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Hegel and Georges Bataille's Conceptualization of Sovereignty

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ABSTRACT

Georges Bataille's intellectual attitude toward Hegel implies a certain complex structure. This makes it difficult to posit Bataille's attitude as endorsement or rejection of Hegel. Even if it is possible to infer that Bataille's formulation of sovereignty directly challenges Hegel's Phenomenology, we can still realize that in Bataille's sovereignty, the crucial part is played by the insights taken from Phenomenology. This study tries to look at where this relationship finds its clearest expression: slave/master dialectics. The main concern of this study, therefore, consists in analyzing the insights which we realize when we put slave/master dialectic and Bataille's sovereignty side by side. This shows not only how Bataille's sovereignty enlightens slave/master dialectics, but also how Bataille's encounter with Hegel conditions his formulation of sovereignty.

Keywords: Georges Bataille, Hegel, sovereignty

ÖZET

Georges Bataille'ın Hegel karşısındaki entelektüel konumu karmaşık bir yapıya sahiptir. Bu karmaşıklık Bataille'ın Hegel karşısındaki konumunu ret veya kabul tercihleriyle sınırlandırmayı imkansız hale getirmektedir. Bataille'ın egemenlik kuramının Fenomenoloji"nin bir eleştirisi olduğunu anlamak zor değilse de, Bataille'ın egemenliği formüle etmede Fenomenoloji'ye çok şey borçlu olduğu da bir gerçektir. Bu çalışma Bataille ile Hegel arasındaki bu ilişkinin en belirgin olarak ortaya çıktığı yere bakmak istemektedir: köle/efendi diyalektiği. O halde, çalışmanın temel çıkış noktası Bataille'ın egemenliği ile köle/efendi diyalektiğini birlikte okumanın ortaya koyacağı çıkarımlardır. Bu Bataille'ın egemenlik kavramının köle/efendi diyalektiğini ne derecede aydınlattığını göstermekle kalmayacak, aynı zamanda Bataille'ın Hegel ile karşılaşmasının onun egemenliği formüle etmesini nasıl etkilediğini de ortaya koyacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Georges Bataille, Hegel, egemenlik

1. INTRODUCTION

Within tradition of political philosophy and legal studies, there is a generally held conviction that sovereignty is first and foremost a political and legal concept. This political and legal character has gained a special place within the studies of sovereignty. There is nothing surprising in this if we remember that sovereignty has become one of most fundamental concept which frames and shapes the basic parameters of political and legal organization. Indispensable as this legal and political dimension of sovereignty may be, sovereignty has the connotations and implications which goes beyond the political and legal dimensions. When stripped from the legal and political overtones, it becomes possible to realize that sovereignty appears as the fundamental concept to understand human condition. This, of course, requires an attitude which compels one to take sovereignty as a philosophical concept. To substantiate this claim, referring to the concrete historical data is enough which illuminate the fundamental connection between founding concepts of modern philosophy (autonomy, subjectivity) and the founding principle of modern politics (sovereignty). This study aims at this hidden or usually neglected dimension of sovereignty. It is apparent that for this aim, sovereignty is to be dealt with a certain philosophical outlook. This is the reason why this study takes Bataille's formulation of sovereignty as its center.

The readers of Georges Bataille are well accustomed to his complex attitude toward Hegel. The first impression tells us that Bataille, as an ardent defender of transgression, should have negated Phenomenology. It is not difficult to reason out why this should be so: as an account of how a perfect closure pervades the philosophical imagination, Hegel's system does not tolerate the *transgression* except in functional and meaningful forms; that is in the form of anti-thesis. Yet transgression, if being worthy of its name for Bataille, should put the system in jeopardy, managing to dodge the dialectical movement. Therefore, Bataille should have judged Hegel's system as something to be discarded with no compromise. To our surprise, he refrains from taking this easy stance, developing a complex position vis-à-vis Hegel.

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Focusing on this complex relation and exploring the insights it can offer to us form the motivation for this study. However, I feel it necessary to add a note at this point. Initially, this context, a reading of Bataille after Hegel, could give the impression of being a comparative study which enables us to broach the important points in Bataille's philosophical imagination with the help of its confrontation with Hegel. The usual paths of a comparative study, namely shedding light on the dark sides of one philosophical account with the help of the other, does not exactly correspond to what is really at stake in reading Bataille after Hegel. The gist of the issue, I think, is that reading Bataille after Hegel tells much more than a comparative study can offer. Bataille's confrontation with Hegel creates a context in which the oscillations of capital importance for human mind and for human life (between taboo and transgression, between order and chaos) deluge the philosophical reasoning. Looking at the issue from this side, we can safely assume that Bataille's confrontation with Hegel goes well beyond merely pinpointing convergence and divergence between two thinkers, providing great insights into the human condition.

