

Are we in control?

Hegel's Lordship/Bondage paragraphs 178, & 186-196

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Introduction

Quite often we find ourselves in situations where we know we are not in control, such as being a student, or having a job, or being bullied. The most important factor in this is the perspective you as an individual bring to the situation. In this lesson, we are not discussing the merits of any social situation, though this is of course a fundamental part in any situation. The purpose is for the student to discover ways to understand what roles are possible in situations involving control/being controlled and choosing how to act in the situation.

This lesson unfolds over multiple sections to engage in a deep reading of Hegel and the real world applications of his thought. Each section will take one or more days, depending on the educator's approach and the engagement of the students. It is strongly urged that if the students are particularly engaged in a specific section, do not cut the lesson short.

(It is also recommended that the educator discuss beforehand with guidance that this lesson series is occurring for support if this topic brings forth intense reactions in some students.)

Guiding Question: How can a person take responsibility for their role in a situation of control/being controlled?

Learning Target:

For the students to determine an alternative way to overcome a time that they felt controlled.

Duration: 5 days

Grade Levels: 8-12

Materials:

- **Grades 8-10:** Modified Hegel's Lordship and Bondage from pages 520-523 in Phenomenology of Spirit translated by AV Miller, 1977.
- **Grades 11-12:** Hegel's Lordship and Bondage- sections 191-196
- "12 years a slave"
 - Brad Pitt works with Platt and confronts the Master- 3+ minutes- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxNvYB-K0wY>
- Vox, Lisa. "3 Major Ways Slaves Showed Resistance to Slavery". April 8, 2016. summary of points on resistance of slave- focus should be on the day-to-day methods of resistance-

<http://afroamhistory.about.com/od/slavery/a/How-Did-Slaves-Resist-Slavery.htm>

- Glossary of terms

Schedule

Section 1: Control and response

This first day is to lay the groundwork for the week's work.

- Introduce the Guiding Question.
- Free write: Ask each student to describe a situation that they felt controlled and what they felt/did about it. Discuss an example, such as bullying.
- Students reflect in writing on a situation involving a moment in their own life.
- Have students partner up to share their writing for feedback. Pairs give feedback in the form of questions.
- Group reflection on the day. This can be a cold call of a few students or a quick response from each student.

Section 2: Master/Slave

This day is to introduce the concept of master/slave as a way to analyze situations of control.

- Quick review of the previous day before by eliciting a summary from the students.
- View the clip from "12 Years a Slave" with the lens of the relationship between the persons represented in the film, stating briefly that the film is about the American South before the Civil War, but that it has important messages about humans beyond the historical context..
- Discussion questions (chart answers in the form of a T-chart with Master- Slave as titles for the two columns):
 - What is happening in this situation shown?
 - Who is the master? How do you know?
 - Who is the slave? How do you know?
 - What role does the third person play?
 - How do these three relate to each other?
- Introduce the concept of master/slave- 178 & 186- 189 (see below). This is writing by a philosopher, GWF Hegel in 1809 describing what he thinks happens in situations of control. He called it Lordship and Bondage, but we are going to refer to his writing as Master/Slave.
- These exercises are intended to position the students to understand the power dynamic relationship between the master and slave, highlighting the juxtaposition of which self-consciousness is ultimately essential in the Hegelian dialectic for the slave rather than the master.
- Questions to guide the reading and the discussion (add to charts any responses that fit):
 - What does it mean to be self-conscious?
 - Why do we need others in our life?

- Why do we need as humans to feel like we are better or more important than others?
- Group reflection on the day. This can be a cold call of a few students or a quick response from each student.

178. Self-consciousness exists as being in and being for itself inasmuch, and only inasmuch, as it exists in and for itself for another, i.e. inasmuch as it is acknowledged. It is therefore essentially one only in duplication, and reveals itself in a number of traits which have to be kept firmly apart, and yet reveal themselves as always melting into one another, and dissolving this apartness. **(Terms: self-consciousness, being in itself, being for self, and for another.)**

186. Self-consciousness is at first simple being-for-self which is attached to an immediate individuality which excludes all others from itself. Self at first confronts self, not as an infinite negation of the negation making all its own, but as a simple case of natural being facing another such case, both deeply absorbed in the business of living. Each is conscious only of its own being, and so has no true certainty of itself, since the being of the self is essentially a socially acknowledged being. **(Terms: infinite negation)**

187. Self-consciousness must, however, express itself as the negation of all mere objectivity and particularity. This initially takes the form of desiring the death of the other at the risk of its own life. Self-consciousness must be willing to sacrifice everything concrete for its own infinite self-respect and the similar respect of all others. A life-and-death struggle therefore ensues between the two rival self-consciousnesses. **(Term: death, life-and-death struggle)**

188. For both members to die in the life-and-death struggle would not, however, resolve the tension between them. (nor would the death of one of them do it.) Death certainly eliminates all opposition, but only for others, or in a 'dead' manner. Death does not preserve the struggle that it eliminates in and for the parties in question. For the preservation, it is essential that the parties in question should live.

