

The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic. First published in *La Critique sociale* 5 (March 1932):209–14. Reprinted in *Deucalion* 5 (1955) and in *OC* I, 277–90. This article was written jointly with Raymond Queneau (1903–76); Queneau's contribution (including note 13) is in brackets. Queneau, after breaking with Bataille in the late 1930s (he disapproved of the Acéphale project and its rituals) went on to become well known as an experimental novelist (*Exercices de style*, 1947; *Zazie dans le métro*, 1959) and as an editor (he assembled the various notes and articles to make Alexandre Kojève's *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* [1947]).

The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic

The Marxist conception of the dialectic has often been challenged. Most recently, Max Eastman has considered it to be a form of religious thought. But the dialectic has never been the object of a negative critique. Those who criticized it acted as simple destroyers. They tried not to see that, by removing the dialectical method from proletarian ideology, they removed the blood from the body; they took no notice of it because Hegelianism, in whatever form it might take, was incompatible with their ordinary representations. Thus the Marxist dialectic was treated in the same way that the Hegelian dialectic in general was treated: it was pushed away with repugnance.

A new way of conceiving the Hegelian dialectic nevertheless starts with the critique of Nicolai Hartmann,¹ in which it is possible to find the elements of a true positive critique. The indications given by this German professor, in an article appearing in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*,² are sufficient in themselves: they express in concise form a direction that is, in our opinion, of the greatest interest to Marxist studies. Hartmann successively examines the different dialectical themes developed in Hegel's philosophy, and then compares them from the standpoint of their bases and forms. In this way he seeks to distinguish those that are justified by *experience*, founded in reality, from those that have only a verbal value. As an example of the latter he cites the famous theme of being and nothingness. "In the course of such an investigation," states Hartmann, "Hegel's *Logic* most seriously gives rise to the suspicion that, in its major part, it consists only of a dialectic lacking any foundation in reality. This

is even more true," he adds, "in the *Philosophy of Nature* (this is obvious, it is true, and not unprecedented, as results already confirm)."³

The profound difference between Hartmann's critique and the Marxist critique appears at the outset. For Marx and Engels, the dialectic is still—as it is for Hegel—the general law of a fundamental reality. Nature or matter has been substituted for logic, but the universe is nevertheless abandoned in its entirety to antithetical development. For Hartmann, on the other hand, the basic task lies in methodically testing the value of dialectical reasoning in its particular cases. And not only is universality set aside, but from the outset, more than any other element, nature is seen as a prohibited domain. The dialectical themes justified by Hartmann are borrowed neither from the *Logic* nor from the *Philosophy of Nature*, but from the *Philosophy of Right*, the *Philosophy of History*, and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; and the first example Hartmann gives to found his conception has nothing to do with the grain of barley or with geological formations. It is, on the contrary, class struggle itself, the Hegelian theme of "master and slave." Thus a modern philosopher, wanting to found the dialectic in reality, immediately refers to the Marxist experience.⁴

One must recognize in any case that Marx and Engels themselves felt the necessity of a labor analogous—but only in its elementary principle—to the one that Hartmann has recently undertaken. The fact that they chose a domain of study different from that of Hartmann, that they had the ambition to give dialectical conceptions the character of general laws of nature in no way contradicts the fact that Engels tried, through a long study of the natural sciences, to give these laws an experimental value. But from the beginning we are led to differentiate between the domain admitted *a posteriori* by Hartmann and the one that Engels assigned himself *a priori*. Hartmann methodically seeks to recognize what, in the dialectical themes, can be seen as givens of lived experience, whereas Engels systematically imposed on himself the task of finding these laws in nature, in other words, in a domain that can at first appear to be closed to all antithetically developing rational conceptions.

Hartmann's attitude of indifference toward the *Philosophy of Nature* conforms to that of all the representatives of the natural sciences since Hegel. For scientists, a dialectical construction of the relations they study must seem incompatible with science: science must do as much as possible without the intervention of an element that is as foreign to it as is systematic contradiction—and in fact it was possible to do without it. The objection to the introduction of the dialectic was of a necessity so apparent to specialists that it was not even necessary to formulate it.

But the difficulty offered by nature to the dialectic is not only indicated by the history of all modern scientific research: Hegel himself was the first to indi-

cate cautiously that it was precisely nature which by its "impotence [. . . to adhere strictly to the Notion . . .] sets limits to philosophy."⁵ To philosophy: in other words, to the dialectical construction of the becoming of things. For him, nature is the *fall* of the idea: it is a negation, at the same time a revolt and an *absurdity*.

Even if he had set aside his idealist prejudices, nothing would have seemed more unreasonable to Hegel than looking for the foundations of the objectivity of dialectical laws in the study of nature. This effort would in fact lead again to basing the dialectical construction on its weakest part; it would lead to the paradox of the colossus with feet of clay. The very elements that suddenly become, for Marx and Engels, the method's foundations are precisely those that offer the most resistance to the application of this method, and not only by definition, but above all in practice. In spite of the trouble taken by Hegel to resolve the difficulties encountered in the *Philosophy of Nature*, this part of his work left even him unsatisfied. It must be recognized in principle that difficulties of this kind do not in any way permit Engels's efforts to be considered inherently untenable. Nevertheless, in fact, the failure of this effort was, in a way, given in its premises. The substitution of nature for logic is only the Scylla and Charybdis of post-Hegelian philosophy.

Today a new experimental justification of the dialectic has become necessary. It will be clear why this operation can only take place on the very terrain of its specific development, in other words on the immediate terrain of class struggle, in experience and not in an *a priori* fog of universal conceptions.

The failure of Engels, who worked for eight years preparing a dialectical theory of nature—which led only to the second preface of the *Anti-Dühring*⁶ in 1885—has not yet been the object of the studies that the considerable efforts of this great pioneer of the Revolution so richly deserve. Many people prefer to speak of dialectical materialism as if it were not an incomplete project, but a constituted doctrine.⁷ This carelessness is even more unjustifiable in that Engels's abandonment of the project was due neither to a lack of time, nor to any other circumstances external to the nature of the project itself. Engels invokes the death of Marx and the need to work on the edition of his friend's uncompleted works. He nevertheless wrote this second preface in which—after recognizing the insufficiency of the arguments in the *Anti-Dühring* that have to do with the dialectic—he gives a definition of the dialectic that is nothing more than an abandonment of his initial position. The immense and admirable effort of Engels, which we know of today due to the publications of Riazanov, therefore had this result: the change represented by the second preface in relation to the main text of the *Anti-Dühring*. This step backwards in itself accounts for the fact that Engels left unfinished a work to which, by his own account, he devoted the better part of eight years.