This study, thus, addresses itself to the purpose of probing the possibilities offered by Bataille's confrontation with Hegel and of trying to glean what lies usually hidden but which has existential bearings. This existential dimension, implicated with the theses on "End of History," looms large when a closer look is taken at Bataille's formulation of *Accursed Share* and *Sovereignty*. Focusing on the implications of Hegel's slave/master dialectics for Bataille's formulation of sovereignty, this study therefore tries to make out the extent to which Bataille's sovereignty transcends slave/master dialectics, and in what sense it is taken back by it. What captures the pulse of this study is the realization that while Hegel and Bataille prefer the different sides of moon to stand, the contours of these sides keeps on changing regardless of their will. Realizing this point, we can come to such a conclusion: when the issue is consciousness, going too far in one direction ends up in what is already circumscribed by the other direction.

2. BATAILLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF SOVEREIGNTY

In order to focus attention on how to locate Bataille's sovereignty vis-à-vis Hegel's slave/master dialectics, it is necessary for us to clarify what Bataille understands by sovereignty. But this clarification could be disconcerting given the general condition of Bataille's oeuvre. First of all, Bataille's views on sovereignty can be found scattered throughout a period which ranges from the beginning of 1930s to the 1950s. Moreover, Bataille's style which is fostered by a vigorous poetic imagination could restraint an academic mind trying to master the subject matter at hand by a linear reasoning. Therefore, it is natural to see sovereignty in Bataille's usage as a vague term appearing more as an ontological category than as a political issue. Even in *La Souveraineté*, a book written in view of giving Bataille's understanding of sovereignty in a definite form, we are caught up in curiosity when reading his explanation as to why he does not give the morphology of sovereignty just at the moment when this is most needed.[1] Despite certain weaknesses, we can regard this book as a documentation of themes and concepts all of which, one way or another, are related with his understanding of sovereignty (Richardson, 1994, 38). So we can start our endeavor of giving an account of Bataille's sovereignty with this book.

The first thing that catches our attention in this book is Bataille's reluctance to permit sovereignty to be eclipsed by its institutional embodiments. In this book, sovereignty is not treated as something embedded in an institutional setting. Wrested from such an institutional setting, sovereignty immediately strips itself of the character of being merely political and social phenomenon, and takes the appearance of existential matter. Even though this existential matter (sovereignty) evolves into institutional forms, it belongs first of all to man.[2] Moreover, it belongs to all man quite irrespective of any social, economic and social distinction. If some portion of mankind (be it kings, aristocrats, priests or leaders) holds a monopoly over this asset and excludes others, this does not alter the basic condition: sovereignty belongs to all mankind. It is only by means of the spatial and temporal conditions that the history has made an allowance for the exclusive forms of sovereignty.

When the political tones lost their hegemony, sovereignty rose to the prominence as an issue worthy of an ontological consideration. Therefore, we can ask what an ontological perspective can say of sovereignty. Asking this question enable us to realize the ontological background of sovereignty which is obscured by the political connotations imposed on a concept. And this ontological dimension is felt more and more vigorously as Bataille articulates his formulation by relying on such philosophically loaded concepts as object, tool, anguish, laughter and death.

Let us start the ontological sketch with an etymological reading. Etymology reveals that sovereignty implies superiority. Therefore, it is useful to fathom out the ontological conditions of being superior. Considering this point, we immediately attain the idea that being superior implies relativity. If something is superior, there should also be another element or elements in the face of which the superior position is to be held. That is to say, a superior being has to have its other. Something or someone cannot be superior on its own. On this ground, we can ask what the other of sovereignty is. This question is of key importance in that without a due answer to it, we cannot make out what the ontological implications of sovereignty are. For Bataille, the answer is very simple. Being useful (utility) is what deprives something or someone from sovereignty. The reasoning at work here is not difficult to grasp. A little bit of grammar helps clarifying this point. Even if the adjective *useful* stands by itself, its articulation always *presupposes* a preposition: *for*. Something, if it is useful, is always useful for *another* thing. And in this relation, it is this other thing for whose lot sovereignty falls.

In this sense, we come to one of Bataille's definition of sovereignty: Life beyond utility is the realm of sovereignty (Bataille, 1976, 248). From this definition, we can infer that if sovereignty is to be attained, one must step out the relations which condition him or her for being useful. But we should be careful not to yield ourselves to an economic reading. It can only partly explain the phenomenon of being useful because there are symbolic relations playing a decisive role in determining whether something is useful or not. It is exactly at this point that we come to sense what is radical in Bataille's definition of sovereignty. Sovereign beings, useless as they may be in the material sense of the word, still cling to the discourse of utility to the extent that they occupy the position assigned by the symbolic space of society. This symbolic space is none other than the realm in which the essence of the social (codes, norms, values and identities) is made possible and given a definite form. The meaning of this is very clear: while remaining within the symbolic dimension of society, sovereign being cannot break with the paradigm of utility, however useless it looks like.