189. The demotion of another self-consciousness so that it does not really compete with my self-consciousness, now takes the new form of making it thing-like and dependent, the self-consciousness of a slave as opposed to that of a master. That the two self-consciousnesses are at bottom the same becomes deeply veiled.

190. The self-consciousness of the master is essentially related to the being of the mere things he uses and uses up, and these he enjoys through the slave's self-consciousness. The slave prepares and arranges things for the enjoyment of the master. The self-consciousness of the master is likewise essentially related to the self-consciousness of the slave through the various punitive, constraining, and rewarding instruments which keep the slave enslaved. The slave working on things does not completely overcome their thingness, since they do not become what he wishes them to be or not for himself. It is the master who reaps the enjoyment from the slave's labours.

Glossary of Terms (*Grades 8-9 should be given the terms meaning/ Grades 10-12 can be asked to use contextual clues to come up with their own definitions*):

Self-consciousness/self-conscious- (not embarrassment) knowledge of one's own existence, especially the awareness that one exists as an individual conscious being.

Being for itself- a self-comprehending being.

Being in itself- also thingness; an object other than one's self.

Another- also other; a being other than one's self.

Infinite negation- refers to the capacity of self-consciousness to determine selfhood/ self-consciousness by refusing to let any desire determine what it will do.

Death- obliteration.

Life-and-death struggle- in the master/slave situation, death is avoided by agreement to the situation of slavery by the slave out of fear. The master is not subject to fear and so does not see his identity as dependent on life.

Note about sections 3 and 4 below: *an alternative approach is, instead of guiding whole class in each of the master/slave reactions, divide the class in two; one group takes on analyzing the master, the other group analyses the slave. The share would be a discussion (possibly fishbowl, debate- see [Brookfield and Preskill. Discussion as a Way of Teaching](#) for methods in developing a democratic classroom through discussion).*

Section 3: Looking at the relationship from the perspective of the master

In section three, students focus on the “master”, looking for clues on the relationship the master has to the others in the situation.

- Quick review of the previous day before by eliciting a summary from the students.
- Replay the film clip asking the students to focus on the master.
- Discussion questions (further chart these answers on chart paper):
 - How does the master act?
 - What kind of person is he?
 - What does he want?
 - What does he hope for?
- Continued shared reading of Hegel passages 191-193.
- Questions for guiding the reading and discussion (further chart answers on chart paper):
 - What is Hegel saying about the master? Is he really in control?
- Group reflection on the day. This can be a cold call of a few students or a quick response from each student.

Master: 191-193

191. We thus achieve an essentially unbalanced relation in which the slave altogether gives up his being-for-self in the favour of the master. The master uses the slave as an instrument to control the thing for its own (the master's) purposes, and not for the slave's, and the slave acquiesces to the situation. This means that his self-consciousness demands from a consciousness so degraded and distorted. What the master sees in the slave, or what the slave sees in the master is not what either sees in himself.

192. The master therefore paradoxically depends for his masterhood on the slave's self-consciousness, and entirely fails of the fully realized independence of status which his self-consciousness demands.

193. The *truth* of independent self-consciousness is therefore to be found rather in the slave's self-consciousness than in the master's. Each is therefore the inverse of what it immediately and superficially is given as being.

Glossary of Terms (*Grades 8-9 should be given the terms meaning/ Grades 10-12 can be asked to use contextual clues to come up with their own definitions*):

Truth (as Hegel defines the term)- Not mere correctness; Truth in this context, according to Hegel, is when a concept corresponds to the reality, in other words, the slave's awareness and concept of her/his self-consciousness becomes truth.*

*(This is the purpose of the exercise) The instructor guides the students to the realization that the superficial understanding that the slave's being is reliant on the master's being is false, and instead the opposite (that the master's self-consciousness is dependent on the slave) is TRUE.