One still finds in 1881–82, in a note published by Riazanov,⁸ an affirmation of the most suspect form of the dialectical conception. The “law” of the negation of the negation is cited there as one of the three essential dialectical laws of the history of nature. Nevertheless, the argument that follows stops at the transformation of quality into quantity.⁹ No examples are given of the “negation of the negation.” By 1885 this “negation of the negation” has disappeared from an account meant to remedy the insufficiencies of the *Anti-Dühring*, published in 1878.

It would, however, be easy to agree on this point: if any part of the *Anti-Dühring* can be criticized, it is the one that presents examples of the “negation of the negation”: the stories of grains of barley, butterflies, and geological strata. The insufficiency of this section is even more regrettable in that without this “negation of the negation” the dialectic loses its practical value in the realm of society. Nevertheless, instead of returning to this burning question, Engels in 1885 stops seeing the “negation of the negation” in the “essential of the dialectical conception of nature.” The relevant passage from the second preface should be cited here in its entirety.

It is however precisely the polar antagonisms put forward as irreconcilable and insoluble, the forcibly fixed lines of demarcation and class distinctions, that have given modern theoretical natural science its restricted, metaphysical character. The recognition that these antagonisms and distinctions, though to be found in nature, are only of relative validity, and that on the other hand their imagined rigidity and absolute validity have been introduced into nature only by our reflective minds—this recognition is the *kernel*¹⁰ of the dialectical conception of nature.¹¹

This declaration means nothing less than the renunciation of the hope of founding in nature the general law of which class struggle would only have been a particular case.

To link facts as different as the transformation of electricity into heat (or any other change in nature) and class struggle in fact makes no sense—and in fact no practical sense. Class struggle, which we cite as our most important example, is characterized first of all by the fact that the positive term, capitalism, necessarily implies the negative term, the proletariat; secondly, the realization of the negation implied in the second term implies, in turn, and with the same necessity, the negation of the negation (in this way the revolution has, at the same time, a negative and a positive sense). In other applications, this elementary schema can be altered; as Hartmann explains it,¹² dialectical themes can take a great number of forms, each one very different—but it is possible to admit such alteration while nevertheless refusing to recognize that this schema is the same when it reappears in a form so impoverished that one cannot imagine a greater

impoverishment. If it is only a matter of recognizing diversity in identity, or identity in diversity, if it is only a matter of admitting that what is diversified does not necessarily remain identical to itself, then it is useless and even imprudent to invoke the authority of the Hegelian dialectic. For this dialectic is linked to a current of thought whose “long experimental history” is not exactly what Engels envisages when using this expression. Things must be looked at squarely, and it is necessary to admit that the dialectic had antecedents other than Heraclitus, Plato, or Fichte. It is linked even more essentially to currents of thought such as Gnosticism, Neoplatonic mysticism, and to philosophical phantoms such as Meister Eckhart, the Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, and Jakob Boehme. Now it is no surprise that the thought of these phantoms as assimilated and adopted by Hegel is not applicable to the domain of natural science, or that if this thought seeks to wander in this domain, it only finds a place as a parasite, becoming ever poorer and finding itself reduced to the most miserable state. In fact, however, the same thought, conserved in its richest form, is adequate and, to a certain extent, alone is adequate, when it is a matter of representing the life and revolutions of societies.

But in order to conserve this adequacy, this thought must be conserved in its entirety, whatever its religious antecedents may have been. A justification of its attenuated form, based on the natural sciences, has revealed itself to be an insufficient effort, leaving the way open to analytical work established on the bases defined by Hartmann.

There remains the strangest element of Engels’ *Weltanschauung*, his dialectical conception of mathematics,¹³ which in certain ways recalls the mathematical idealism of Nicholas of Cusa, whom we have just cited as one of the mystical ancestors of the Hegelian dialectic.

Engels cannot be suspected of mathematical idealism, but his conception is even more strange in that it only differs from mathematical idealism to the extent that mathematics is assimilated to nature. This confusion is apparent in the following passage, which appears in the second preface to the *Anti-Dühring* (p. cvii; English translation, p. 17):

It goes without saying that my recapitulation of mathematics and the natural sciences was undertaken in order to convince myself also in detail—of what in general I was not in doubt—that in *nature*,¹⁴ amid the welter of innumerable changes, the same dialectical laws of motion [govern].

Beyond this, he gives mathematical examples of the negation of the negation that come from the history of geological movements and the history of the modes of property.

In any case, Engels saw in mathematics a kind of privileged domain of the conceptions he was trying to introduce: in this domain the dialectic had not only

the most legitimate place, but the most privileged one as well. Mathematics furnished the convincing example of a science that had arrived at the dialectical stage.

For this reason it is all the more important to indicate here that this science rejected in its very development everything that could give rise to such an interpretation. What Engels considered a progress toward perfection¹⁵ was considered by mathematicians a degeneration and an evil that had to be eliminated. [In its origins, infinitesimal calculus was in fact based on "contradictory" notions, and the demonstrations that were available were, in the words of Engels, "false from the point of view of elementary mathematics." Throughout the eighteenth century people worked without worrying about the logical difficulties presented by the use of the infinitely small, the passage to the limit, continuity, etc. "The simple question of proof is definitely pushed into the background, as compared with the manifold application of the method to new spheres of research."¹⁶ But this sentence, which Engels put in the present tense, applied, in fact, only to a stage of analysis that had already been superseded. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, mathematicians such as Gauss, Abel, and Cauchy worked to give their demonstrations an absolute rigor and tried to revise, from this point of view, the demonstrations of their predecessors. Their successors continued this labor of purification and attacked the very principles of analysis: the passage to the limit, continuity, differentiation, integration, etc., were defined in such a way as to exclude all contradiction. In 1886, Jules Tannery,¹⁷ summing up the mathematical activity of an entire century, could write:

One can constitute analysis entirely with the notion of whole numbers and notions relative to the addition of whole numbers; it is useless to invoke any other postulate, or any other experiential given; the notion of infinity, which should not be seen as a mystery in mathematics, is reducible to this: after each whole number, there is another.

One cannot reproach Engels for his ignorance of the very latest scientific findings of his time, but when he writes of differentials:

I only mention in passing that this ratio between two quantities that have disappeared, caught at the moment of their disappearance, is a contradiction; however, it cannot disturb us any more than it has disturbed the whole of mathematics for almost two hundred years.¹⁸

It is necessary to recognize that this contradiction finally not only troubled mathematicians, but even scandalized them, that they applied all their efforts to the task of eliminating it and—it would be vain to deny it—they succeeded. Today's analysis is presented with as much logical rigor as arithmetic or algebra. It is true that, even in elementary mathematics, Engels discovered examples

of the negation of the negation or of dialectical thought. We cannot take up each example here; one can say, in a general way, that Engels' examples are all based on a certain "realistic" way of interpreting mathematical symbolism and logic. From the fact that the expression "first degree curve" designates a straight line, Engels believes it possible that there is identity between straight and curved; but is it not evident that the use of the word "curved" in this case is only a convention of language? In the same way, the fact that a root can be a power means nothing other than this: the sign designating the extraction of a root can be advantageously replaced by a fractional number used as an exponent. Mathematical symbolism, translated into everyday language, can lead to contradictions; but these are, one might say, contradictions without reality, pseudocontradictions. A last example: imaginary quantities. Engels says they are in an "absurd contradiction . . . a real absurdity,"¹⁹ but a mathematician would say that they are simply ordered couples of real numbers.