Realizing this point, we have achieved a deeper stratum of Bataille's text: the impossibility of sovereignty or sovereignty as impossibility. To understand this, let us look at the ontological conditions of sovereign beings. A sovereign class apparently sustains a life beyond utility; but this is only apparently so. They consume the resources at their disposal quite differently from the ordinary bourgeois, who are motivated by the calculation and thus are keen about to render their consumption useful. For sovereign class, it is mainly the prestige attained only by means of useless consumption that motivates the behaviors. With this, we are well acquainted since Veblen's *A Theory of Leisure Class* which details this class's ambition to put a distance with the productive works and skills (Veblen, 1953, 41). Highly critical to highlight here is that their unproductive quality, their useless position by no means guarantees that they are set loose from the realm of utility, still clinging to this realm so long as their useless position is posited *as such* by the symbolic space of society. They are still useful insofar as they reproduce the symbolic relations of society, an indispensable pillar without which social life is bound to collapse. To put it briefly, sovereign beings that divulge into useless consumption are not useful for any specific purpose but they are still useful for maintaining the society within a certain configuration.

Leaving institutions and actors thus aside, Bataille's sovereignty manifests itself only in one form: as an *experience*. So long as an experience gravitates around the social codes, namely so long as it is encoded by the social, this experience cannot pave the way for sovereignty. For sovereignty to appear in the phenomenal world, it must break up the temporal sequence in which the past, present and future are so arranged as to make expectation possible. Expectation is a mode of existence in which one is bound by future concerns; and this is the reason that experience should be free from the yoke of expectation. This can be only at hand when the future, or the chronological sequence leading every moment into an unknown future, disappears. This point is more readily understandable the moment we recall that so long as man accords his life to a future time, this future dominates over this life, having a command in directing the will. From this, it is legitimate to conclude that a will under command can be everything but sovereign. Suppose this granted, we can get a distinct notion of ontological condition of sovereignty: defined as the denial of utility, sovereignty can only be conceived to exist in the present moment (which belongs neither to past nor to future) (Bataille, 1976, 260).

When we see this radical tone in it, Bataille's definition urges us to recognize that sovereignty is the denial of the primacy of future over the present

moment, and it thus defies routine. Therefore, it is quite safe to assume that sovereignty manifests itself when a moment thwarts the well-functioning of routine which operates with a view to utility and which thus makes the meaningful social context possible. This ontological sketch, cursory though it is, may suffice to convince us of the miraculous character of sovereignty. Untied from the material and symbolic dimension of society rendering everything meaningful, useful and functional, sovereignty does not emerge into view except as a miraculous moment. Whatever the form it assumes, a miracle is miracle to the extent that it breaks the smooth continuation of events. Therefore, sovereignty erupts at the heart of routine, violating its duration. To this ontological condition, we can add a further note which lays the political connotations of the issue open. Despite his difference with Bataille, Carl Schmitt concentrates on the same point in his political reading of sovereignty, inviting us to take the miraculous character of sovereign into account.[3] Further, it is interesting to see that even at the dawn of modernity, Kings of France and England were still performing the public shows in which they attempted to prove themselves capable of bringing about miracles such as healing certain diseases by the touch of their hand (Bloch, 1961, 431). This suffices to bear out how much political sovereignty too stands in need of miracle to attain a legitimate ground as a social institution.

Having mapped out the underground connections between miracle and sovereignty, we encounter another of Bataille's definition of sovereignty: sovereignty is the moment when anticipation dissolves into NOTHING.[4] Pondering on the conditions in which an object (matter) surpasses objectivity and the anticipation of the subject dissolves into NOTHING, we are quite prepared to admit that in Bataille's formulation of sovereignty, the real stake in question is the boundary between the *possible* and the *impossible*. Sovereignty, thus, is a borderline phenomenon; accordingly whenever sovereignty flashes into being, it is seen that the *impossibility* makes surface to the realm of possible. In this way, we come to make sense why Bataille writes of sovereignty as *impossible yet there it is* (Bataille, 1976, 257).

3. NEGATIVITY WITH OR WITHOUT EMPLOYMENT?

The above given ontological sketch has already driven our attention to the similarities and dissimilarities between Hegel and Bataille. In both slave/master dialectic and sovereignty, the issue revolves around the question of consciousness. The slave, after being defeated and enslaved by the master, can only attain autonomy by the work which is made possible by consciousness (Hegel, 1977, 118). In this way, we understand that in Bataille's sovereignty and Hegel's slave/master dialectic, there are two philosophical views on consciousness: absolute knowledge and non-knowledge.[5] It is exactly at this point that Bataille's confrontation with Hegel takes on an interesting appearance. How complex an attitude Bataille has developed toward Hegel we come to understand when we look at the relationship between Bataille's non-knowledge and Hegel's absolute knowledge: it is not until Hegel's absolute knowledge is taken into account that we could appreciate Bataille's unknowledge.