Section 4: Looking at the relationship from the perspective of the slave

In section four, students focus on the "slave", looking for clues on the relationship the slave has to the others in the situation

- Quick review of the previous day before by eliciting a summary from the students.
- Replay the film clip asking the students to focus on the slave.
- Discussion questions (further chart these answers on chart paper):
 - How does the slave act?
 - What kind of person is he?
 - What does he want?
 - What does he hope for?
- Continued shared reading of Hegel passages 194-196.
- Questions for guiding the reading and discussion (further chart answers on chart paper):
 - What is Hegel saying about the slave?
 - How does the slave become aware of their power?
- *Addition: add reading by Lisa Vox to give historical perspective on slave resistance. This could be a way into looking at student reaction to schooling.*
- Group reflection on the day. This can be a cold call of a few students or a quick response from each student.

Fear/ Slave: 194-196

194. The slave in his fearful respect for the master becomes shaken out of his narrow self-identifications and self-interest and rises to the absolute negativity, the

disinterested all-embracingness of true self consciousness. He becomes the ideal which he contemplates in his master.

195. The slave has the further advantage that in working on the object he as it were preserves his labour, makes the outward thing his own and puts himself into it, whereas the master's dealings with the object end in vanishing enjoyments. The slave overcomes the otherness and mere existence of material thinghood more thoroughly than the master, and so achieves a more genuine self-consciousness.

196. The slave in overcoming the mere existence of material thinghood also rises above the fear which was his first reaction to absolute otherness as embodied in the master. Then he achieved self-consciousness in opposition to such otherness, now he achieves a self-consciousness not opposed to otherness, but which discovers itself in otherness. In shaping the thing creatively, he becomes aware of his own boundless originality. Hegel thinks that the discipline of service and obedience is essential to self-consciousness: mere mastery of things alone would not yield to it. Only the discipline of service enables the conscious being to master himself, i.e. his finite, contingent, natural self. Without this discipline formative ability would degenerate into narrow cleverness placed at the service of personal self-will. (Hegel suggests that a period of subjection to others is essential to the highest magisterial rationality. Not to have undergone such discipline results in a trivialization of self-consciousness which never rises above petty finite interests. It would seem that the permissive bringing-up of children is implicitly condemned, and that 'imperialism' and 'colonialism' at certain stages of development are given justification.)

Section 5: Who is the "Middle person"?

In section five, students focus on the "middle man", the Brad Pitt character, looking for how this middle person relates to both the master and the slave.

- Quick review of the previous day before by eliciting a summary from the students.
- Replay the film clip asking the students to focus on the "middle man".
- Discussion questions (further chart these answers on chart paper):
 - How does the middle man act?
 - What kind of person is he?
 - What does he want?
 - What does he hope for?
- Student written reflection: Have you ever been a middle person? Describe a time when you were in the middle in a situation.

Section 6: Free write Essay-

In the situation you initially described, would you react differently now that we have looked at the master/slave relation? Use evidence from our lesson.

Questions to guide your writing:

- What do you think the controlling person wanted in this situation?
- What did you want?
- What would you hope for now if the situation happened again?

In the writing, be sure to show the movements of:

- The desire of the master
- The work or labor of the slave
- The moment of the slave realizing independent self-consciousness
- How the master is denied independent self-consciousness?

Students can share their essays in a culminating event*.

*The students are to evaluate the situation in which they shared “a situation that they felt controlled and what they felt/did about it”. These evaluations are to be based on their new understanding of the master/slave dialectic, using the terms discussed, mapping out the dialectic for their particular situation.

Further study of social relations:

Any social relationship can be viewed from the lens of the master/slave. Have the class generate an issue that is near to them to study with this lens (an example is below)!

If your class is ready for more independent research, have groups of four students decide on a social relationship that they want to research, present to the class and facilitate a discussion.

Here is a sample:

Where are the women?: The fundamental issue of women controlling their bodies and lives is of extremely significant concern.

Here are some videos from the same film, “12 Years a Slave”, that can be viewed:

- Scene: “Where are you from, Platt?” - the master’s wife questions Platt about his education- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSMFQ1ITzog>
- Scene: “Auction”- this is a disturbing scene (that is right) and should be carefully discussed- nudity and emotional violence where Eliza, a mother, is separated from her children- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7ilyAfWg_w
- Scene: “Soap”- Pats disappears from the plantation and is brought back- this is Pats explanation to the master for leaving the plantation- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHOVSYK4c88>
- Questions that may guide the beginnings of a discussion.
 - What role does the master’s wife play? What do you think she wants and hopes for?
 - What does Pats want and hope for?
 - What does Eliza want and hope for?
- Questions for the student’s perceptions of our current culture:
 - How are women treated in our culture now?
 - Do women have full freedom to choose their destiny?

- Do you think this is fair?
- Share: have the women in the class facilitate the discussion