Thus mathematics—whether higher or not—underwent, during the nineteenth century, an evolution that in every way was contrary to Engels's program; it eliminated every appearance of a dialectic. Rigor in demonstrations, noncontradiction in principles, constant accord with logic; those are the ends pursued, and on the whole attained, by mathematics. One could object, certainly, that new difficulties reappeared with set theory and that the transfinite could give rise to developments having the appearance of the dialectic. But the mathematicians' attitude (their *practical* effort) toward these new paradoxes is the same as their attitude toward the old ones: far from seeing them as the result of a superior mode of thought, they examine them with horror. A new labor of logical reduction starts. We need mention here only the work of Hilbert and the Polish school.

If, in its origins, a mathematical theory can present a certain "floating" in its principles and can lack rigor in its demonstrations, that is a weakness—isn't it superfluous to say?—and not the proof of the dialectical character of the object of science. It is true that mathematics is constructed through the denial of the degeneracies and weaknesses that its development introduces. But quite different are the completed domain of science and the detours that were necessary in order for the human mind to arrive at the point where this structure is found. The dialectic does not express the nature of mathematics; it applies to the agent and not to the object of scientific activity.

This last remark reintroduces the essential theme of this article. It is not a question of setting aside dialectical thought; one must instead try to know the limit beyond which its application in this direction is fruitful. It is useful to consider the following passage of Plekhanov: "There is not a single 'moral and political science,' as the French call them, that has not undergone the powerful and fruitful influence of Hegel."²⁰ This remark, which expresses the real thrust

given to these sciences by the dialectic and which implies the sterility of this same method when applied to the natural sciences, coincides with the principles laid down in Hartmann's argument, which sought a domain of application for the dialectic. It is true that Plekhanov did not imagine a limit, but it is important to note that he recognized in his own way the striking privilege of the *moral and political sciences*. This is in any case a vague designation; Hartmann uses the more Hegelian expression "sciences of the spirit," which is relatively precise. But it should be understood that terminology must not prejudice anyone (in the final analysis) as to the nature of the object in question in a more or less homogeneous group of sciences, and furthermore that no precise limitation can be given in advance.

The publication of the detailed results of Hartmann's analysis will furnish the elements of a more exact labor of determination. This analysis has successively been applied to each of the numerous dialectical developments that make up the *oeuvre* of Hegel, and its preliminary goal has been to separate those developments representing a lived experience from those that are excrescences of dead flesh. But it is not necessary to wait for this publication in order to extend the domain of such investigations to include facts that were not integrated into Hegel's philosophy.

Starting from Hartmann's method, it is possible to analyze themes posed only by recent developments of science. And the fact must still be recognized that in the course of such analyses numerous subsidiary problems will necessarily be posed. From the outset this new investigation appears as an unlimited task, and it is even improbable that, starting from a comparable method imposing itself independently of the more or less open intentions to which, in Hartmann, it may correspond, the results of the two similar analyses will coincide at labor's end.

We will give here a few indications of the possibilities of a long systematic elaboration, which can lead to a readaptation of general conceptions. The precise point where introduced dialectical thought starts to express real relations must be determined in particular cases. For example, no opposition of terms can account for the biological development of a man who successively is an infant, an adolescent, an adult, and an old man. On the other hand, if one envisages the psychological development of the same man from a psychoanalytic point of view, one can say that the human being is first limited by the prohibitions that the father sets in opposition to his urges. In this precarious condition, he is reduced to unconsciously desiring the death of his father. At the same time, the wishes he directs against paternal power have their repercussions on the son's personality; he tries to bring castration down on himself, just as he brings on himself the shock of his death wishes. In most cases this negativity of the son does not express the entire real character of his life, which offers at the same time numerous and contradictory aspects. It is this negativity, however, that

poses as a necessity the son's taking the place of his father, which he cannot accomplish without destroying the very negativity that had characterized him up to this point.

The importance of this theme comes from the fact that it constitutes an *experience lived* by each human being. Through this, the terms of dialectical development become elements of real existence.

Starting from this example we can moreover define the position of a certain number of problems, whereby it will be possible to indicate the orientation to which, in our opinion, the introduction of a dialectic of the real could correspond.

1. The theme of the father and son allows the demonstration of the fact that nature has not been left behind and replaced by a truly separate domain. In fact, the phenomena for which psychoanalysis accounts can be reduced in the final analysis to *drives* whose *goal* is expressed in psychological terms but whose source is of a somatic nature. There is no question here of a matter-spirit dualism; the objects of dialectical investigation represent only the most complex products of nature. The problem of their specific character can only be honestly posed if one sets aside from the outset the hateful and vulgar hypothesis of spiritualism, a move authorized precisely by psychoanalysis.

2. Not only has the domain of nature not been abandoned for phantoms that would be absolutely heterogeneous to it, but the question remains whether a mode of thought founded neither directly on the study of nature nor on a work of pure logic but, as in the example we have just seen, on a *lived experience*—whether a mode of thought that seems to be directed by the very structure of the one who thinks is not susceptible to being applied, at least to a certain extent, to the understanding of nature. The first condition for whoever would attempt this application would be the awareness of the limits posed by the very origin of the method, which is another way of saying by the risky character of a hypothesis according to which the relatively simple forms of nature could be studied by using given facts furnished by the most complex.

3. Returning to the realm of practice, a last problem must be posed, which results from a difference that immediately appears between a method founded on the natural sciences and a dialectic recognizing its historical origins in lived experience. In the first, it is not possible to introduce a distinction between the opposing terms, which can be designated as positive or negative, but which are neither to the extent that these terms can be used indifferently for one or the other. Engels makes this observation himself in one of the notes published by Riazanov.²¹ Very different are the examples that we consider truly valuable, in which negativity takes on a specific value. Now it would be easy to show that as a group the fundamental dialectical themes of the Marxist conception of history belong to this second category, and that their profound originality, and at

the same time their practical importance, consist precisely in the fact that they introduce into tactics a constant recourse to negative forces or actions, not as goals but as means demanded by historical development. The study of this characteristic of the dialectic is all the more important in that, surely, such methods determine both the suppleness and the power of Marxism, radically oppose it to reformist solutions,²² and make it the living ideology of the modern proletariat, as the class condemned by the bourgeoisie to a negative existence, to the revolutionary activity that constitutes, from now on, the basis for a new society.