Therefore, we should, first of all, lay bare what Hegel understands by absolute knowledge. Relying on Hegel, we can define absolute knowledge as a homogeneous state in which there would be nothing in the external world that is not already a part of mind or there would occur to the mind nothing that does not take place in the external world. The rift between the mind and the *world* would thus evaporate, and turn out to be something that belongs to an era before absolute knowledge. Bataille's position to absolute knowledge is interesting in that he does not reproach it for pan-logicism. He views it as encompassing all that belongs to knowledge; or putting more precisely, Bataille considers Hegel as the formulator of a magnetic circle capable of making all human knowledge gravitate around it (Bataille, 1972: 126). Stepping back from the usual course expected of him, such as Adorno presents in his *negative dialectic*, Bataille takes absolute knowledge as fact. Yet, even if Bataille endorses absolute knowledge, he invites us to take a further step: realizing the "contingent existence of knower" (Baugh, 2003, 84-85). Whether absolute or not, knowledge should presuppose a knower. Knowledge is so ontologically conditioned by a knower that this relation (between knower and knowledge) casts doubt over absoluteness of knowledge: a knower is by no means complete to the degree required by absolute knowledge. The closeness with Heidegger strikes us: so long as death is there, man cannot be complete.[6]

What remains for us is to show what a complex relationship is found between absolute knowledge and *un-knowledge* and how Bataillian concepts, anti-Hegelian as they sound, are in fact indebted to the Hegelian discourse. To focus on this, let us look

at what the incompleteness of man implicates for knowledge. Man is not complete until he is struck by death. Bataille's contribution consists in showing that even if the movement of knowledge accomplish the absolute knowledge, namely even if there is nothing in the face of which knowledge moves (rendering it known), existence cannot be reduced to knowledge. The reason is clear: the difficulty of a phenomenal discourse in transforming the experience of death into knowledge. From this, Bataille concludes that there are some occasions when the mind fails to articulate the objects or to proceed in the direction from the unknown to known. Upsetting the function of mind, these occasions open up experience such as is impossible to be grasped by knowledge. Bataille calls them *blind points.* There are certain objects or occasions triggering an experience resulting in the collapse of the very faculty through which world becomes known. It is exactly at these points, for Bataille, that man become sovereign.

This last point strikes our attention as showing up the difference between Bataille's sovereignty and Hegel's autonomy. Turning our attention to a list of sovereign moments given in *La Souveraineté*, we are brought to see the occasions when the mind runs up against a situation where it is impossible to bring about knowledge: poetry, laughter, tears of joy, eroticism, death…(Bataille, 1976, 262). Knowing no other aim than knowledge, (Bataille, 1972, 130) Hegel envisages absolute knowledge as prevailing over the sequel (history of human mind; of course not as a psychological theme) as an end point of it and combining every point on this sequel to one another. Accordingly, the completion of the system can never be at hand when there remain heterogeneous elements or blind points such as are capable of breaking the continuity of the sequel. For the march of knowledge is crowned by absolute knowledge, every moment preceding it should serve the purpose; but the sovereign occasions, ontologically speaking, ruin the very language through which a service can be rendered.

Upon a closer examination, we come to make out what this difference implies and how it makes Bataille's sovereignty different from Hegel's autonomy. In Hegel's system, man is designated as negativity, in that his actions form antithesis to the nature. It should be emphasized however that this negativity, through the dialectical process, produces positive results. This indicates the essence of the difference between Hegel and Bataille: whereas in Hegel's system, negativity manifests itself as being-always-already-put-into-work, Bataille considers only the sovereign moments worthy of negativity. For him, if true negativity is to be seen, it should be bereft of any employment. This is why we can conceive of the sovereignty described by Bataille as negativity without employment. (Corn, 1995, 84).

This comparison makes evident that what is at hand is two different modalities of exerting individual will upon the external world. Though the relation between subject and object in the Hegelian system comes into being through the mediation of work, Bataille sees *évanouissement* as the modality of negativity. In this sense, the difference between Bataille and Hegel is shown in an eminent degree. For Hegel, autonomy is attained through a discourse unfolding itself in time. It comes at the end of a sequel formed step by step by mediation; a mediation capable of converting the confrontation of thesis with its antithesis into a synthesis and making both thesis and antithesis useful. The German term Hegel chooses to define the movement of dialectics, *Aufhebung*, is utterly suggestive of this point: transcending while preserving. In the Hegelian dialectic, nothing can escape from the clutch of dialectical movement, which eventually ascribes meaning to the act of negativity, and thus allows negativity no option except to appear only in useful forms. When we pay heed to Bataille's perspective, however, it becomes clear that the grasp of dialectic is not so tenacious as it might be supposed. There are always remnants which the movement of dialectic cannot inscribe into a meaningful context. To see the true sovereignty, Bataille invites us to turn our attention to these occasions in which discourse faces NOTHING (Bataille, 1976, 256). On those occasions, the boundaries of discourse, behind which meaning enjoys a certain security, are interrupted by gaps and breaks. Consequently, it is only during these occasions that it becomes possible to see negativity without it being put into useful activity: negativity that is truly autonomous because of the fact that it no longer submits to anything other than itself. We thus understand that Hegel's absolute knowledge closes while the movement Bataille talks about opens.[7] Hegel's autonomy is a sort of closure, yet Bataille's is opening. Highly important here is to take notice of the fact that this opening should be only momentary. Otherwise it becomes another moment in a sequel, yielding to the imperative of future. Therefore, this opening itself, if sustained a little further in time, becomes another closure, as Bataille's formulation "impossible yet there it is" illustrates.

