-feeling, as its object of worship, and letting the unchangeable spirit die.

Here we might conclude that a certain form of self-preoccupation, understood as a reformulation of an insurmountable *eigensinnigkeit*, constitutes a narcissism of the subject that defeats the self-sacrificial project of devotion. The subject who would subordinate its body to an ideal, compel its body to embody an ideal, finds itself more fully autonomous from that ideal, outliving it altogether. The collapse of devotion into narcissism, if we can call it that, signifies that there can be no final leave-taking of the body within life. Forced, then, to accept this ineluctability of the body as a presupposition, a new form of the subject emerges, which is distinctly Kantian. If there is a world of appearance for which the body is essential, then surely there is a world of noumena in which the body has no place; the world divides up into beings that are for-itself and in-itself.

In a formulation that will prefigure Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*, Hegel claims that the unchangeable world surrenders or renounces an embodied form, that it, the in-itself, delivers an embodied version of itself into the changeable world to be sacrificed. This reference to the figure of Christ suggests that the unchangeable world becomes embodied, but does so only to be sacrificed or returned to the unchangeable world from which it came. As a model for the

sacred life, Christ is understood as an embodiment which is continually in the mode of giving thanks. In its desire and in its work, this embodied consciousness seeks to give thanks for its own life, capacities, faculties, abilities. These are given to it; its life is experienced as a gift; and it lives out its life in the mode of gratefulness. All of its acts it owes to another; its life becomes understood as a kind of endless debt.

Precisely because, on the one hand, this living being owes its life to another being, it is not the seat or origin of its own actions. Its action is referred to another's action; thus, not being the ground of its own action, it is not responsible for what it does. On the other hand, its own actions are to be construed as a perpetual self-sacrifice by which the self *proves* or demonstrates its own thankfulness. This demonstration of thankfulness thus becomes a kind of self-aggrandizement, what Hegel will call "the extreme of individuality" (134/171).

The renunciation of the self as the origin of its own actions must be performed repeatedly and can never finally be achieved, if only because the *demonstration* of renunciation is itself a self-willed action. This self-willed action thus rhetorically confounds precisely what it is supposed to show. The self becomes an incessant performer of renunciation, whereby the performance, as an action, contradicts the postulation of *in*action that it is meant to signify. Paradoxically, performance becomes the *occasion* for a grand and endless action that effectively augments and individuates the self it seeks to deny.

This consciousness, like the stoic, seeks to know and show itself as a "nothing," yet inevitably becomes a *doing* of nothing. Here the pleasure which earlier appeared to belong to the childish sadism of the skeptic is turned on the self: this "doing of nothing," Hegel argues, finds in "its enjoyment a feeling of wretchedness." This intermingling of pleasure and

pain results from a renunciation of the self which can never quite accomplish that renunciation, which, as an incessant accomplishing, carries with it the pleasurable assertion of self. The self-absorption of consciousness does not translate into self-congratulation or simple narcissism. Rather, it appears as negative narcissism, an engaged preoccupation with what is most debased and defiled about it.

Here again the self to be renounced is figured as a bodily self, as "this actual individual in the animal functions." Hegel appears to imply defecation as an object of self-preoccupation: "these [animal functions] are no longer performed naturally and without embarrassment, as matters trifling in themselves which cannot possess any importance or essential significance for Spirit; instead, it is in them that the enemy reveals himself in his characteristic shape, they are rather the object of serious endeavor, and become precisely matters of the utmost importance. This enemy, however, renews himself in his defeat, and consciousness, in fixing its attention on him, far from freeing itself from him, really remains forever in contact with him, and forever sees itself as defiled" (135–36/174). This "enemy," as it were, is described as "the merest particular of the meanest character," one which serves, unfortunately, as an object of identification for this "fallen" consciousness. Here, consciousness in its full abjection has become like shit, lost in a self-referential anality, a circle of its own making. In Hegel's words, "we have here only a personality confined to its own self and its petty actions, a personality brooding over itself, as wretched as it is impoverished" (136/174).