Notes

1. A study of this philosopher has appeared in Georges Gurvitch's *Les Tendances actuelles de la philosophie allemande*, Paris, 1930, pp. 187-206.
2. *Hegel et le problème de la dialectique du réel*, 1931, pp. 285-316.
3. *Hegel et le problème . . .*, p. 307.
4. Hartmann states: "The influence of the 'master/slave' dialectic seems less well known (than the dialectic of suffering), but its present usefulness is even greater, if that is possible; it suffices to recall that the Marxist theory of class struggle came out of it." *Revue de métaphysique*, 1931, p. 310.
5. *Encyclopædia*, section 250. Remark. [Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature, Part II of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 23-24. Tr.]
6. We are following the translation of Laskine (Paris, 1911.) [The English translations here are from the *Anti-Dühring* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962). Tr.]
7. Lenin himself wrote of the insufficiency of works representing dialectical materialism: "The correctness of this side of the content of dialectics must be tested by the history of science. This side of dialectics as a rule receives inadequate attention (e. g., Plekhanov); the identity of opposites is taken as the sum total of examples ('for example, a seed,' 'for example, primitive communism'). The same is true of Engels. But with him it is 'in the interests of popularization . . . ' and not as a *law of knowledge* (and as a law of the objective world)." In "On Dialectics" (a text apparently written between 1912 and 1914), in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* [English translation (New York: International Publishers, 1959), p. 377. Tr.]
8. *Archives Marx-Engels*, vol. 11, p. 54.
9. We will not speak here of the transformation of quantity into quality, a question that merits an in-depth study, but one that is distinct from the problems that we have wanted to consider in this article. What becomes of the value of this "law" once it is detached from its *a priori* justification? What then is its real meaning? What value should be attributed to the examples given, and to those that are not given? What are its connections with experimental laws? Can it, in the domain of the natural sciences, lead to new discoveries? These are methodological problems, which would demand a later study.
10. Our emphasis.
11. *Anti-Dühring*, p. cxii. [English translation, p. 21. Tr.]
12. *Revue de métaphysique*, 1931, pp. 289-90.
13. [For Hegel, on the contrary, mathematics is the work of abstract reason (*Verstand*) and not of concrete reason (*Vernunft*), i.e., the dialectical mode of thought.] [The long bracketed passage in the text, and note 13, were written by Raymond Queneau. Tr.]
14. Our emphasis.

15. *Anti-Dühring*, p. 148. [English translation, p. 185. Tr.]
16. *Anti-Dühring*, p. 148. [English translation, pp. 185-86. Tr.]
17. *Introduction à la théorie des fonctions*, Paris, 1886, p. viii.
18. *Anti-Dühring*, p. 172. [English translation, p. 189. Tr.]
19. *Anti-Dühring*, p. 148. [English translation, p. 167. Tr.]
20. *La Philosophie de Hegel*.
21. *Archives Marx-Engels*, 1925, vol. 2, p. 14.
22. In the *Communist Manifesto*, the revolutionary process is expressed by "measures . . . that appear economically insufficient and untenable, but that in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves . . . and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionizing the mode of production." [English translation, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), p. 39. Tr.]

within us to the faculty of apprehending, a new feeling of essential dissatisfaction takes hold of me.

If it is necessary for us at some moment in our misery to postulate God, it is to succumb by a rather vain flight to submit the unknowable to the necessity of being known. This is to give precedence to the idea of perfection (to which misery is attached), over all representable difficulty and, what is more, over all that is, such that, inevitably, each profound thing slips from the impossible state, where experience perceives it, to the compliance drawing its profundity from that which it has as a goal to suppress.

God is in us at first the movement of spirit which consists—after having passed from finite knowledge to infinite knowledge—in passing, as if through an extension of limits, to a different, non-discursive mode of knowledge, in such a way that the illusion arises from a satisfaction—realized beyond us—of the thirst for knowing which exists in us.

III

HEGEL

To know means: to relate to the known, to grasp that an unknown thing is the same as another thing known. Which supposes either a solid ground upon which everything rests (Descartes) or the circularity of knowledge (Hegel). In the first case, if the ground gives way . . . in the second, even if assured of having a well-closed circle, one perceives the unsatisfying nature of knowledge. The unending chain of things known is for knowledge but the completion of oneself. Satisfaction turns on the fact that a project for knowledge, which existed, has come to fruition, is accomplished, that nothing (at least nothing important) remains to be discovered. But this circular thought is dialectical. It brings with it the final contradiction (affecting the entire circle): *circular, absolute knowledge is definitive non-knowledge*. Even supposing that I were to attain it, I know that I would know nothing more than I know now.

If I "mimic" absolute knowledge, I am at once, of necessity, God myself (in the system, there can be no knowledge, even in God, which goes beyond absolute knowledge). The thought of this self—of *ipse*—could only make itself absolute by becoming everything. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (IV, A), is translated and commented upon by A. Kojève in the January 15 edition of *Mesures* under the title *Autonomy and Dependence of the*

nology of Spirit comprises two essential movements completing a circle: it is the completion by degrees of the consciousness of self (of human *ipse*) and the becoming everything (the becoming God) of this *ipse* completing knowledge (and by this means destroying the particularity within it, thus completing the negation of oneself, becoming absolute knowledge). But if in this way, as if by contagion and by mime, I accomplish in myself Hegel's circular movement, I define—beyond the limits attained—no longer an unknown, but an unknowable. Unknowable not on account of the insufficiency of reason, but by its nature (and even, for Hegel, one could only have concern for this beyond for lack of possessing absolute knowledge . . .). Supposing then that I were to be God, that I were to have in the world the assurance of Hegel (suppressing shadow and doubt)—knowing everything and even why fulfilled knowledge required that man, the innumerable particularities of *selves*, and history produce themselves—at precisely that moment, the question is formulated which allows human, divine existence to enter . . . the deepest foray into darkness without return; why must there be *what I know*? Why is it a necessity? In this question is hidden—it doesn't appear at first—an extreme rupture, so deep that only the silence of ecstasy answers it.

This question is distinct from that of Heidegger (why is there being and not nothingness?) in that it is only asked after all conceivable answers, aberrant or not, have been made to the successive questions formulated by understanding: thus it strikes at the heart of knowledge.

