The General Argument

Hegel's concept of *Bildung* is often explained with reference to the Introduction and chapter four in the *Phenomenology*.[4] It is thought that for Hegel experience, negation and productive work are the determining elements for the *Bildung* of the consciousness as conscious being, in German *Bewu?t-sein*. In contrast to this, I argue that for Hegel *Bildung* cannot be completed through production. The most elaborate discussion of *Bildung* in the *Phenomenlogy* is found in the chapter six on *Geist* (i.e. spirit), and here it is the alienation and tearing apart of the self that is constitutive for *Bildung*, not working with some material. *Bildung* presupposes alienation as something experienced, but also as expressed. Language is thus a necessary component for *Bildung*. The point is here, that *Bildung* as a phenomenon is collective (a people and a family), political (about wealth, power and law), and historical (it develops until revolutions). *Bildung* is something that happens in relation to the spirit, not production. *Bildung* is therefore not just a matter of concern for an individual consciousness working with some material. This is the idea of *Bildung*, I will elaborate a little further on in the next section. In the rest of this section I will just complete the general argument.

With this general idea of *Bildung* as a framework it is obvious that Hegel must put a lot of emphasis on the importance of language and alienation also in the *Gymnasium*. In his annual speeches as rector he pays homage to traditional *Bildung* (*W*4: 307), but he also wants to open the minds of the students for new developments (*W*4: 314). This opening, however, can according to Hegel be achieved by confronting the students with the classical writings in Greek and Latin (*W*4: 319). The learning of language requires discipline, and since it is strange, it also breaks with conformity. The content of the classics, however, also give you the instruments to reconcile yourself with reality once again (*W*4: 320-21). As would be expected from his reputation as the spokesman of the state, Hegel of course emphasizes discipline (*W*4: 334-35), but he is also very careful to spell out that the youth needs time by themselves to be able to develop the character necessary for grating them freedom and liberty (*W*4: 351-53).

In his teaching material from the same period Hegel emphasizes that the *Bildung* should be both theoretical and practical. According to Hegel virtues to be cultivated in relation to science are the recognition of the limits of judgment, the importance of objectivity and

disinterestedness (*W*4: 260). Practical virtues are first of all health, which enable us to fulfill our calling. We should be faithful to our calling, since as part of humanity it expresses something universal and necessary (*W*4: 262-63). *Bildung* is to Hegel what Kant would consider duties toward oneself. With these duties fulfilled in relation to ourselves, we are enabled to have duties in relation to others.

Bildung thus requires education, not just working with a material. In relation to *Bildung*, work can at most create tacit knowledge, whereas *Bildung* in the full sense presupposes language and culture. As such this account of *Bildung* in Hegel differs from interpretations in the slipstream of Marxism. The historical subject can never be the working class; the historical subject must have studied Greek and Latin in the *Gymnasium*.

The interpretation offered, however, also differs from the way the term has recently been understood by Robert Pippin. *Bildung* is not just a "learning process" (Pippin 2008: 122), neither is it "collective self-cultivation" (2008: 126), since cultivation is an instrumental purposive practice, whereas *Bildung* relates to the split between individual and collective, it partly happens behind your backs, and it is never completed. It is precisely by the consciousness being torn apart that *Bildung* is always open to freedom.

Some Details from the *Phenomenology*

This being the argument, I will just supply a few details to substantiate it a little more. In discussions of *Bildung* it is as mentioned common to refer to chapter four of the *Phenomenology*. It is here we get the detailed account of the conceptual logic of work, as it is carried out by the slave. Slavery is to be forced to work for somebody else. The consciousness of a slave in the service of a master is thus characterized by fear. For Hegel desire is characterized by requesting the "pure negation of an object", which will thus be lost, and in this perspective Hegel can therefore think of work as another kind of negation, namely as "inhibited desire, delayed disappearances" (W3: 153). Crucial to Hegel is that the slave in this formation of the thing "comes to himself" (W3: 153). It is therefore common to link the work on the object to *Bildung* as such. One is supposed to form oneself, when working and thus forming the thing according to one's own idea. In giving the thing its shape one externalizes oneself, and one can therefore recognize oneself in the resulting

object.