Regarding itself as a nothing, as a doing of nothing, as an excremental function, and hence regarding itself as excrement, this consciousness effectively reduces itself to the changeable features of its bodily functions and products. Yet, since it is

an experience *of* wretchedness, there is some consciousness which takes stock of these functions and which is not thoroughly identified with them. Significantly, it is here, in the effort to differentiate itself from its excretory functions, indeed, from its excretory identity, that consciousness relies on a "mediator," what Hegel will call "the priest." In order to reconnect with the pure and the unchangeable, this bodily consciousness offers up its every "doing" to a priest or minister. This mediating agency relieves the abject consciousness of its responsibility for its own actions. Through the institution of counsel and advice, the priest offers the reason for the abject consciousness's actions. Everything that the abject consciousness offers, that is, all of its externalizations, including desire, work, and excrement, are to be construed as *offerings*, as paying penance. The priest institutes bodily self-abnegation as the price of holiness, elevating the renunciatory gesture of excretion to a religious practice whereby the entire body is ritualistically purged. The sanctification of abjection takes place through rituals of fasting and mortification [*fasten und kasteien*]" (137/175). Because the body cannot be fully denied, as the stoic thought, it must be ritualistically renounced.

In its fastings and mortifications, the unhappy consciousness denies itself the pleasures of consumption, figuring perhaps that it will forestall the inevitability of the excremental moment. As self-inflicted bodily acts, fasting and mortification are reflexive actions, turnings of the body against itself. At the limits of this self-mortification and self-sacrifice, the abjected consciousness appears to ground its action in the counsel of the priest, and yet this grounding merely conceals the reflexive origins of its self-punishment.

At this juncture Hegel departs from what has been the pattern of explanation, in which a *self-negating* posture is under-

scored as a *posture*, a phenomenalization that refutes the negation it seeks to institute. In the place of such an explanation, Hegel asserts that the will of another operates through the self-sacrificial actions of the penitent. In effect, self-sacrifice is not refuted through the claim that self-sacrifice is itself a willful activity; rather, Hegel asserts that in self-sacrifice one enacts another's will. One might expect that the penitent would be shown to be reveling in himself, self-aggrandizing, narcissistic, that his self-punishments would culminate in a pleasurable assertion of self. But Hegel eschews this explanation and thus breaks with the pattern of explanation in the chapter in favor of a religious solution in Spirit.

Indeed, at this juncture one might well imagine a set of closing transitions for "The Unhappy Consciousness" different from the ones Hegel supplies, a set that is, nevertheless, perhaps more properly Hegelian than Hegel himself. The penitent disclaims his act as his own, avowing that another's will, the priest's, operates through his self-sacrifice, and, further, that the priest's will is determined by God's. Installed thus in a great chain of wills, the abject consciousness enters into a community of wills. Although its will is determinate, it is nevertheless bound to the priest's; in this unity, the notion of Spirit is first discerned. The mediator or priest counsels the penitent that his pain will be repaid with everlasting abundance, that his misery will be rewarded with everlasting happiness; misery and pain imply a future transformation into their opposites. In this sense, the minister reformulates the dialectical reversal and establishes the inversion of values as an absolute principle. Whereas in all of the earlier examples of self-negation pleasure was understood to *inhere* in pain (the pleasurable aggrandizement of the stoic, the pleasurable sadism of the skeptic), pleasure is here temporally removed

from pain, figured as its future compensation. For Hegel, this eschatological transformation of the pain of this world into the pleasure of the next establishes the transition from self-consciousness to reason. And self-consciousness's recognition of itself as part of a religious community of wills effects the transition from self-consciousness to Spirit.

But what are we to make of this final transition, considering the immanent relation of pleasure and pain in the transitions that precede it? Before the introduction of the "mediator" and the "priest," the chapter on the unhappy consciousness appears to proceed as if it contained a trenchant critique of ethical imperatives and religious ideals, a critique which prefigures the Nietzschean analysis that emerges some sixty years later. Every effort to reduce itself to inaction or to nothing, to subordinate or mortify its own body, culminates inadvertently in the *production* of self-consciousness as a pleasure-seeking and self-aggrandizing agent. Every effort to overcome the body, pleasure, and agency proves to be nothing other than the assertion of precisely those features of the subject.