Evident lack of pride in the stubbornness of wanting to know discursively to the very end. It seems however that Hegel was lacking pride (was a servant) only on the surface*. He had no doubt a tone of one who

*No one more than him understood in depth the possibilities of intelligence (no doctrine is comparable to his—it is the summit of positive intelligence). Kierkegaard made a superficial critique of it in that:

- 1) he had an imperfect knowledge of it;
- 2) he only opposes the system to the world of positive revelation, not to that of man's non-knowledge. Nietzsche knew barely more of Hegel than a standard popularization. *The Genealogy of Morals* is the singular proof of the ignorance in which the dialectic of the master and the slave has been held and remains to be held, of which the clarity is dazzling (it is the decisive moment in the history of the consciousness of self and, it must be said, to the extent that we have to distinguish between each thing that affects us, no one knows anything of *himself* if he has not understood this movement which determines and limits man's successive possibilities). The passage on the master and the slave in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (IV, A), is translated and commented upon by A. Kojève in the January 15 edition of *Mesures* under the title *Autonomy and Dependence of the*

irritatingly gives out empty promises, but in a portrait of him as an old man, I imagine seeing exhaustion, the horror of being in the depths of things—of being God. Hegel, at the moment when the system closed, believed himself for two years to be going mad: perhaps he was afraid of accepting evil—which the system justifies and renders necessary; or perhaps linking the certainty of having attained absolute knowledge with the completion of history—with the passing of existence to the state of empty monotony—he saw himself, in a profound sense, becoming dead; perhaps even his various bouts of sadness took shape in the more profound horror of being God. It seems to me however, that Hegel, shrinking back from the way of ecstasy (from the only direct resolution of anguish) had to take refuge in a sometimes effective (when he wrote or spoke), but essentially vain attempt at equilibrium and harmony with the existing, active, official world.

My existence, of course, like any other, moves from the unknown to the known (relates the unknown to the known). No difficulty; I believe I am able, as much as anyone I know, to surrender to operations of knowledge. This is, for me, necessary—as much as for others. My existence is composed of steps forward, of movements which it directs to points which are suitable. Knowledge is in me—I mean this for every affirmation of this book; it is linked to these steps forward, to these movements (the latter are themselves linked to my fears, to my desires, to my joys). Knowledge is in no way distinct from me: *I am it*, it is the existence which I am. But this existence is not reducible to it; this reduction would require that the known be the aim of existence and not existence the aim of the known.

There is in understanding a blind spot: which is reminiscent of the structure of the eye. In understanding, as in the eye, one can only reveal it with difficulty. But whereas the blind spot of the eye is inconsequential, the nature of understanding demands that the blind spot within it be more meaningful than understanding itself. To the extent that understanding is auxiliary to action, the spot within it is as negligible as it is within the eye. But to the extent that one views in understanding man himself, by that I mean an exploration of what is possible in being, the spot absorbs one's attention: it is no longer the spot which loses itself in

Consciousness of Self. Reproduced in: Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Gallimard, 1947, pp. 11–34).

knowledge, but knowledge which loses itself in it. In this way existence closes the circle, but it couldn't do this without including the night from which it proceeds only in order to enter it again. Since it moved from the unknown to the known, it is necessary that it inverse itself at the summit and go back to the unknown.

Action introduces the known (the manufactured); then understanding, which is linked to it, relates the non-manufactured, unknown elements, one after the other, to the known. But desire, poetry, laughter, unceasingly cause life to slip in the opposite direction, moving from the known to the unknown. Existence in the end discloses the blind spot of understanding and right away becomes completely absorbed in it. It could not be otherwise unless a possibility for rest were to present itself at a certain point. But nothing of the kind takes place: what alone remains is circular agitation—which does not exhaust itself in ecstasy and begins again from it.

Ultimate possibility. That non-knowledge still be knowledge. I would explore night! But no, it is night which explores me . . . Death quenches my thirst for non-knowledge. But absence is not rest. Absence and death are without reply within me and, without fail, absorb me cruelly.

Even within the closed completed circle (unceasing) non-knowledge is the end and knowledge the means. To the extent that it takes itself to be an end, it sinks into the blind spot. But poetry, laughter, ecstasy are not the means for other things. In the "system", poetry, laughter, ecstasy are nothing. Hegel gets rid of them in a hurry: he knows of no other end than knowledge. His immense fatigue is linked in my eyes to horror of the blind spot.

The completion of the circle was for Hegel the completion of man. Completed man was for him necessarily "work". Hegel, himself, could be it, being "knowledge". For knowledge "works", which does neither poetry, laughter, nor ecstasy. But poetry, laughter, ecstasy are not completed man—do not provide any "satisfaction". Short of dying of them, one leaves them like a thief (or as one leaves a girl after love), dazed, thrown back stupidly into the absence of death: into distinct consciousness, activity, work.

from

The Accursed Share

Volume III

ONE

Knowledge of Sovereignty

1. *The General and Immediate Aspect of Sovereignty*

The sovereignty I speak of has little to do with the sovereignty of States, as international law defines it. I speak in general of an aspect that is opposed to the servile and the subordinate. In the past, sovereignty belonged to those who, bearing the names of chieftain, pharaoh, king, king of kings, played a leading role in the formation of that being with which we identify ourselves, the human being of today. But it also belonged to various divinities, of which the supreme god was one of the forms, as well as to the priests who served and incarnated them, and who were sometimes indistinguishable from the kings; it belonged, finally, to a whole feudal and priestly hierarchy that was different only in degree from those who occupied its pinnacle. But further, it belongs essentially to *all men* who possess and have never entirely lost the value that is attributed to gods and "dignitaries." I will speak at length about the latter because they *display* that value with an ostentation that sometimes goes with a profound baseness. I will also show that they *cheapen* it by displaying it. For I shall always be concerned, however it may seem, with the apparently lost sovereignty to which the beggar can sometimes be as close as the great nobleman, and from which, as a rule, the bourgeois is

voluntarily the most far removed. Sometimes the bourgeois has resources at his disposal that would allow him to enjoy the possibilities of this world in a sovereign manner, but then it is in his nature to enjoy them in a furtive manner, to which he strives to give the appearance of servile utility.

2. *The Basic Elements: Consumption beyond Utility, the Divine, the Miraculous, the Sacred*

What distinguishes sovereignty is the consumption of wealth, as against labor and servitude, which produce wealth without consuming it. The sovereign individual consumes and doesn't labor, whereas at the antipodes of sovereignty the slave and the man without means labor and reduce their consumption to the necessities, to the products without which they could neither subsist nor labor.

In theory, a man compelled to work consumes the products without which production would not be possible, while the sovereign consumes rather the surplus of production. The sovereign, if he is not imaginary, truly enjoys the products of this world — beyond his needs. His sovereignty resides in this. Let us say that the sovereign (or the sovereign life) begins when, with the necessities ensured, the possibility of life opens up without limit.

