

**BLEEDING HEARTS AND BLOODY MINDS
REASON IN ACTION IN ALTRUISTIC BENEVOLENCE**

by

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Abstract

This paper provides an analysis of Hegel's section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* on "The Law of the Heart and the Frenzy of Self-Conceit." The section provides an account of the dynamics of humanitarian benevolent activity to explain how charitable organizations become so conflictual.

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Part IV - Analysing the Hegelian Account

Preface

In this paper I make several claims. I claim that I am merely stating what Hegel says in my own words. Second, Hegel depicts what is actually found in experience. Third, Hegel makes sense of that experience in his insight into the dynamic of that experience and the logic of its development. This paper focuses on the third, expressing what Hegel is phenomenologically depicting and analysing the dynamic that takes place in moral humanitarianism.

The Law of the Heart

This section preceding the Law of the Heart deals with the self seeking hedonistic search for pleasure in the world and romantic love, a phenomenological account which turns into this section, the giving of the self in service to another. We begin to act as if unity is the starting point not a goal. The pursuit of pleasure for oneself in and through another turns into the pleasure one gets in serving another. In this humanitarian service, actions are not determined by choice but by necessity. We serve where natural disasters or human wars demand we go as servants of necessity rather than exemplifications of personal freedom. This necessity is not simply a contingently external one; it is a categorical internal necessity. My heart dictates that I must go: I must offer service to any human in need.

There are three sides to this internal necessity: (1) the law applies to all humans; every human is identified as having a heart and, therefore, worthy of heartfelt service; (2) the feeling of compassionate response is also said to be in all humans; (3) the law of the heart is universal in characterizing the essence of a human - someone who has sympathy for every human being and who expresses that sympathy in action.

Every human being not only experiences this sympathy, but the law demands that we try to actualize ourselves as sympathetic human beings by trying to act upon our sympathies in a real world in which our hearts bleed precisely in situations in which bloody mindedness is extant, in situations governed by heartlessness, where refugees, the displaced and the unwanted are persecuted, neglected and treated as having no hearts and, hence, are not human.

Immediately, a contradiction is encountered between the universal presumptions of the law of the heart and the situations attended to by the actions dictated by the law of the heart. Superheart encounters reality, Aa reality which is the opposite of what is to be realized@. (Hegel, 369) The reality contradicts the law and the rational assertion about the universal character of humanity because reality

reveals humans as heartless, uncaring even towards those close to them. Life is experienced as Anasty, brutish and short, @ a heartless, dog-eat-dog world.

The presumption that all humans have a heart encounters a demonstration of heartlessness, coming face to face with the heartless who believe that victims are worthy of victimization because they lack a heart, lack a human personality. But the victimizers also share a common presumption, that humans share common sentiments, differing only in those entitled to enter into membership in the human club. Humanitarians, thus, have a twofold task. They must give witness to the law of the heart by treating victims as part of humanity by relieving their suffering. At the same time, they must, like Christian missionaries, convince those who inflict that cruelty that they and their victims share a common humanity. In caring for the suffering and appealing to the victimizers, they must always deal with those who inflict cruelty as if they had a heart and potentially could care for their victims. In this activity, in caring for the victims and in the form of address to the victimizers, the humanitarians express A the earnestness of a high purpose which seeks its pleasure in displaying the *excellence* of its own nature, and in promoting the welfare of mankind. @ (Hegel 370)

The Encounter with Heartlessness

But the action is *undisciplined*. The humanitarians revel in voluntarism, celebrate individualism as the mode through which our heartfelt essence is demonstrated. Reality is otherwise inclined. For the law of the jungle demonstrates contrary inclinations, but without any self-consciousness. There is no intention on the part of those inflicting cruelty to make the law they live by universal. They simply accept cruelty as a given. They do not revel in transgressing the law of the heart because they have no real consciousness of the law of the heart. Without reflection, they inflict cruelty simply because that is the way of the world.

How do the victimizers cope with do-gooders? They treat them as irrelevant at best, and more often as a form of self seeking. The humanitarians provide no counter-authority to challenge the victimizers= view of the world. The cruel exploiters often pay lip service to caring humanitarianism and human rights, cooperating with the humanitarian agencies as they cynically exploit them to suck foreign aid into the country and to ensure these agencies provide another financial source through robbery, fraud and lucrative contracts. The satisfaction of the victimizers is obtained in the use of the law of the heart for self-interested purposes.