Post-Hegelian Subjections

The Nietzschean critique of ethical norms, prefigured in "The Unhappy Consciousness" and articulated in Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Daybreak*, has received more recent reformulation in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Both Hegel's position and those inspired by Nietzsche might also be usefully compared with Freud's critique of the genesis of moral imperatives in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Recall that for Hegel ethical imperatives first emerge in a defensive response to absolute fear, and their emergence must be construed as a permutation and refusal of that fear. This absolute

fear was the fear of death, hence a fear conditioned by the finite character of the body. The ethical refusal and subordination of the body might then be understood as a magical effort to preempt that existential negation. Moreover, the ideal of radical self-sufficiency is jeopardized by the body's permeability and dependency. In this sense, excretion is not the only "animal function" that would signify "defilement" for this subject. The repeated efforts to sacrifice the body which become repeated assertions of the body are also efforts to defend it against everything that "jeopardizes" it, where to be in "jeopardy" denotes a danger slightly less dire than death, a kind of penetrative paroxysm that implies being moved or shaken sexually "through and through" (*durch und durch angesteckt*). One could then see in the various forms of self-beratement and self-mortification typologized in "The Unhappy Consciousness" a prefiguration of neurosis and perhaps also a specific modality of homosexual panic.[6]

We might then reread the mobilizing fear that is both refused and rerouted by the ethical imperative in terms of the feared "expropriability" of the body. If the bondsman's laboring activity could be expropriated by the lord and the essence of the bondsman's body be held in ownership by that lord, then the body constitutes a site of contested ownership, one which through domination or the threat of death can always be owned by another. The body appears to be nothing other than a threat to the project of safety and self-sufficiency that governs the *Phenomenology*'s trajectory. The anal preoccupation that directly precedes the ascendance into a religious concept of an afterlife suggests that bodily permeability can only be resolved by escape into an afterlife in which no bodies exist at all. This affirmation of the absolute negation of the body contradicts all the earlier efforts to subordinate or master the

body *within* life, efforts which culminated in the assertion of the ineluctability of the body. Whereas other religious notions turned out to be surreptitious ways of reasserting the body, this one appears exempt from the dialectical reversal that it resolves.

Psychoanalysis theorizes the failure to maintain the subjection of the body along lines parallel to these earlier dialectical reversals. The repression of the libido is always understood as itself a libidinally invested repression. Hence, the libido is not absolutely negated through repression, but rather becomes the instrument of its own subjection. The repressive law is not external to the libido that it represses, but the repressive law represses to the extent that repression becomes a libidinal activity.[7] Further, moral interdictions, especially those that are turned against the body, are themselves sustained by the bodily activity that they seek to curb:

> An idea . . . which belongs entirely to psychoanalysis and which is foreign to people's ordinary way of thinking . . . it tells us that conscience (or more correctly, the anxiety which later becomes conscience) is indeed the cause of instinctual renunciation to begin with, but that later that relationship is reversed. Every renunciation of instinct now becomes a dynamic source of conscience and every fresh renunciation increases the latter's severity and intolerance.[8]

According to Freud, then, the self-imposed imperatives of conscience are pursued and applied precisely because they are now the site of the very satisfaction that they seek to prohibit. In other words, prohibition becomes the displaced site of satisfaction for the "instinct" or desire that is prohibited, an occasion for reliving the instinct under the rubric of the condemning law. This is, of course, the source of the form of comedy in which the bearer of the moral law turns out to

be the most serious transgressor of its precepts (Hawthorne's Dimsdale, Tom Stoppard's moral philosopher). Because this displaced satisfaction is experienced through the application of the law, that application is reinvigorated and intensified with the emergence of every prohibited desire. The prohibition does not seek to obliterate prohibited desire; on the contrary, prohibition seeks to reproduce prohibited desire and becomes intensified through the renunciations it effects. The "afterlife" of prohibited desire is in the prohibition itself, where the prohibition not only sustains, but is *sustained by*, the desire that it forces the subject to renounce. In this sense, then, renunciation takes place *through* the very desire that is renounced, which is to say, the desire is *never* renounced, but becomes preserved and reasserted in the very structure of renunciation.