Conversely, we may call sovereign the enjoyment of possibilities that utility doesn't justify (utility being that whose end is productive activity). Life *beyond utility* is the domain of sovereignty.

We may say, in other words, that it is *servile* to consider duration first, to employ the *present time* for the sake of the *future*, which is what we do when we work. The worker produces the machine bolt with a view to the moment when this bolt will itself be used to assemble the automobile, which another will enjoy in a sovereign fashion, in contemplative drives. The worker does not personally have in view the sovereign pleasure of the future

car owner, but this pleasure will justify the payment that the factory owner anticipates, which authorizes him to give a wage to the worker without waiting. The worker turns the bolt in order to obtain this wage. In principle, the wage will enable him to meet his needs. Thus, in no way does he escape the circle of constraint. He works in order to eat, and he eats in order to work. We don't see the sovereign moment arrive, when nothing counts but the moment itself. What is sovereign in fact is to enjoy the present time without having anything else in view but this present time.

I know: These statements are theoretical; they account for the facts only vaguely. If I consider the real world, the worker's wage enables him to drink a glass of wine: he may do so, as he says, to give him strength, but he really drinks in the hope of escaping the necessity that is the principle of labor.

As I see it, if the worker treats himself to the drink, this is *essentially* because into the wine he swallows there enters a *miraculous* element of savor, which is precisely the essence of sovereignty. It's not much, but at least the glass of wine gives him, for a *brief moment*, the *miraculous* sensation of having the world at his disposal. The wine is downed mechanically (no sooner swallowed than the worker forgets it), and yet it is the source of intoxication, whose *miraculous* value no one can dispute. On the one hand, to freely take advantage of the world, of the world's resources, as does the worker drinking the wine, partakes in some degree of the *miraculous*. On the other, it is the substance of our aspirations. We must satisfy our needs, and we suffer if we fail, but where the necessities are at stake we are only obeying the animal injunction within us. Beyond need, the object of desire is, *humanly*, the *miracle*; it is sovereign life, beyond the necessary that suffering defines. This *miraculous* element *which delights us* may be simply the brilliance of the sun, which on a spring morning transfigures

a desolate street. (Something that the poorest individual, hardened by necessity, sometimes feels.) It may be wine, from the first glass to the intoxication that drowns. More generally, this miracle to which the whole of humanity aspires is manifested among us in the form of beauty, of wealth – in the form, moreover, of violence, of funereal and sacred sadness; in the form of glory. What is the meaning of art, architecture, music, painting or poetry if not the anticipation of a suspended, wonder-struck moment, a miraculous moment? The Gospel says that “man does not live by bread alone,” that he lives by what is *divine*. This expression has such clear evidence in its favor that it must be seen as a first principle. “Man does not live by bread alone” is a truth that sticks in the mind; if there is a truth that counts before the others, it has to be this one.¹

The divine is doubtless but one aspect of the *miraculous*. There is nothing *miraculous* that is not in a sense *divine*. The question is difficult, moreover. The category of the *miraculous*, though not so narrow as that of the *divine*, is awkward nonetheless. I may say that the object of laughter is *divine*, but at first this is just my feeling; nowadays it is not that of everyone. If I am right, if my feeling is justified, I will still have to prove it. I may also say of this impure and repugnant thing that it is *divine*, but granting this assertion implies that one has understood the principle of the ambiguity of the divine, which is no different in principle from the ambiguity of the sacred.² The extreme aspects of eroticism, the obsessive desire in eroticism for a miraculous element, are doubtless more familiar, easier to grasp. (The difference, however, is not such that we would not also find in this domain the ludicrous and the repugnant in their murkiest form.) It is more than a little strange, certainly, that death and birth communicate to us the clearest sensation of the miracle of the sacred.

3. *Considerations on Method*

The domain that we shall survey fully, but only in its general lines, is so complex that one feels the need for a coherent description. If the sovereign partakes at once of the divine, of the sacred, of the ludicrous or the erotic, of the repugnant or the funereal, shouldn't I consider the general morphology of these aspects? It seems useless to go any further in our exploration of sovereignty without accounting for the underlying unity of aspects whose appearance is so varied. Nevertheless, it would seem to me untimely, at the outset, to pursue that course.³ A morphology describing complex domains could only come after a posing of fundamental problems. It might be a final result, which would come at the end. I prefer to examine what is essential, without lingering over the question of method. I shall save for another volume the coherent exposition of the method I've followed. For the present I shall only make a few quick remarks about it. My “labors,” if I may speak in that way, only tend to continue the effort of “researchers” who pursued various disciplines. I have not been overly concerned about the legitimacy of the results that I borrowed, as judiciously as I could, from the history of religions, from sociology, from political economy or from psychoanalysis.... Moreover, my inquiries were made with shameful casualness (that of too long a patience, a bit wearily), but neither am I a stranger to the demands of phenomenology. On one point I contribute a new element.

I grant, in a fundamental way, that we know nothing beyond what is taught by action with a view to satisfying our needs. What action teaches undoubtedly goes beyond the purposes of the action: we may even say of science, acquired in practice, by means of practice, that it is, or at least can be, *disinterested*. But science is always subject to the primacy of the future over the present. To do science is to disregard the present time with a view

to subsequent results. And the most surprising thing, no doubt, is that the situation doesn't change when, once the results are obtained, we have access to the knowledge itself, when, the science done, the knowledge is given us seemingly in the present time. Hegel saw very well that, were it acquired in a thorough and definitive way, knowledge is never given to us except by *unfolding in time*. It is not given in a sudden illumination of the mind but in a *discourse*, which is necessarily deployed in duration. Knowledge, and the most profound knowledge, never appears to us in full except, finally, as the result of a calculated effort, an operation useful to some end. Knowledge can't in any way be confused with the last moment or the *end* of the operation; it is the entire operation. The end of a useful operation may be an object devoid of utility, for example an automobile employed, as I said, for contemplative drives. By becoming useless, that automobile detaches itself rather clearly in thought (if not in mechanical reality) from the operation that produced it. This detachment is not in any way possible if one considers the operation of knowledge in its homogeneity. Knowledge is always comparable to what the enjoyment of an automobile would be if driving it were just that *and nothing more*, without any other essential and new aspect, a homogeneous extension of the work of the shop that made it.

To know is always to strive, to work; it is always a servile operation, indefinitely resumed, indefinitely repeated. Knowledge is never sovereign: to be *sovereign* it would have to occur in a moment. But the moment remains outside, short of or beyond, all knowledge. We know regular sequences in time, constants; we know nothing, absolutely, of what is not in the image of an operation, a servile modality of being, subordinate to the future, to its concatenation in time. We know nothing absolutely, of the moment. In short, we know nothing about what ultimately con-

cerns us, what is *supremely* [souverainement] *important to us*. The operation leaves off as soon as sovereignty is its object.

