

# As Fire Burns: Philosophy, Slavery, Technology

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**Abstract:** There is an ancient, if rarely thematized bond between philosophy and slavery. As Alain Badiou has recently remarked, 'this [rarity] is especially because from the outset everything is in some sense divided.' For the figure of the slave divides philosophy at its inception, cutting across the divisions of the polis, freedom, and justice. My thesis is that this paradox of the slave is at once foundational and aporetic for philosophy: when the slave appears within the text of philosophy, it thereafter has certain disorganising, if revelatory effects. Moreover, the paradox of the slave is linked integrally to another ancient phenomenon: judicial torture as the model of the extraction of knowledge from a resistant or un-knowing body. This essay examines this situation, in which slavery, torture, and philosophy are variously linked, through a series of vignettes drawn from Spinoza, Plato, Aristotle, and Hegel.

**Keywords:** Spinoza, Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Slavery, Torture

'If the juridical practice of torture was abandoned precisely when our society began promulgating Human Rights, which were ideologically founded in the abstraction of man's natural being, it was not because of an improvement in mores.' — Jacques Lacan

In Letter 17, dated 20 July 1664, responding to a missive from 'the very learned and prudent Pieter Balling,' in which that eponymous gentleman had written regarding the possible premonitions of impending mortality he perhaps should have had regarding the sighs of his now-dead son, Benedict Spinoza offers a staggering image of his own. Spinoza writes:

I can confirm, and at the same time explain, what I say here by an incident that happened to me last winter in Rijnsburg. One morning, as the sky was already growing light, I woke from a very deep dream to find that the images which had come to me in my dream remained before my eyes as vividly as if the things had been true — especially [the image] of a certain black, scabby Brazilian whom I had never seen before. For the most part this image disappeared when, to divert myself with something else, I fixed my eyes on a book or some other object. But as soon as I turned my eyes back away from such an object without fixing my eyes attentively on anything, the same image of the same Black man appeared to me with the same vividness, alternately, until it gradually disappeared from my visual field.<sup>1</sup>

1 Spinoza 1985, p. 353. I would like to thank Joe Hughes for alerting me to this letter, and for

Perhaps one might discern overtones of Descartes' Daughter in the pious Flemish Mennonite Balling's question. There is, after all, a notorious story that the philosopher, being so distraught by the death of Francine from scarlet fever at the age of five, built a automatic effigy of his own child in order to continue to have her as if she were still alive.<sup>2</sup> If the first recorded instance of this infamous tale in 1699 significantly postdates Balling's communication, the Cartesian distinction between mind and body is nonetheless clearly at stake in his question, as well as the problems of signs, thought and causality. Balling's question directly concerns the status of the links in experience between imagery, omens and causation: could or should we understand the sighs he heard his son utter as indeed signs of the boy's imminent demise?

For Spinoza, no. 'As for the omens you mention,' he writes, 'that when your child was still healthy and well, you heard sighs like those he made when he was ill and shortly afterwards passed away — I should think that this was not a true sigh, but only your imagination.'<sup>3</sup> One can easily give an interpretation of this letter along the following lines: Spinoza is pointing out that the circumstances under which an image arises say nothing in themselves regarding the truth of that image; that even radically strange and intense images that seem to move between different scales of experience are neither validated nor falsified by such a movement; that the associations of experience in memory have a bearing upon expectations that are, as per the previous remarks, not necessarily veridical nor reliable; and that whatever causation one retrospectively applies to such an image on the basis of subsequent experience must remain speculative.

Yet, despite these delimitations, Spinoza is also returning a certain set of rights to the imagination. As Genevieve Lloyd and Moira Gatens comment, stressing the import of 'emotion' and 'community' in the operations of the imagination:

Imagination and intellect are here presented as involving two separate orders of thought. But whereas the intellect links together 'demonstrations,' what the imagination links together is 'images and words.' Omens depend on this distinctive associative power of imagination.... Omens, in other words, are not physical events causally connected with other later events.... Spinoza retains also an element of causality in his analysis of omens; but it is relocated

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his decisive remarks regarding the issues I discuss here.