Nietzsche makes a similar argument, deploying a dialectical structure not unlike Hegel's, in his critique of the ascetic ideal in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. The ineluctability of the body in "The Unhappy Consciousness" parallels the ineluctability of "instinct" in Freud and that of the will in Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, the ascetic ideal, understood as a will to nothingness, is a way of interpreting all suffering as guilt. Although guilt works to deny a specific kind of object for human wants, it cannot obliterate the wanting character of humans. According to the dictates of guilt, then, "man had only to *want* something—and to begin with, it mattered not what, whereto, or how he wanted: *the will itself was saved*." The ascetic ideal, very much like Hegel's unhappy consciousness, is to be understood, then, as:

> that hatred against everything human, even more, against everything animal, everything material, this disgust with the senses, with reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this desire to get away from all semblance, change, becoming, death, wish, desire itself—the

meaning of all this is a will to nothingness, a will running counter to life, a revolt against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; yet it is and remains a will! . . . rather than want nothing, man even wants nothingness![9]

I do not mean to suggest that Freud's highly problematic notion of instinct, Hegel's inchoate body, and Nietzsche's will are strictly equivalent. Yet I do want to suggest that these three thinkers circumscribe a kind of dialectical reversal which centers on the impossibility of a full or final reflexive suppression of what we might loosely call "the body" within the confines of life. If the suppression of the body is itself an instrumental movement of and by the body, then the body is inadvertently preserved in and by the instrument of its suppression. The self-defeating effort of such suppression, however, not only leads to its opposite—a self-congratulatory or self-aggrandizing assertion of desire, will, the body—in more contemporary formulations it leads to the elaboration of an institution of the subject which exceeds the dialectical frame by which it is spawned.

In Hegel, the suppression of bodily life is shown to require the very body that it seeks to suppress; in this sense, the body is preserved in and by the very act of suppression. Freud understood this differently in his analysis of neurosis as a kind of libidinal attachment to a prohibition which nevertheless thwarts libidinal gratification. Where that thwarting constitutes a repression, the splitting off of ideation from affect, neurosis or symptom formation follows. One might read Hegel's references to *eigensinnigkeit* or stubbornness as illustrating the process of splitting and defense in the formation of neurosis. That Hegel refers to this "unhappiness" as a kind of stubborn attachment suggests that, as in neurosis, the ethical regulation of bodily impulse becomes the focus and aim

of impulse itself. In both cases, we are given to understand an attachment to subjection which is formative of the reflexive structure of subjection itself. The impulse or bodily experience which would be negated, to return to Hegel, is inadvertently *preserved* by the very activity of negation.

We can see in both Hegel and Freud a certain reliance on a dialectical reversal by which a bodily experience, broadly construed, comes under the censor of the law only to reemerge as the sustaining affect of that law. The Freudian notion of *sublimation* suggests that denial or displacement of pleasure and desire can become formative of culture; his *Civilization and Its Discontents* thus laid the ground for Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*. The inadvertently productive effects of sublimation in the formation of cultural products appear to exceed the dialectical reversal by which they are generated. Whereas for Marcuse, the drives, or eros and thanatos, precede the regulatory imperatives by which they are rendered culturally livable, for Foucault, the repressive hypothesis, which appears to include within its structure the model of sublimation, fails to work precisely because repression generates the very pleasures and desires it seeks to regulate. For Foucault, repression does not act on a pregiven field of pleasure and desire; it constitutes that field as that which is to be regulated, that which is always potentially or actually under the rubric of regulation. The repressive regime, as Foucault calls it, requires its own self-augmentation and proliferation. As such, this regime requires the field of bodily impulse to expand and proliferate as a moralized domain, such that it will continually have fresh material through which to articulate its own power. Hence, repression produces a field of infinitely moralizable bodily phenomena in order to facilitate and rationalize its own proliferation.

Here we see that Foucault departs from the kind of dialecti-

cal reversal we followed in Hegel. In Foucault, the suppression of the body not only requires and produces the very body it seeks to suppress, it goes further by extending the bodily domain to be regulated, proliferating sites of control, discipline, and suppression. In other words, the body *presumed* by the Hegelian explanation is incessantly produced and proliferated in order to extend the domain of juridical power. In this sense, the restrictions placed *on* the body not only *require* and *produce* the body they seek to restrict, but *proliferate* the domain of the bodily beyond the domain targeted by the original restriction. In what many have come to see as a finally utopian gesture in Foucault, this proliferation of the body by juridical regimes beyond the terms of dialectical reversal is also the site of possible resistance. The psychoanalytic discourse that would describe and pathologize repressed desire ends up producing a discursive incitement to desire: impulse is continually fabricated as a site of confession and, hence, potential control, but this fabrication exceeds the regulatory aims by which it is generated. In this sense, criminal codes which seek to catalogue and institutionalize normalcy become the site for a contestation of the concept of the normal; sexologists who would classify and pathologize homosexuality inadvertently provide the conditions for a proliferation and mobilization of homosexual cultures.

