

On Slavery. Kojèbian Reconstructions

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The 'return' of the concept of slavery within philosophical reflection in the twentieth century after the abolition of slavery, during the nineteenth century, is located in Kojève's interpretative reconstruction in the lecture course of the 1930s on Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. It is this 'return', and the particular determination of the concept of slavery which results from it, which is the focus of critical reflection. The critical reflection commences by examining the interconnection that the Kojèbian interpretative reconstruction, as a philosophical anthropology, establishes between slavery and the end of history. The analysis then proceeds to the particular departure of Agamben's The Open from this Kojèbian background and the manner in which it introduces the task of rendering the anthropological machine inoperative. The analysis concludes by rethinking the centrality of slavery within philosophical reflection by extricating itself from both the original 'return' of slavery in the Kojèbian interpretative reconstruction and the repositioning of slavery as product of the operation of a variant of the more fundamental anthropological machine revealed by Agamben in the departure from Kojève.

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1. Introduction

The concept of slavery, as the designation of a form of human relationship, indicates one which is characterized by the fundamentally unequal position of the individuals who occupy the two sides or poles of the relationship. The two poles – slave and owner/master – are themselves constituted by a preceding process of forcible enslavement as the 'origin' from which the fundamentally unequal positions are established. The length in the past in which the 'origin' of enslavement is located, and the absence of subsequent regular instances of enslavement, affect the degree to which the 'origin', and the preceding status of those currently enslaved, disappear from the character of the slavery and the memory of the currently enslaved enabling it to assume the appearance of a sedimented status¹. The concept expresses both the explicit, *forcible creation* of these

¹ This, for example, would distinguish the system of Atlantic plantation slavery from that of Russian serfdom. For the comparative analysis of American slavery and Russian serf-