2 For a recent account of the genesis and implications of this tale, see Kang 2017.

3 Spinoza 1985, p. 352.

to the mind's relations with the body, rather than the relations between physical events.<sup>4</sup>

Yet the peculiarities of Spinoza's own image are evidently not exhausted by his own apotropaic ratiocinations: after all, 'a certain black, scabby Brazilian' is an astonishing vision and an astonishing syntagm. From where would such an image arise? Would it have any possible sense beyond the vicissitudes of an individual's imagination? Is it possible to discern in this image a recurrently disavowed element of philosophy itself, not least regarding the vagaries of corporeal bodies according to the modalities of sickness, slavery, sadness....and, even, *science*?

Perhaps Spinoza would have encountered such figures on the docks in the great trading port of Amsterdam; if so, it would almost inevitably have been as slaves and servants. Moreover, the Spinozan family business — which Spinoza himself later abjured — 'must have consisted, at least in part, in the importing of fruit and nuts from Portugal.'<sup>5</sup> Portugese colonialism was by then fully exploiting African slaves in its plantations in Brazil (and of course elsewhere too), and the Portugese ships would have carried slave cargos. Since Portugal also strenuously controlled trade with Brazil, the ships that came out of Portugal relied heavily on slave labour, and Portugal was a supplier of slaves to other nations, notably Spain. As for the Dutch themselves, they too were ruthlessly engaged in this, the 'oldest trade.'<sup>6</sup> As Angela Sutton reminds us: 'The Portugese had been the main trading presence on West Africa's Gold Coast for over a century, establishing precedents for European-African trade. By the early 1600s, companies such as the Dutch West India Company (WIC) challenged this monopoly and targeted Portugese holdings.'<sup>7</sup> The scabby black Brazilian, in other words, is a figure that, among other things, not only indicates the booty of a ongoing European capitalist trade war, but is a trace of that unpaid labour that sustains that war economy as such.

As for the scabs, there is presumably something unutterably and verisimilitudinously representative about a scab-wracked slave. And would it be possible for anyone familiar with psychoanalysis to ignore the relation to the real — whether of familial or colonial repression — that such scabbiness might designate, for example as manifested in the

4 Gatens and Lloyd 1999, pp. 20-21.

5 Nadler 2001, p. 29.

6 See Vink 2009.

7 Sutton 2015, p. 445.

'Dream of Irma's Injection,' in which Freud recounts, looking into Irma's mouth in his dream, that he saw 'extensive whitish grey scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modelled on the turbinal bones of the nose'?<sup>8</sup> We could, in other words, underline in this image a classic return of the repressed: Spinoza's own renunciation of his family, their history, their business, and their religion comes back unheralded in this inexpugible, shocking and affective vision, that, moreover, is invoked by the philosopher only in order to immediately banish it again from any proper philosophical significance. Is it that a disavowed image of a slave functions for Spinoza — perhaps even for philosophy more generally — as an intense exemplum of that sensorial or imaginative intensity which, *because* of its very intensity, must be dispelled if a proper understanding of nature and its causes are to be achieved?

But I am not seeking here to psychoanalyse Spinoza or resituate his thought according to his position in the high era of mercantile European imperialist colonialism, even if we are perhaps today at a point where the chains of life, labour, law and language can finally be given their full and complex articulation as a consequence of the full globalization of what Mark Kelly has recently called 'biopolitical imperialism.'<sup>9</sup>

To put this another way, once there has been a real short-circuit of the opposition between *techne* and *physis*, it becomes possible to discern previously-indiscernible operations regarding the production of non-contradictory paradoxical differences within each of the aforementioned phenomena: life can be seen to be the outcome of an operation between its own self-division as *zoe* and *bios*; labour shows itself as at once material and immaterial; law appears a fold of the bifurcation between sacrifice and sacrality; language presents as a binding rift between signifier and signified. Finally, power itself — as a kind of ur-phenomenon that is produced by, infiltrates, and alters the relations of these four Ls — breaks into the intrications of an affirmative and negative deployment, between its sutures of normalization and its resources of potentiality. Very abstractly, the current era would be a kind of revelation of the inter-essential essence of the ir-reversible historical dehiscence of these phenomena.