Yet we are in fact conscious of the moment. (Indeed, we are conscious of nothing but the moment.) But this consciousness is at the same time a slipping-away of the moment, insofar as it might be clear and distinct, insofar as it is not a vague knowledge of oneself but knowledge of an object: knowledge of an object needs to apprehend that object caught up in duration, beyond the present moment. Consciousness of the moment is not truly such, is not sovereign, except in *unknowing*. Only by canceling, or at least neutralizing, every operation of knowledge within ourselves are we in the moment, without fleeing it. This is possible in the grip of strong emotions that shut off, interrupt or override the flow of thought.

This is the case if we weep, if we sob, if we laugh till we gasp. It's not so much that the burst of laughter or tears stops thought. It's really the *object* of the laughter, or the *object* of the tears, that suppresses thought, that takes all knowledge away from us. The laughter or the tears break out in the vacuum of thought created by their object in the mind. But these moments, like the deeply rhythmed movements of poetry, of music, of love, of dance, have the power to capture and endlessly recapture the moment that counts, the moment of rupture, of fissure. As if we were trying to arrest the *moment* and freeze it in the constantly renewed gasps of our laughter or our sobs.⁴ The miraculous moment when anticipation dissolves into *NOTHING*, detaching us from the ground on which we were groveling, in the concatenation of useful activity.

So there are — at rare, privileged moments — objects of thought whose conditions can be known in the same way as the other objects of knowledge; thus the object of laughter, the object of tears.... But what is peculiar to these objects is, at least hypothetically, that the thought that conceives them disso-

ciates them, and thereby dissolves itself as thought. The content prior to this dissolution, even the conditions under which it dissolves, can be known: these conditions can be known, for example, if the object in question provokes a laughter that won't stop. Consequently, we shall stop speaking of the NOTHING into which the object dissolves; we shall speak rather of what the dissolved object was, and of what determined the dissolution. In this way it will be possible for us, perhaps, to *speak* of what is sovereign. The thought that comes to a halt in the face of what is sovereign rightfully pursues its operation to the point where its object dissolves into NOTHING, because, ceasing to be useful, or subordinate, it becomes *sovereign* in ceasing to be.

4. *The Paradox of Happy Tears (Further Consideration on Method)*

In principle there is no need, in an essay that considers the movement of sovereignty only in a general way, for us to linger over the specific aspect of laughter or tears to which the preceding suggestion refers in particular. I will merely remark that as concerns laughter this conception is classic. But I shall dwell longer on tears, for the reason that I derive from reflection on tears the general notion of *miraculous* that dominates this book.

It seems best to set out my thought here as it takes shape. Its final cohesion, I believe, would be less interesting (although achieving that cohesion would demand nothing more in sum than an enormous amount of time).

For many years, I was struck by the ambiguous aspect of tears, which a happy event provokes as readily as misfortune. But happy tears have not been the subject of innumerable and meticulous investigations as laughter has. This surprising lacuna, by itself, showed me the disappointing nature of the agglomeration that our psychological knowledge forms as a whole. I had observed that

on occasion these tears would well up in my eyes in circumstances that left me disconcerted. I am not inclined to record these kinds of facts in succession, but one of them has stuck in my memory. One of my cousins by marriage is an officer in the British Navy; he served during the war on board the *Hood*. Just a few hours before the *Hood* was to sink, and the whole crew with it, my cousin was assigned a separate mission and sent on board a smaller boat. The admiralty officially reported his death to his mother. This was logical, since he was part of the crew of the *Hood*, which had perished almost to the last man. But some days after, my mother received a letter from him relating the circumstances in which he had, "by a miracle," escaped death. I didn't become acquainted with my cousin until much later, so these were events that had not affected me personally at first. But, without dwelling on it otherwise, I had the opportunity to tell the story to friends, and every time I did so, to my great surprise tears came to my eyes. I didn't see the reason for this, but I am in the habit of wondering, for this thing and that, what *is known about it* (even if I only have to tell myself, rather vaguely, that it must be found in some book...): finally, I began to suspect that no one knew anything about this. Apparently, no one had even advanced an absurd hypothesis, having at least the merit of initiating an inquiry; probably no one had even perceived the interest of these paradoxical tears (yet, in the case of laughter the most secondary questions have been the subject of numerous studies). I am no longer sure of this lack; I should look further, I know. But I spoke of the matter in a lecture attended by some eminent philosophers and no one seemed to know any more about it than I did.

This point is unimportant in itself, but I had to try to solve by myself a problem that astonished me. I reflected at first on the relationship between such tears and good fortune. Everyone knows that one weeps for joy. But I didn't feel any joy. The fortunate

outcome appeared to me to correspond possibly to a set of circumstances about which I had, in spite of everything, a more general and more detailed picture than I now have. Then it dawned on me – while I was considering the problems of this work – that a *miracle*, that only a miracle, caused those happy tears to arise. A miracle or, if not, something that seemed that, since in such circumstances we cannot expect a repetition of the same fact. In any case, we cannot expect it from our efforts.... This *miraculous* quality is conveyed rather exactly by the expression: *impossible and yet there it is*, which had once appeared to me to take on the meaning of the *sacred*. I imagined at the same time that art has no other meaning, that art is always a response to the supreme hope for the unanticipated, for a miracle. This is why the measure of art is genius, while talent relates to the rational, explicable means, whose result never has anything unanticipated about it.

I wanted to present the development of my thought, disclosing in the course of time, little by little, unexpected relations, rather than offer a drily theoretical statement of those relations or of the method I followed. From the beginning, this content, the *miraculous*, that I ultimately recognized where one would least expect it, in the object of tears, seemed to me to be in basic agreement with humanity's expectation. So I was able to say to myself with a feeling of certainty that "man needed more than bread, that he was just as hungry for a miracle." Above all, I understood this essential point: what I had found in happy tears was also found in unhappy ones. This *miraculous* element that, each time tears rose to my eyes, I recognized in amazement, was not lacking in unhappiness. The death that deprived me of my fellow man, of the very one in whom I had recognized being – what was it if not, in a negative form, the unanticipated, the miracle that takes one's breath away? *Impossible, yet there it is* – what better way to cry out the feeling that death inspires in men? May we not say of

death that in it, in a sense, we discover the negative analogue of a miracle, something we find all the harder to believe as death strikes down the one we love, the one who is close to us, something we could not believe, *if it, if death were not there*.

5. *The Equivalence of the Negative Miracle (Death) and the Positive Miracle (Final Considerations on Method)*

The most remarkable thing is that this *negative miraculous*, manifested in death, corresponds quite clearly to the principle stated above, according to which the miraculous moment is the moment when *anticipation dissolves into NOTHING*. It is the moment when we are relieved of anticipation, man's customary misery, of the anticipation that enslaves, that subordinates the present moment to some anticipated result. Precisely in the miracle, we are thrust from our anticipation of the future into the presence of the moment, of the moment illuminated by a miraculous light, the light of the sovereignty of life delivered from its servitude.