4. DEATH AND RECOGNITION

Our endeavor to mark the difference between Hegel's autonomy and Bataille's sovereignty has already made clear that the dividing line is drawn by their divergent position on consciousness. Whereas autonomy in Hegel's system is realized by the help of consciousness, the achievement of sovereignty in Bataille is premised on the collapse of it. Of great importance at this point, however, is to take note that the difference does not consist solely in choosing approval or disapproval. This is well understood the moment we realize how much Bataille's sovereignty is indebted to the opposite discourse: if sovereignty is defined as the collapse of consciousness or as a break with work or as the termination of rationality, we immediately understand that without the existence of consciousness, there could be no collapse of it; without rationality, there could be no termination of it; and without work, there could be no break with it.

Since the different approaches to consciousness form the backbone of the difference between sovereignty and autonomy, we can pursue this issue a little further; however this we cannot do without taking two other notorious Hegelian themes into account: death and recognition. These two strike us as anthropogenetic in the Hegelian system. In the case of death, this anthropogenetic role reveals itself in man's ambiguous attitude toward death. As for every organism, survival is very important for human beings too. Nevertheless, man differs from animals in the voluntary acceptance of death: man risks his life for no good biological reason. If man's risking his life cannot be completely accounted with biological reasons, there ought to be other kinds of reasons. Upon asking what kind of reasons these could be, we should take particular note of recognition. Recognition is not a biological desire directed to a material presence (object of a biological satisfaction); it is directed to an *absence* (desire for desire) instead. In recognition, what is in question is none other than the desire to be recognized by the other.

In Hegel's phenomenology, recognition entails struggle; and struggle death. When death and recognition stand together, the tension immediately rises to the prominence. This stems from the fact that in order for struggle to be real struggle, death should fall to the lot of one party. Given the possibility that other can strike back (Carse, 1980, 350), struggle, once set in motion, can escalate to the point of death. True recognition, then, would not come, except by exposing *self* to death. It is fairly easy to note the contradiction implied by such a conceptualization: recognition, if it is defined as the death of other, is *impossible*. It presupposes the death of the being whose recognition is desired and without whose recognition self can be by anything but human being. The process of recognition, according to this schema, necessarily ends up in the annihilation of the very recognition for the sake of which whole process is set in motion.[8]

In order for Hegel to solve this paradox, it is required that the combat, after which the recognition is deemed to happen, cease before putting to death; and this Hegel proposed in his 1805-1806 Lectures and *Phenomenology*. In those lectures and *Phenomenology*, mere risk of life, rather than actual death, appears to be the sufficient condition of being human. This requirement, nonetheless, brings no more solution than the emergence of new one. For combat to stop before the moment of death, one of the parties should withdraw from the combat, proving him incapable of continuing to the end in the life and death struggle. And since reaching to the end in this struggle is indispensable for recognition, we cannot assume that true recognition takes place in this case. The part capable of reaching to the end in this struggle proves itself to be worthy of recognition. The defeated part therefore recognizes the other without being recognized by this other in return. Nevertheless, the situation of the victor, who henceforth assumes the title of master, is no less fragile; the recognition provided by the vanquished is by no means the true one because the vanquished, insofar as refraining from risking his life in full force, remains an animal. This inability seems to be a distinctive quality of the vanquished; however it also affects the situation of victor: according to the schema that links death and recognition inescapably together, he too remains an animal so long as he remains unrecognized by the one worthy of recognition.[9]

Ongoing arguments attract our attention to the two requirements which, left unfulfilled, cause the door of humanity to remain forever closed to Hegelian system: that the struggle be concluded before its culmination in death, and equally important, that the status of human-being be bestowed upon the defeated, incapable of enduring the work of death. It is only by accepting the humanity of the defeated to whom the title of Slave is ascribed after the defeat that Hegel manages to avoid the paradox of death and recognition. (Gasché, 1978, 263). However, we may ask how Hegel justifies the humanity of the being who has refused to subordinate the ani-

mal life –the biological need of self-preservation- to the anthropogenetic desire for recognition. Hegel's solution comes with the emphasis on consciousness. Consciousness of death suffices to humanize man and to form the basis of humanity. This is exactly what the defeated undergoes at the moment of recoil and retreat from the struggle. The dread of death makes him conscious of his finitude, and he becomes a human being (Kojeve, 1973, 120-24). With the help of this twist, he proves worthy of being a source of recognition. Thus we arrive at the first stage of human history; a stage that figures in Hegel's system as the world of slave and master.