Perhaps the recent work of such Italian thinkers as Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, Roberto Esposito, Giorgio Agamben, and many others, most

8 Freud 1953, p. 107.

9 Kelly 2015.

directly attends to the genesis and implications of these developments.<sup>10</sup> To use a term of Virno's, we are confronted by the patency of the becoming-generic of man, insofar as our times constitute a kind of simultaneous revelation and expropriation of the conditions of human individuation by the realization of the operativity of the generic as such. It is at such a point that, as Jacques Lacan would never forget not to omit, a new Master reemerges with a vengeance — even among the most equitable, peaceful, and just among us. And, of course, there is no Master without slaves or servants.

In other words, I am invoking this Spinozan anecdote as a kind of indicative entrée to a number of features of the fundamental problematic of slavery vis-à-vis philosophy. This is indeed an ancient, if rarely thematized bond. As Alain Badiou has recently remarked, 'this [rarity] is especially because from the outset everything is in some sense divided.'<sup>11</sup> For the figure of the slave divides philosophy at its inception, necessarily running through every question of the organization of the polis, thought, freedom, and justice.<sup>12</sup> In fact, my thesis is that the paradox of the slave is at once foundational and aporetic for philosophy. When the slave appears within the text of philosophy, it will therefore 'necessarily' throw the organisation of that text into a certain disarray.

Such divisions run, moreover, not only *between* but *within* each philosopher and philosophy. Examples can be found at the heart of the work of the great founders of philosophy themselves. As Badiou briefly notes, Plato, on the one hand, returns reason to the slave, while never contesting the fact and act of slavery; on the other, Aristotle speaks of the slave as an 'animate tool,' and has almost-universally been held to be justifying the institutions of enslavement as such. If philosophy must constitutively examine the getting of wisdom, then the slave primordially manifests as either already rational (in which case, the institution of slavery does not bear essentially upon the problem of thought and can therefore be set aside) or essentially irrational or sub-rational (in which case, the institution of slavery can receive a certain kind of 'rational' justification). Put otherwise: philosophy doesn't seem to know whether it knows whether a slave knows. And, given it doesn't know if it doesn't know, philosophy then has recourse to certain supplementary operations which aim to rectify this non-knowing. If this is indeed the case, then tracing the peculiar destiny of the image or figure of the slave in

10 See, inter alia, Agamben 2015, Esposito 2010, Hardt and Negri 2001, Virno 2009.

11 Badiou 2017, p. 35; see also Timofeeva in the same issue.

12 On this point, see the groundbreaking work of Orlando Patterson, e.g., Patterson 1982, Patterson 1991, Patterson 2008.

philosophical thought becomes of paramount interest.

The situation is, of course, even more complex and intractable than Badiou's establishing vignette perhaps conveys. For if Plato in the *Meno* does indeed construct a theory of recollection from Socrates' interactions with the slave boy, it is not certain that this state of affairs speaks particularly well of philosophy: as Jacques Lacan points out in *Seminar XVII*, this operation could well be considered the primary philosophical operation par excellence, the *savoir-faire* of the slave being expropriated and abstracted as *savoir* for the master's benefit; rather than an assignation of reason *to* the slave, the operation is instead an attempt to extract reason *from* the slave.<sup>13</sup> That said, it is also possible that Plato deliberately excludes slavery from the *Republic*. As Brian Calvert has argued, Plato never affirms the necessity of slavery, but, to the contrary, asserts that the ideal city's population is to be completed by wage-earners. This implies, first, that there no longer seems to be any labour left to be done by slaves; second, it denies 'that deficiency in intellect is sufficient justification for enslavement'; third, the very structure of the city precludes slavery: there is no class able to own slaves in the republic.<sup>14</sup> The guardians are forbidden private property, which of course includes slaves; the tripartite division of the soul cannot consistently accept that anybody has a 'naturally slavish' soul; there is no public office that deals with slavery.<sup>15</sup> The commentary itself hence remains undecided: did Plato think or refuse to think slavery? Did Plato affirm or deny the very idea of slavery? Was Plato himself on the side of the slave or the master?