It is normally presumed that Hegel in this figure let an awareness of one self in self-consciousness be created through the working process, and that *Bildung* therefore will be the result of production. However, Hegel consistently fails to use the word '*Bildung*' in this context. Instead when Hegel is writing on the formation of things in this passage, he uses the word '*Bilden*', and none of the two words appears in the account of the evolution of consciousness. It is clearly the case that Hegel let the thing be formed according to the idea of man working with the material and also that an awareness is generated through this work. That, however, does not mean that self-consciousness thereby attains *Bildung.*

The close connection between *Bildung* and alienation mentioned above is indicated already by a superficial look at chapter six on The Spirit. The combination of both these elements actually constitutes the title of section VI.B., "The world of the spirit, which is alienated for itself; *Bildung*". Furthermore subsection VI.B.1 on "The world of the spirit alienated from itself" contains a sub-sub-section VI.B.I.a., which is named "*Bildung* and its realm in reality", and this sub-sub-section is one of the longest in the book.

In this realm of *Bildung* consciousness confronts conflicts, contradictions and divisions, which are developed in relation to objects, in relation to consciousness itself, and even in relation to the contradictions themselves. For Hegel *Bildung* not only presupposes that consciousness becomes external to itself. It also means that consciousness becomes alienated to itself; actually Hegel goes as far as to say that alienation becomes alien to itself (W3: 366). Basically the problem is from the outset the conflict between the universal, which consciousness strives to express, and the individual or particulars, which appear in reality. Consciousness thinks to have the truth about itself, but again and again it becomes obvious to consciousness itself that what is expressed by consciousness does not have universal validity, and thus for Hegel no reality in the strict sense.

In the realm of *Bildung* the decisive contradiction is between the political power of the state and wealth (*W*3: 367). This conflict Hegel describes in various steps, which as a whole reconstructs the logic in the societal development from the feudal society to bourgeois or capitalist society. The decisive moment for Hegel, however, is, when language is introduced in the analysis. For Hegel it is language that really makes alienation and *Bildung* possible.

The language is "the existence of the self as pure self" (W3: 376). Language allows the silent loyalty to be transformed into "heroic flattery" (W3: 378), and on the other hand, it elevates the power to "an existence refined to spirit", the pure "similarity-in-itself: the monarch "(W3: 378). For Hegel it is language that constitute the absolute sovereignty of the king – *l'état, ce moi* – and this form of state on the other hand implies the most extreme alienation on the side of the servant.

The result is "laceration", i.e. being torn apart in such an extreme sense that it must lead to a revolution. To Hegel this means that everything that is universal, everything "that is called law, good and right" (W3: 382) falls apart and is destroyed; "everything equal has dissolved" into "the purest inequality "(W 3: 382). According to Hegel, however, it is in this absolute alienation, we encounter the truth of *Bildung*. "The language of being lacerated is […] the perfect language and the true existing spirit of this whole world of *Bildung*." (W3: 384) Self-consciousness is exalted in this rejection of "the absolute equality-with-itself in the absolute laceration" (W3: 385). The "pure *Bildung*" is "this absolute and general distortion and alienation of reality and thought" (W3: 385). In this alienated *Bildung* consciousness transcends both the noble loyalty and the vile meanness of the rebel. Its existence is "the general speech and the lacerating judging" (W3: 386) which, however, expresses what is "true and irrepressible" (W3: 386). This "lacerated consciousness" is "the consciousness of distortion"(W3: 386), which distorts "all concepts and realities ". The" shamelessness to pronounce this deception", "alternately furious and soothing, urgent and mocking" is however "the greatest truth "(W 3: 387). For Hegel "the laceration of consciousness that is conscious of itself and speaks itself" is a "scornful laughter about life as well as about the whole confusion and itself" (W3: 389).