This shift from "Recognition vs. consciousness" to "recognition via consciousness" is of capital importance. In the first form (Recognition vs. consciousness), the desire for recognition appears to be a kind of irrational impulse entangled so inseparably with death that we may find it resembling, of course with risk of anachronism, what is called today the death-drive. Nevertheless, Recognition in its second form (recognition via consciousness), a form attained with infusion of consciousness into the places emptied from death, comes to appear either as a kind of initiation rite of primitive peoples, after which recognition is conferred upon the subject, or as a version of what we call *original position*, in Rawlsian sense of the word, in which a mechanism is so designed as to yield to a desired situation with its norms and principles determined beforehand. At this point, it is not too much to say that the first form of recognition, so irrational as to be no more different from death, is but another expression of what Bataille understands by sovereignty. What is important for us is to realize that Bataille himself is torn between consciousness and sovereignty. Equally important however is that Bataille did not take the way Hegel had opted for to solve this paradox. The implications of such an attitude now demand our attention.

5. DEATH, SACRIFICE AND RECOGNITION

Now that we have seen the tense relation in Hegel's phenomenology between recognition and death, we can turn our attention to how Bataille looks upon it. For this, his article "Hegel, la Mort et Le Sacrifice," seems to be good place to start. The main problematic in Hegel's philosophy is given, as we have seen, in terms of the dilemma that man could never have consciousness without the touch of death, yet meanwhile this touch does not come except with the annihilation of this consciousness. Sacrifice therefore can be taken as a case of how primitive man could overcome the Hegelian problematic: subterfuge used in sacrifice makes it possible to maintain an experience of death as immediate (direct) as it can possibly be, without annihilation of the experience itself. Hence Bataille explicitly refers to this point: man must live at the moment that he really dies, he must live with the real impression of death. (Bataille,1988 336-37)

However, the difference stemming from the contrasting approaches to consciousness immediately seizes our attention. Hegel's representation is conscious par excellence. It is for Hegel a matter of taking the negativity into a discourse, which occupies the position of a privileged link between consciousness and existence. Insofar as being motivated by the desire to bring negativity into the limits of coherent discourse, Hegel is left with no alternative but to discard all forms of negativity that are unable to be reconciled with consciousness: *negativity without employment*. By stepping back from negativity without employment into the coherent discourse in which negativity does not appear except by taking upon itself a meaningful character, Hegel closes the door of his system to heterogeneous elements; elements only by means of which Bataille thinks authentic sovereignty would be realized.

Therein lies the difference of those remaining within sacrificial circle: they lack the discursive consciousness of what they did, but they have the sensual awareness caused by unintelligible and irrational emotion, an element which Hegelian system lacks.[10] Then it is plain that we are presented by two forms of sovereignty: on the one hand, a conscious, discursive sovereignty, on the other, a naïve form, bereft of the conscious knowledge of its real implication.

Pondering upon these forms, Bataille concludes that there is no reason to relegate the sacrificial sovereignty to a lower position than the rational and functional sovereignty. This Bataille explains by referring to death and absolute dismemberment (the Hegelian term for death) as the final experience. So great an experience as this absolute dismemberment, nevertheless, cannot be at hand unless already accompanied by excessive pleasure, anguish, terror and sacred horror, which the sacrificial situations yield abundantly, but the Hegelian system lacks. Therefore, the means that primitive man has at its disposal seem more suitable for absolute dismemberment than Hegel's *consciousness* unfolding itself in time with a discursive thinking.

It is then no longer extravagant to draw conclusion that when compared with Hegel, man of sac-

rifice, naïve though he is, has an advantage, for he possesses the sensual awareness, the only factor that can bring about absolute dismemberment. Additionally, Bataille turns our attention to another defect in Hegel's philosophy. The blind point in Hegel's *Phenomenology* is quite readily seen if we take notice of the fact that from beginning to end, the sacrifice is always already implicated in Hegel. To substantiate this claim, it would be enough to remember that the end of history comes only when the Worker-Soldier sacrifices his life for a universal homogenous state. It is only by risking his life for such an ethical totality that Worker-Soldier becomes Citizen. Thus even the act that is thought to bring history to the end can be taken as a kind of sacrifice.

Turning a deaf ear to sacrifice, namely considering it a mere topic to be dealt with within the chapter in *Phenomenology* entitled Religion, but not as a crucial theme inherent to the movement of work, Hegel misses the chance of knowing to what extent he was right, with what precision he described the intimate movement of negativity (Bataille, 1998, 338-339) Therefore, it becomes possible to see the blind point in Hegel's discourse: insofar as consciousness is not conscious of sacrifice inherent in it, it cannot be absolute, however great an emphasis is put on it.