But in following appearances, they encounter those for whom the law of the heart is the essence of who they are. And the victimizers at the very least become self-conscious that the law of the jungle does not seem to govern everyone. The victimizers witness genuine dedication, deep and sustained caring for the suffering of others, and a sense of identification with victims rather than victimizers.

If there is a small degree of victory with the victimizers, it is not free of cost to the humanitarians; the latter come to recognize that the victimizers are not governed by the law. The humanitarians carry on, determined to establish the law of the heart by their actions even if the law is not a description of

reality. To act *as if* the law was universal.

The Encounter with the Dutiful

If there is some ironic kind of synergy and interdependence between those governed by the law of the heart and victimizers, the same cannot be said of the relations between bleeding heart humanitarians and those responsible for delivering aid who work as professionals for states and international UN agencies. If the activities of the former are undisciplined and depend primarily on the initiatives of individuals, the activities of the latter are very disciplined within a bureaucratic structure of awesome proportions depending primarily on precedent, experience and agency norms characterized by meticulous reporting and accountability. The latter are objectively rather than subjectively determined in their actions; they are professional, hierarchical, and rule based. The bleeding hearts determine that what is heartless is not primarily the actions of the victimizers, who at least are governed by passion, but the actions of the rule-based bureaucrats. These become the objects of detestation. And the fault is placed on laws, laws which are devoid of compassion. Compassion that is not subject to universal law is now seen as the heart of the heartfelt.

The Alienation of the Law from the Heart

Instead of being a descriptive law of the character of pity and compassion in all humans translated into action based on sentiment, the law is not of the heart at all, but heartless, an external norm dictating to the individual what ought to be the case. What the heart feels is indifference. Thus, the law is no longer *his* ordinance; only the responsibility for realization is his. Does he obey the law of the jungle or the law of sentiment which is no longer has any heart, or does he follow the dictates of his own heart? He now has a choice. The law of sentiment has lost its obligatory force.

There is a benefit. In freedom from the necessity of the law, since the law depends entirely on his commitment, the agent is no longer just a particular expression of the law. The law as a universal now depends on him. He, in turn, is raised to free universality through expressing the law. His essential character is acting so his own feelings become the norm. The humanitarian posits himself as free; reality is an open possibility. Hence, he **and** reality are no longer governed by necessity.

But if he now suborns himself to the universal, it is only by making himself a particular opposed to the universal. For before, every heart was supposed to feel the same way, and the actions based on those feelings were supposed to be what anyone would do. Now, however, the action is what he has chosen to do; ~~A~~only the heart of *this* individual has placed its reality in its deed, which expresses for him *his-being-for-self or his pleasure*.@ (Hegel 373) The effect on the victimizers or the victims is clear. Others who are not humanitarian have no need to see themselves as carrying out what was once called the law of the heart. Quite the reverse, since the humanitarian defines reality in his own way, as an order dictated by *his* sentiment, so they find that their passions and feelings, directed towards exploiting those who they can, is as valid a position as

that of any feely. The real targets of scorn become those who are governed by heartless and bureaucratic rules and norms.

It is the effect on the humanitarian that is critical. Whereas before, he believed that the victimizers were essentially good and governed by the same feelings of pity and compassion as he, now he finds their behaviour, and whatever is in their hearts that govern their actions, detestable. But even more detestable is the heartlessness of those whose activities are governed by bureaucratic ambition and obedience to a central organizational authority.

Everything he formerly believed that governed the humanitarian is now alien to him. The law is **not** universal in applying to all humans, in producing the same emotional response, and in characterizing what in essence it means to be human. The whole foundation of the humanitarian's world view as the basis for his actions has crumbled in its encounter with reality and the effort to ensure that the law actually governed all of reality.

The situation is even worse than he knows. Once his beliefs were based on the immediacy of his feelings and the belief that those feelings were held by everyone and were applicable to everyone. Now the belief is simply a postulated feeling, but with no basis in universality, and the humanitarian bleeding heart has not yet recognized the postulate as an ethical maxim that can be raised to a universal by the power of his reason. So the relevance of his particular feeling is lost without being replaced by a universal thought or idea. The humanitarian is *burnt out*. He is dead to himself and merely acts out the feelings of compassion, but his heart is no longer in his work. Instead, he now believes that compassion depends upon belief, not the universality of feelings, depends upon an ordinance but given vital motion by an individual passionately committed to it. But the burnt out humanitarian no longer sees himself as exemplifying that passion. He turns into his worst enemy, the international humanitarian bureaucrat.