Moreover, if Aristotle has often been interpreted as justifying slavery in the most obsequious of terms, Victor Goldschmidt has shown how Aristotle's position on slavery in fact proceeds by a series of uncharacteristic reversals and equivocations, which not only derange the latter's 'habitual method' of enquiry but, taken to the letter of his text, can even seem to deny any legitimacy and justification to the practice.

As Goldschmidt essays to demonstrate: when confronted by a physical phenomenon, Aristotle usually asks as to its existence, and, that established, then asks what it is. Here, by contrast, he presumes the existence of what is precisely in question. Rather than dialectics preceding a scientific inquiry, in this case, Aristotle's scientific beginning into the nature of slavery is *followed* by a dialectic. This inversion or reversal of Aristotle's standard practice has several paradoxical upshots.

13 See Lacan 2007.

14 Calvert 1987, p. 368.

15 See also Dubois 2003.

The examination of slavery is in fact submitted to two movements. The first movement depends on the concepts of property and instrument, that is animate and inanimate nature (*physis*) and what Goldschmidt translates as 'function' (*dynamis*). Aristotle asserts that, as nature, a slave is the property of another, and, as property, his function is to be the latter's instrument. The second movement thereafter takes up the question as to whether or not such a being exists in nature, and, as such, whether this would be a just relation. Goldschmidt points out that the incontestable institutional reality of slavery in Greece doesn't properly bear on the *physics* or nature of slavery: in this particular context, one no longer really knows what such a 'nature' would be. For if nature works by finality, it doesn't always manage to impose its ends, for example, in regards to exceptions or abnormalities.

Furthermore, the doxography on this question — which Aristotle is covertly polemicizing against — harbours three positions. These are: slavery conforms to nature; slavery is contrary to nature; slavery conforms to *nomos* or convention. Yet in themselves, none of these positions is acceptable for Aristotle; together, moreover, they seem to be contradictory. But Goldschmidt wishes to show something else: that Aristotle wants to find a secret complicity amongst these three irreducible propositions, of which they themselves are unaware and unable to discern, and also to demonstrate that all confirm his own position.

Certainly, each position is dissatisfactory in its received form. The proposition that slavery is in conformity to nature really derives from a kind of presupposition of the law of the strongest à la Callicles, but nature doesn't simply function like this for Aristotle. On the other hand, the proposition that slavery is in conformity with convention doesn't do any better, its partisans also relying on a covert presumption regarding the status of the natural. Rather, for Goldschmidt, Aristotle aims to use the figure of the slave to exceed the very division between *nomos* and *physis*, such that '*nature...is no longer opposed (nor defined in relation) to law or convention: it is referred to its own impotence to always realize what it proposes.*'<sup>16</sup> This has several paradoxical upshots, including that those very alleged 'slaves by nature' should, if they in fact truly exist at all for Aristotle, be precisely brought out of their natural servitude by the supplement of art.<sup>17</sup> Rather than a defense of slavery, then, Aristotle rather offers a surprising and rigorous attack upon it.

Goldschmidt's astonishing intervention notwithstanding, the

16 Goldschmidt, p. 159.

17 Goldschmidt 1973.

questions regarding the slave in Aristotle don't end there. Indeed, the title of the present essay — 'As Fire Burns' — appears at least twice in Aristotle. The first instance comes in the *Nichomachean Ethics*: 'Some people think all rules of justice are merely conventional, because whereas a law of nature is immutable and has the same validity everywhere, as fire burns both here and in Persia, rules of justice are seen to vary' (1134b).<sup>18</sup> The second is from the *Metaphysics*: 'manual workers are like certain lifeless things which indeed act, but act without knowing what they do, as fire burns — while lifeless things perform their functions by a natural tendency, the workers perform them through habit' (981b).<sup>19</sup> In this second instance, the 'artisans,' 'manual workers' (*χειροτέχνας*) are compared unfavorably to 'master craftsmen' (*ἀρχιτέκτων*), according to an order that proceeds from natural objects through craftsmen/manual workers to architects. The manual workers labour through habit, but, unlike the architects, don't know the *arché*, the principles and foundations, of their work; as such, they are also unable to *teach, to transmit*, what it is they do.