This, however, by no means dismisses the weak points of sacrificial sovereignty from view. Sacrifice, as an irrational and violent moment breaking the chains of discursive thinking, dooms to failure in that a meaningful discourse always finds a way to reduce the authentic moment of sovereignty to the level of utility: well-being of community, fertility, and fall of rain. James Frazer successfully establishes the link between the institution of sovereignty and this sacrificial gesture; and he is also successful in showing how this gesture is encoded by a discourse. (Frazer, 1963, 69). We can reiterate the general ontological condition laid bare earlier: no sooner does sovereignty (miracle, the act beyond any meaning and beyond any utility) start to emerge than it is absorbed into a meaningful discourse, and this equally holds true for sacrifice.

Considering all these points, we can come to the conclusion that we are presented by two forms of sovereignty: one that has emerged out of a meaningful discourse unfolding itself in time; a discursive sovereignty. In this form of sovereignty the difference between the autonomy of man and the symbolic space, against which this autonomy should be asserted, wears so thin that autonomy becomes no more than a symbolic mandate to be assumed by man, if he is to be recognized. In this situation freedom turns out to be another name for regulation. This point is all the more readily seen the more we pay attention to the fact that in an ever-increasing fashion the autonomy of man becomes the subject of discourses and documents issued from the organizations that are themselves likely to menace the autonomy. What is of capital significance for us as regards this form of sovereignty is that it is achieved by means of consciousness. In addition to this form, Bataille brings us another form of sovereignty. Unlike the first form, this sovereignty does not stem from a discourse, and is therefore not informed from the beginning by a consciousness. Accordingly, this sovereignty would be truly sovereign were it not for the consciousness that arrives afterwards and ascribes meaning and utility to the phenomenon that should be meaningless and useless if it is to be sovereign.

6. BATAILLE BETWEEN SOVEREIGNTY AND CONSCIOUSNESS

So far, we have tried to give credit to the idea that there are two forms of sovereignty: one which, attained through mediation and work, appears as autonomy; and other which, appearing as momentary rupture, looms as *loss*. We have also detected the ambivalent character in Hegelian system when noting that Totality inscribed by Hegelian phenomenology cannot exhaust all the possibilities belonging to *Geist*. That is to say, there are remnants that cannot be captured by the dialectical movement and, moreover, these remnants are what render the Totality ethical (sacrificial gesture without which civil society [the pursuit of self-interest] can strip of its egoistic character and culminate in ethical state). Yet an attentive look does miss the fact that the same ambivalence is also at work in Bataille's sovereignty. Focusing on this point, we realize that consciousness, via its ambivalent character, manifests itself as an element that constantly haunts Bataille's historical and political readings of sovereignty. Asking such questions affords us ground to suggest that the very ambivalence detected in Hegel forms the background of historical readings in *La Souveraineté*. A closer examination of this book may suffice to illustrate that the relationship between consciousness and sovereignty is that which effects and determines the historical movement of sovereignty. This becomes all the more surprising the moment we see that sovereignty always accompanied by a meaningful discourse and is always rendered useful by it.

After these general remarks, we can turn to the

periodization in *La Souveraineté*. In Bataille's historical account, sovereignty passes through such historical periods as archaic (sovereignty of hunters, gatherers and shepherds), classical (sovereignty in feudal forms), bourgeois (sovereignty tolerated in minimal and rational forms) and communist (sovereignty that is totally eradicated). If we follow these epochs step by step, we can see that in all movements between epochs, history has always been accompanied by certain forms of consciousness. Let us then take the first moment: man in the stage of hunters and shepherds possessed sovereignty. The most apparent character of shepherds and hunters is given according to Bataille by their possession of sovereignty and by their lack of consciousness of it. Voluntary respect for sovereignty of the other was a matter-of-fact. (Kessel, 1998, 208) Bataille hardly shares the outlook of those, Rousseau, for example, who conjure up a representation of a golden age in this stage of development. Thereupon we may ask why it was that Bataille favored feudal sovereignty than this period, in which everyone enjoyed such a perfect sovereignty that they needed not submit to any political sovereignty –political authority- and that everyone recognized other and was recognized by this other as sovereign, is less favored by Bataille than feudal sovereignty. To such a question, there seems to be only one answer to give: because they lacked the very consciousness that was to be found in feudal societies. If we note the fact that Bataille detects, behind the dazzling facades of feudal forms, e.g. royalty, only the muddled forms of sovereignty, mired down eventually by the world of practice, we may further ask what merits the considerable attention that Bataille has given to the feudal forms of sovereignty. Given that archaic societies can find a place only in the margins of *La Souveraineté*, while the feudal forms is one of its focal points, we can ask: what was it that archaic societies had not possessed but feudal forms did? The answer is simple: consciousness. By allowing the condensation of sovereignty in a single person, king or lord, and by depriving others from this sovereignty, feudal society had achieved what was impossible in archaic society. Those submitting to the exceptional sovereignty of the one became instantly conscious (aware) of what they did not possess, of what they had lost. The contribution of this form of sovereignty is that the awareness of the loss to which it had given rise helped humanity to claim the very sovereignty of which it was deprived by the exceptional figure of sovereignty.