But, as I said, the anticipation dissolves into NOTHING. So we must raise the two-part question: if this NOTHING is that of death, it is hard for us to see how the moment can be the sovereign illumination of life; if, on the other hand, what is involved is a miraculous appearance that captivates, like the extreme beauty of an authentic work of art, it is hard for us to see why the beauty would be NOTHING, why it would have no other meaning than NOTHING. I spoke of a *negative miraculous*, but in this negative the miraculous element is contrary to desire, and this manner of speaking implies the existence of a *positive miraculous*, which alone seems to justify the *value* that is ordinarily connected with the word miracle, and whose positive form corresponds with the anticipation of a blessing.

It is precisely on this point, in order to address this difficulty, that I bring out how the method I followed led me away from the

usual paths of knowledge. I resolved long ago not to seek knowledge, as others do, but to seek its contrary, which is unknowing. I no longer anticipated the moment when I would be rewarded for my effort, *when I would know at last*, but rather the moment when *I would no longer know*; *when my initial anticipation would dissolve into NOTHING*. This is perhaps a mysticism in the sense that my craving not to know one day ceased to be distinguishable from the experience that monks called mystical – but I had neither a presupposition nor a god.⁵

In any case, this way of going in the wrong direction on the paths of knowledge – to get off them, not to derive a result that others anticipate – leads to the principle of the *sovereignty* of being and of thought, which from the standpoint where I am placed at the moment has this meaning: that thought, subordinated to some anticipated result, completely enslaved, ceases to be in being *sovereign*, that only unknowing is *sovereign*.

But the bias that I affirm, and, supreme result, the negation of future results, cannot by themselves give this thought that which engages one's attention. As I said, I will confine myself to the general lines, but at this point I must explain my basic position.

I reflected on unknowing, and I saw that human life was full of moments – which I assign to knowledge – when the ceaseless operation of cognition is dissolved. I referred to those moments in speaking of sobs, of laughter that makes one gasp ... saying that in them the train of thought was broken off. I fastened on this aspect, if not of nature, of human life, seeking in the experience a way out of my servitude. The object of tears or of laughter – and of other effects such as ecstasy, eroticism or poetry – seemed to me to correspond to the very point at which the object of thought vanishes. Up to that point, that object might be an object of knowledge, but only up to that point, so that the effect of knowledge would regularly fail. (Every philosopher knows how

exhausting is the impossibility of working out the problem of laughter, but poetry, ecstasy, eroticism ... doubtless pose problems that are no less exhausting.) It was bound to fail insofar as unknowing, that is, insofar as NOTHING, taken as the supreme object of thought, which takes leave of itself, which quits itself and becomes the dissolution of every object,⁶ was not involved in the solution of the problem.

So it is easy to see, if I have been understood, how the "paradox of tears," which would hinder me did I not have this position, could appear to me, quite on the contrary, at the apex of a thought whose end jumps the rails on which it is traveling. What appeared to me was not the paradoxical aspect of the equivalences: in my eyes the fact that a happy event might have the same effect as death, usually thought of as the most unhappy event, was not a revelation. I had long been aware of the *banal* character of these relationships, but it made a light that dazzled me a blinding one. A little phrase of Goethe's on death,⁷ "an impossibility that suddenly changes into a reality," had the merit of opening my eyes, unintentionally, to the *miraculous* character of the most dreaded event. But what was most striking was the sameness of *uncalculated* reactions which, from a definite point of view, did away with the difference between the positive and the negative, extreme happiness and extreme unhappiness, situating both, indiscriminately *at the point of resolution of our processes*.

The clearest thing was that essentially *an unreasoned impulse gave a sovereign value to the miraculous*, even if the miracle were an unhappy one. What mattered, what the tears maintained, conversely, in front of us and for us, was the awful yet, in spite of ourselves, marvelous moment when "the impossibility suddenly changed into a reality." While determining our unhappiness, no doubt, this moment nevertheless had the sense of a miracle, the power to dissolve in us that which up to then had been necessar-

ily subjugated, bound up. Moreover, there is no reason at all for thinking that tears of happiness signify gratified expectations, because the object of these tears is itself unanticipated; like death, it is only, all of a sudden, the impossible coming true, becoming *that which is*. In this case the object of anticipation is not that of desire: we anticipate, perhaps in anguish, what it is reasonable to anticipate, the duration of a tiresome state of things, but we don't anticipate, we dare not, cannot anticipate the outcome that desire suggests. Or, if we anticipate it, this is without believing in it, and more truly, we don't anticipate it if we anticipate it *against all reason*. Thus, desire gives rise to unjustified hope, to hope that reason condemns, which is different from the anticipation of the desired object or of its duration. What I call anticipation, which dissolves into NOTHING, is always the unavoidable calculation of reason.

I insist on the fact that, from a point of view that is doubtless limited, but which we can adopt, it is only of secondary importance whether, in the anticipation that NOTHING follows, the surprise is sad or joyful. What matters most from this point of view is that an unanticipated, unhopèd-for aspect, considered impossible, reveals itself. This is the place to recall a remarkable fact: in certain islands of Oceania, the death of the king would provoke an outburst of passion on the part of a whole people, where the rules ordinarily determining what was possible were overturned, where all of a sudden the youngest men would try to outdo one another in killing and violating. When it struck the king, death would strike the whole population at its sore point and then the latent pressure would be directed toward a reckless dissipation, an enormous festival whose presiding theme was sorrow. Whenever it dissolves into NOTHING, disappointed anticipation suggests a sudden reversal of the course of life. Sometimes a fit of laughter or of tears exhausts the possibility of efferves-

cence that opens up at this moment. But often the incipient transgression develops into an unbounded transgression: the disappointed anticipation heralds the reign of the moment, clearing the way for sexual disorder and violence, for revelry and frantic squander. In this way, sovereignty celebrates its marriage with death. A king is the creature par excellence of the miracle; in his person he concentrates the virtues of a miraculous presence. In keeping with a dynamic equilibrium, these virtues may help to maintain order and preserve the possible, but this is to the extent that the integrity of his power, so sacred that no one would dare imagine anything that might affect it, ensures the return of transgression and violence. The "miracle" of death is understandable in terms of this sovereign exigency, which calls for the *impossible coming true*, in the *reign of the moment*.

That which counts is there each time that *anticipation*, that which binds one in activity, the meaning of which is manifested in the reasonable *anticipation* of the result, dissolves, in a staggering, unanticipated way, into NOTHING.