Oliver Feltham, who first alerted me to this phrase 'as fire burns' in his discussion of 'functional work' in Aristotle, also notes that this intransmissibility of workers' habits in Aristotle means that their praxis cannot contain its order in itself but must be directed from the outside — at the very moment that their labour as such evaporates into nothingness.<sup>20</sup> One presumes that this may be one reason why Aristotle asserts that some men are slaves by nature, their lack of knowledge regarding their habits, and the origins, principles and ends of such habits, forces them to be dependent for their own good, subject to nature and to those who know. As Reiner Schürmann has noted: 'teleocratic representations refer to the substantial changes artisan man is capable of effecting. From there Aristotle extends them to all philosophical disciplines.'<sup>21</sup> Moreover, as Aristotle puts it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 'justice between master and slave and between father and child is not the same as political justice.... for there is no such thing as injustice, in an absolute sense, towards what is one's own.'<sup>22</sup> To be a slave is to be excluded from the possibility of suffering injustice.

Just as Giorgio Agamben has argued, of the three relations that constitute the oikos or domestic realm: the master/slave (*despotes/*

18 Aristotle 1934.

19 Aristotle 1933.

20 See Feltham 2000.

21 Schürmann 1987, p. 83.

22 Aristotle 1934.

*doulos*), the husband/wife (*gamikè*), and the parental (*technopoietikè*), the first is by far the most illuminating and important. In Agamben's words: 'The slave plays in modern terms more the part of the machinery or fixed capital than of the worker. But... it is a matter of a special machine, which is not directed to production but only use.'<sup>23</sup> This claim — that the slave is tied for the ancients not to production but to use — can find a confirmation in Lacan's remarks in Seminar II that 'people who had slaves didn't realise that one could establish equations for the price of their food and what they did in their *latifundia*. There are no examples of energy calculations in the use of slaves. There is not the hint of an equation as to their output. Cato never did it. It took machines for us to realise they had to be fed. But why? Because they tend to wear out. Slaves do as well, but one doesn't think about it, one thinks that it is natural for them to get old and croak.'<sup>24</sup> A slave is, as such, an in-separable animate organ of the master, whose exclusion from politics founds the economy, whose body is available for any deployment without questioning, and who produces without really producing.

It is for such reasons that Agamben asserts in the course of his discussion of Aristotle the following five propositions regarding the relation of master and slave in regards to 'the use of the body':

1. It is a matter of an unproductive activity (*argos*, 'inoperative,' 'without work' in the terminology of the *Nichomachean Ethics*), comparable to the use of a bed or a garment.
2. The use of the body defines a zone of indifference between one's own body and the body of another. The master, in using the body of the slave, uses his own body, and the slave, in using his own body, is used by the master.
3. The body of the slave is situated in a zone of indifference between the artificial instrument and the living body (it is an *empsychon organon*, an animate organ) and, therefore, between *physis* and *nomos*.
4. The use of the body is, in Aristotelian terms, neither *poiesis* nor *praxis*, neither a production nor a praxis, but neither is it assimilable to the labour of moderns.
5. The slave, who is defined by means of this 'use of the body,' is the human being without work who renders possible the realization of the work of the human being, that living being who, though being human, is excluded — and through this exclusion,

23 Agamben 2015, p. 11.

24 Lacan 1988, p. 75.

included — in humanity, so that human beings can have a human life, which is to say a political life.<sup>25</sup>

So the slave enables: a use that is not labour; an economy which is not political; a vital community that is almost even sub-vegetative; a servitude that is natural and yet permanently open to refiguration.... If the slave is, as Giuseppe Cambiano underlines, reduced to *soma*, to *body* as such, the slave is nonetheless not simply an animal, nor even a plant — as everyone also understands, even as they disavow the fact.<sup>26</sup> Why? Because the problem is that no slave, however degraded, can be considered simply *without voice*. Certainly, the commands given to a slave are necessarily 'functional' — whether they are polite requests, barked orders, silent gestures, or the blows of a whip — which may be perhaps presented as ultimately non-political or pre-political, insofar as they evade any sense of discussion, negotiation, decision, action. But they are not simply natural gestures, either, being signs. As signs, they threaten always to re-enter the realms of the political from which they must be thoroughly excluded.