Within the Hegelian framework, the subject, which splits itself off from its body, requires that body in order to sustain its splitting activity; the body to be suppressed is thus marshalled in the service of that suppression. For Foucault, the body to be regulated is similarly marshalled in the service of suppression, but the body is not constituted prior to that regulation. On the contrary, the body is produced *as* an object of regulation, and for regulation to augment itself, the

body is *proliferated* as an object of regulation. This proliferation both marks off Foucault's theory from Hegel's and constitutes the site of potential resistance to regulation. The possibility of this resistance is derived from what is *unforeseeable* in proliferation. But to understand how a regulatory regime could produce effects which are not only unforeseeable but constitute resistance, it seems that we must return to the question of stubborn attachments and, more precisely, to the place of that attachment in the subversion of the law.

Although Foucault criticizes Freud's hypothesis of repression, he is indebted to this theorization in his own account of the production and proliferation of the regulated body. In particular, the logic of subjection in both Hegel and Freud implies that the instrument of suppression becomes the new structure and aim of desire, at least when subjection proves effective. But if a regulatory regime requires the production of new sites of regulation and, hence, a more thoroughgoing moralization of the body, then what is the place of bodily impulse, desire, and attachment? Does the regulatory regime not only produce desire, but become produced by the cultivation of a certain attachment *to* the rule of subjection? If part of what regulatory regimes do is to constrain the formation and attachments of desire, then it seems that from the start a certain detachability of impulse is presumed, a certain incommensurability between the capacity for a bodily attachment, on the one hand, and the site where it is confined, on the other. Foucault appears to presume precisely this detachability of desire in claiming that incitements and reversals are to some degree *unforeseeable*, that they have the capacity, central to the notion of resistance, to *exceed* the regulatory aims for which they were produced. If a given regime cannot fully control the incitements that it nevertheless produces, is that in part the result

of a resistance, at the level of impulse, to a full and final domestication by any regulatory regime?

What Hegel implies in "The Unhappy Consciousness" is not merely that moral wretchedness cannot be coherently sustained, that it invariably concedes the bodily being that it seeks to deny, but that the pursuit of wretchedness, the attachment to wretchedness, is both the condition and the potential undoing of such subjection. If wretchedness, agony, and pain are sites or modes of stubbornness, ways of attaching to oneself, negatively articulated modes of reflexivity, then that is because they are given by regulatory regimes as the sites available for attachment, and a subject will attach to pain rather than not attach at all. For Freud, an infant forms a pleasure-giving attachment to any excitation that comes its way, even the most traumatic, which accounts for the formation of masochism and, for some, the production of abjection, rejection, wretchedness, and so on as the necessary preconditions for love. The gesture of rejection can become masochistically eroticized only because it is a gesture. Although the rejecting gesture's alleged purpose is to thwart an oncoming desire, it nevertheless appears *as a gesture*, thus *making itself present* and lending itself to being read as a kind of offering or, minimally, *presence*. Precisely because the gesture of rejection *is*, it rhetorically denies the threat of withdrawal that it nevertheless purports to signify. For the infant, the presence or determinacy of that object, no matter how persistently rejecting, is nevertheless a site of presence and excitation and, hence, is better than no object at all. This truism is not far from Nietzsche's line that the will would rather will nothingness than not will at all. In both cases, the desire to desire is a willingness to desire precisely that which would foreclose desire, if only for the possibility of continuing to desire.

The question, then, that Hegel and Freud would appear to pose for Foucault is whether this terrain of "stubborn attachment" does not in some way figure in the scenarios of subjection that he describes. To what extent does a regulatory regime exploit this willingness to attach blindly to what seeks to suppress or negate that very attachment? And to what extent does the attachment that a regulatory regime requires prove to be both its constitutive failure and the potential site of resistance? If desire has as its final aim the continuation of itself—and here one might link Hegel, Freud, and Foucault all back to Spinoza's *conatus*—then the capacity of desire to be withdrawn and to reattach will constitute something like the vulnerability of every strategy of subjection.