In this way self-consciousness is related to a twofold antithetic essence; it is in its own self a contradiction, and is distraught in its inmost being. The law of *this* particular heart is alone that in which self-consciousness recognizes itself; but the universally valid order has, through the realizing of that law, equally become for self-consciousness its own essential being and its own reality. Thus, what contradicts itself in its consciousness has for it in each case the form of essence and its own reality. (Hegel 375)

The alienation is experienced in duplicate. On one side, the humanitarian feels oneness with all mankind, but if he is now to carry out that feeling, he can only do so by accepting his feelings as simply belonging to him. On the other hand, what he now feels is not the pleasure and satisfaction brought by his work based on that feeling, but the despair with reality and with his own lack of pleasure from his work. And if that is now his essential feeling, then what is projected on the world as a universal is a universal order of despair. That is enough to make anyone deranged. For your feelings of immediate oneness in the world as your basis for giving yourself in service to that world is now irrelevant to the workings of the world, an initial naive fantasy without any reality whatsoever. What is experienced is precisely the opposite of fellow feeling, a despair at the cruelty of the world and at one's own alienation from the immediate feeling that brought one into the service of humanity. The humanitarian now wallows in the nothingness of himself while professing the positivity and unity of the world of sentiment. And his essence is to hold both to be true - the unity of the world in feeling, and his despair with himself and the possibility of having any such feeling. And that is just the way the world is. He is not crazy. The world is just a mad place.

The Frenzy of Self-Conceit

When the bleeding heart reaches this point, he has usually become the head of a mission and attends the meetings and consultations where decisions are made. And that is almost exactly the time when the immediacy of feeling with all humanity has now passed into the ravings of an insane self-conceit. (Hegel 377) The feely now furiously tries to preserve himself from falling apart by declaring the mad world of cruelty and the insane world of bureaucratic meaningless rules to be based precisely on the indifference and despair he finds now within himself. The world is not based on universal fellow feeling and sentiment, but on indifference, cynicism and surrender of any immediate care for the world. Those who exploit humanity, whom he formerly believed to share in a fellow feeling to which he once appealed, and those who serve that humanity from the duties of their positions rather than as a committed act, are both now seen as experiencing emptiness and coldness, precisely the Hobbesian law his law of the human heart first encountered as an alien proposition. The exploiters exploit others because they feel so self degraded themselves. And the career self-servers of humanitarianism serve others for precisely the same reasons. They deserve one another. This is the universal psychological law that governs the world, not the universality of fellow feeling.

Without fellow feeling and the unity of sentiment, all each individual can do is attempt to keep from flying apart by seeing everyone else as an exemplification of the process of indifference, cruelty and self-seeking. The humanitarians wrangle over the smallest minutiae as if the existence of the world depended upon it, for in their own experience, their own lives do depend on it. Among humanitarians, the game was supposed to be an interest in the benevolence of the other which united them all. What they now experience is that everyone is just pursuing their own agenda but, unlike the self-interested possessive individualist, professing that their own particular agenda represents the good of all. Moreover, they profess it as if their life depends on its realization. Also that even when they complain about this ordinance as if it went against their own inner law, and maintain against it the opinions of the

heart, they cling to it with their hearts, as being their essential being.@(Hegel 378) If they lose, they experience the loss as a loss of their whole being, for public order seems to depend on the projection of what they feel to be the case.

The situation was made to breed conflict over everything and to make any solution unsatisfactory to everyone else except the one who proposed it. And not superficially unsatisfactory, but as threatening the very foundations of the world. So the only universal at work is Aa universal resistance and struggle of all against one another, in which each claims validity for its own individuality, but at the same time does not succeed in his efforts, because each meets with the same resistance from the others, and is nullified in their reciprocal resistance.@(Hegel 379) The wonder is that anything is accomplished at all. The humanitarian now fights for his proposals as adamantly as he once gave himself over in the service to others.