And it is at this point that the problematic of torture re-emerges as integrally bound up with the metaphysical difficulties with slavery. As Nicholas Heron remarks:

In classical Athens, the speech of a slave could be admitted publicly (which is to say, as testimony in the context of a trial) only if forcefully extorted under conditions of torture. Indeed, as the ancient sources clearly attest, the vocabulary of Athenian law even reserved a particular term for this specific kind of 'evidentiary' torture: *basanos*. Confronted with with references to this 'barbaric' practice, the historians of ancient Greece have typically reacted either with incredulity or silence. And yet, however cruel and ultimately unjustified it may have been, the motivation behind it nonetheless remains perspicuous.<sup>27</sup>

25 Agamben, 2015, pp. 22-23.

26 'Perhaps we no longer catch the weight that reference to the body had in classical Greece in defining the condition of slavery. In the Hellenistic Age, but sometimes as early as the fourth century BC, the word "body" (*soma*) without any adjective was used to indicate the slave. This was meant to emphasize that a slave was exclusively or mainly a body, rather than a body of a particular kind,' Cambiano 1987, p. 35.

27 Heron 2018, n. 80, pp. 177-178. For a relatively recent historico-legal examination of the phenomenon, see Gagarin 1996.

Heron proceeds to list three justifications for the practice of *basanos*. The first is Moses Finley's: the torture is to degrade the slave in order to distinguish humans who are property from humans who are not.<sup>28</sup> The second is Paige Dubois's: the torture is to mark the difference between free and unfree.<sup>29</sup> The third is Heron's own: the torture is not just a performance of the difference between slave and master, free and unfree, but of the original political division between *oikos* and *polis*. To which, drawing on my own previous work on the subject, I will add a fourth point: torture draws a distinction between voice (*logos*?) and noise, between sense and senselessness, as it paradoxically enables precisely the transformation of noise into voice.<sup>30</sup> For a slave to have a voice bearing on public matters, he or she must therefore be tortured in order that the living noises she emits can signify politically.

The word *basanos* is itself highly significant in the context. As Page Dubois states: 'The ancient Greek word for torture is *basanos*. It means first of all the touchstone used to test gold for purity; the Greeks extended its meaning to denote a test or trial to determine whether something or someone is genuine. It then comes to mean also inquiry by torture, "the question," torture.'<sup>31</sup> (Let us note in passing the real and imaginative associations between mining, mostly done in antiquity by slaves, the use of fire, crucial in mineral extraction, and the necessity for assaying the value of the extract though a touchstone of some kind: we have here all the elements of a liminal but fundamental conceptual figure.) If Dubois herself emphasizes the relationship between torture and truth in a Foucauldian vein, I think that the emphasis could be differently placed. After all, many ancient commentators note the practice but also simultaneously the inexpugible unreliability of such a practice as a tool of truth: Aristotle himself asserts in the *Rhetoric* that there is an irresolvable differend regarding torture's powers to assure veracity. Truth in any fundamental sense is not really at stake in torture — unless we understand it as bearing upon the truth of the specific division of the polis itself.

It is for this reason that the emergence of actually-existing democracies of one kind or another has been so crucial to philosophy in many of its greatest moments. This is so not because philosophers are democrats — quite to the contrary. It is rather because democracy

28 See Finley 1980.

29 See Dubois 1991.

30 See Clemens 2013; on the problematic of 'voice' in philosophy, see also Agamben 1991 and Dolan 2006.

31 Dubois 1991, p. 7.

constitutionally bans torture for its citizens. No other kind of polity makes this ban constitutive, but it is only on the basis of such a ban that something that has proven essential to philosophy can emerge: the problematic of speech-as-action as such, a speech that bears on its own conditions of taking-place, as well as upon other such acts. Why? Because 'free speech' in a democracy has never until recently meant 'say anything'; it instead signifies that a citizen or 'free man' has *the right to speak or not to speak*, that is, that that freedom is the freedom of action inscribed in the deployment of a voice, which remains free only insofar as it is not coerced, that is, not extracted through torture.<sup>32</sup>