This description of *Bildung* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* obviously presupposes the development of the culture of modern society, where people linguistically can relate both to themselves, to their surroundings and to the contradictions that arise in relation to themselves as well as between them. *Bildung* reaches its climax in the clear recognition of the contradictionary character of existence itself. *Bildung* is what is achieved by the one, who is indeed alienated, that is, not only alienated from himself and his surroundings, but also from the very alienation.

Concluding Remarks

Bildung and alienation are for Hegel thus processes, which clearly take place in the upper strata of society. *Bildung* presupposes the alienation, which can only be brought by in the formal education, and on its side *Bildung* creates the enabling conditions for further alienation, fragmentation and freedom of expression. Pushed to the extreme *Bildung* is simply alienation. *Bildung* is directed towards an end, which can be determined in advance. As Gadamer says, then *Bildung* is not a means to shape natural dispositions, which are given (Gadamer 1986: 17). In *Bildung* man must break with what is merely given and through negation sublate himself to universality.

These remarks apply both to the general concept of *Bildung*, as it is described in the *Phenomenology* and to the more pedagogical concept of *Bildung* that Hegel developed in his Nürnberg-writings. In relation to the classics in Greek and Latin one can develop alienation and laceration, and still it is precisely in these works, in the midst of lacerating despair, that it is possible to find one self again. However, this means that for Hegel there must be some kind of contradiction between being an educated person and having *Bildung*. For *Bildung* seems to be so closely associated with alienation, that *Bildung* can never be a process brought to a close. *Bildung* is precisely this that consciousness – that is, man's conscious being – can still be moved by the impressions, which are worth being moved by. With *Bildung* one becomes able to form still better judgments, but one does not receive a set of final judgments.

Hegel clearly sees that higher administrative officers, as the *Gymnasium* mainly were to educate, must be able to take responsibility. *Bildung* as a special kind of spiritual formation thus require the experience of real freedom; *Bildung* must develop the capacity to make the right judgments in a very complex reality, and therefore it must not imply the feeling that action is concluded, or that that the answer is already given. The laceration means that each and every person must decide concretely for himself in every case. In a gender and class perspective, one can say that the upper-class sons of Hegel's high school are trained for the freedom, responsibility and sovereignty required by the roles they must fill out in bourgeois society. This also means that for Hegel one of course gets some formation through productive work, but that does not mean that one gets *Bildung*. Negation is a necessary component of all kinds of consciousness formation, but productive work is not the only kind

of negation, and actually it is a rather primitive one. In *Bildung* it is the experienced strangeness of antiquity, which is the negative component. The necessary break with the given reality happens in the alienation experienced in relation to the classical languages. To get the *Bildung* necessary for living in freedom and taking responsibility, for Hegel the worker thus has to enter high school.

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1 The German term *Bildung* is very difficult to translate adequately into English. *Bildung* is a specific kind of formation, and the word can signify both the process of what in the US would be called liberal education, and the normative goal for such an education, namely to acquire *Bildung* or to end up as an educated person. These difficulties cannot be ignored when dealing with this matter in English, but for now I have restricted myself to a simple technical solution. In what follows I have thus used the German term, whenever there was any possibilities of misunderstandings.

2 The relation between the German *Gymnasium* and the high school of the English speaking world will not

be dealt with here.

3 This note stems from a presentation at the winter session in Nordic Summer University at Turku University in Finland, February 11th 2012. I have given a fuller account of the argument in the original Danish version, "Hegel. Fremmedgørelse, sprog og frihed", which will be a chapter in the Norwegian anthology edited by Ingerid Straume, *Danningens Filosofihistorie* (Oslo: Gyldendal).

4 Cf. e.g. Heidegren (1995: 464).