But if democracy enables such a structure to appear — that to have a voice is to not to have to use it — it also vitiates or undermines its own possibilities by a variety of means, of which the sophists are the emblem for Plato. But it also vitiates its own possibilities by precisely retaining within its ban on torture an unjustified — and potentially unjustifiable — exception, which can be phrased as the paradox of the slave I broached above. Only man has politics and language, that is, a voice, a voice that is by nature free; but some men can only have a voice by not having it, precisely insofar as they are slaves, and can only acquire such a voice when it is extracted under duress, that is, when it is subjected to the very routines which must be otherwise banned in order to ensure the conservation of political existence. Insofar as this is the case, the voice of the tortured slave is not the slave's voice at all, but the voice of the polis itself, which pulls *logos* out of *physis* by *basanos*.

But it is then in the figure of the slave that 'the question concerning technology' as elaborated by philosophy perhaps finds one unheralded commencement. It is not simply that the slave is an ancient figure of automation or of political technics or some such, although there are certainly zones of indistinction evident in this regard. It is rather that the use of torture — as forced extraction of voice from a living body that must otherwise not have a voice, and which thereby contravenes the usual conditions under which voice should be available at all — comes to function as one fundamental model for the operations of technology or technics as such.

I believe this paradox of the slave-torture nexus as integrated with the thinking of technology can be shown to be operative at key moments in the texts of philosophy. If there is evidently no end to such a list, one of the most famous of these apparitions is undoubtedly in

32 Insofar as this is the case, Foucault's late researches into the varieties of ancient forms of 'free speech' (perhaps most notoriously his account of *parrhesia*) are somewhat vitiated insofar as they are stripped of any relation to torture, perhaps a minor conundrum given the thinker's otherwise infamous attentiveness to the powers of torture, e.g., Foucault 1996.

Hegel. If the notoriously tricky dialectic of 'master and slave' to be found in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* may seem — as it has at least done to some of its most influential interpreters — to give the slave a crucial destiny in the philosophical anthropology, it remains the case that the specificities of the dialectical argumentation are themselves marked by serious difficulties. Badiou gives three: first, if Alexandre Kojève famously translates it as 'esclave' in *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*,<sup>33</sup> the word that the *Phenomenology* actually uses for this character is '*Knecht*,' bondservant (which strictly speaking denotes a feudal servant, and, significantly, derives its legitimacy for Hegel and the German language more generally from Luther's translation of Saint Paul's *doulos*, slave, as *Knecht*); second, that Hegel ignores the fact that a certain technological hierarchy must already really *precede* the encounter that allegedly founds that hierarchy (e.g., guns and ships); third, Hegel renders inaccessible the political subjectivity of the slave as such. In sum — and one must assent to Badiou's judgement here — Hegel's thinking 'certainly does not really touch the real of slavery.'<sup>34</sup> For Badiou, by contrast, such a thought would have to attend to 'the real political subjectivity of the slave,' as he himself has attempted in regards to Spartacus in *Logics of Worlds*, or others have done, say, with respect to the Haitian Revolution and its consequences.<sup>35</sup>

My examination here has taken a slightly different tack, insofar as it has sought only to indicate the possibility of the surprising presence of a shadowy image of slavery in philosophy, and the further linking of this image to a problematic of torture. In the picture I have sketched, torture moreover comes to function as a kind of disavowed matrix for the philosophical thinking of technology insofar as it transforms noise to voice, sound to sense, and paradigmatically in a *political* frame, even as the political aspects of this framing tend to dissipate into express physical or metaphysical concerns. In other words, the question concerning the essence of technology as thought by philosophy has an integral bond with such a divided figure of slavery. Yet, as such, the possibility of the slave as subject becomes moot at best. From Plato's slaveboy, through Spinoza's 'scabby black Brazilian' and Hegel's *Knecht*, to Nietzsche's theses regarding 'slave morality' and beyond, such figures can only manifest....as fire burns.

33 See Kojève 1947.

34 Badiou 2017, p. 45. See also Vatter 2014 for a very interesting recent interpretation of Hegel's difficulties.

35 See Badiou 2009, esp. pp. 51-54; Wright 2013.

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Volume 5 /  
Issue 1

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Volume 5 /  
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