When human history is considered as a whole, it is seen that feudal forms have been discarded by bourgeois and communist revolutions. Let us concentrate on bourgeois society as treated by Bataille in his reading of sovereignty. Bourgeois society is a political and social form which sees the light of day after the evolutionary process during which consciousness holds sway over irrational and mystic things. With the success of consciousness, there lurks another problem: reification of consciousness. Reification runs the risk of turning consciousness (consciousness conscious of everything except itself, namely except how it is still inscribed by its others) into a great machine assimilating everything into utility.

Communist society, representing a further stage of development than bourgeois society, differs from it with its strict intolerance to any differentiation based on rank and statue. This condition of communist society brings the understanding that the communist society casts every capricious, whimsical and useless thing aside. Bataille is apt to glean, however, the drastic possibility inherent to this situation: perfect thinghood, a condition in which, all that is an end in itself being terminated, man has no option but to be means for something else. What is the value (lesson) of this plight with which Stalinist society made humanity face? The answer, for Bataille, is simple: consciousness. This situation is so drastic that that Bataille thought it would necessarily lead to a consciousness of the reification that remained inconspicuous and hence undetectable in bourgeois world. This would drive humanity to be aware of the fact that there are only two alternatives to choose from. Either the rationalization, namely the reign of the consciousness without conscious of itself, would continue but lead to a situation in which nothing that is not useful would remain; a situation in which everything, including humanity, would be a mere tool, in which humanity thus would be reduced to being merely a thing. On the other hand, confronted with such a plight, humanity would develop a *consciousness* which would finally teach it how to deal with sovereignty. This was the main concern of Bataille in formulating his General Economy: (Bennington, 1995, 46-50) developing a consciousness that has respect for the sovereignty of man and does not deny consumption beyond utility (sovereignty) in favor of accumulation and industrial growth. Without such a consciousness, Bataille envisions that only total war and concentration camps would give vent to sovereignty of man.

Exposed to this kind of reading, Bataille's sovereignty is to be seen as always being accompanied by

consciousness, just as Hegel's autonomy by sacrificial gesture. We can conclude without undue temerity therefore that sacrifice is to Hegel's phenomenology (absolute consciousness) what consciousness is to Bataille's general economy. This conclusion can be more in place, however, if added with a caution: to closure (reconciliation via dialectic), Bataille always opposes an agitation that always starts anew. For him, the balance of reconciliation is always upset by the touch of transgression. Absence of reconciliation is the hall-mark of Bataille. This is so to such an extent that in Bataille's system, there is not even reconciliation favoring sovereignty: sovereignty that is favored by reconciliation or sovereignty that is reconciled with a favor becomes a practical, and thus a useful thing. This is exactly the source of what is radical in Bataille's sovereignty.

7. CONCLUSION

In this study, what we have in view throughout is the ambivalence inherent in Bataille's views on sovereignty. If this ambivalence is taken as the main theme, it becomes understandable why we attach so much importance to Hegel. As we try to clarify, Bataille's relation with Hegel's philosophy is always marked by a tension. On the one hand, we see Bataille that never hesitates to challenge absolute knowledge by giving precedence to heterogeneous elements. On the other, we also see another Bataille that always acknowledges the importance of absolute knowledge for such elements.

When we bring Hegel and Bataille together, the most critical point of Bataille's sovereignty becomes obvious: the tension between sovereignty and consciousness. Reading Bataille after Hegel shows us the reasons why we cannot take autonomy as absolute. The more this autonomy is articulated, the wider the gap between this autonomy and sovereignty. In addition to this, there is also another lesson to be taken from reading Hegel and Bataille together: sovereignty unarticulated by a discourse can only be seen as a miracle in phenomenal world. But this momentary rupture is always taken back to the world of meaning and utility, hence, a discourse always follows on the heels of sovereignty that is in effect unarticulated. Though Bataille has always been interested in heterogeneous elements, he is also quite sensitive to this dimension. As final word, it can be said that importance of Bataille's formulation of sovereignty stems from his refusal to take this ambivalence as something to be solved mechanically. For Bataille, it is an existential matter exceeding the scopes of epistemology or text. Moreover, he keenly realizes this point, suggesting that such an inherently essential condition as this ambivalence cannot be dealt with as a mere problem of mechanics.

END NOTES

[1] "Une morphologie décrivant des domains complexes ne pourrait que suivre une position des problèmes fondamentaus. Ce pourrait être un resultat final, qui ne surviendrait qu'en dernier lieu." (Bataille, 1976: 252).

[2] "Mais encore: ell [sovereignty] appartient essentiellement à tous les homes qui possèdent et jamais n'ont tout a fait perdu la valeur attribuée aux dieux et aux dignitaires" (Bataille, 1976: 247).

[3] Carl Schmitt explains the emergence of modern sovereignty in theological terms showing us how much modern sovereignty is related with the dispel of miracle: "… die Idee des modernen Rechsstaates setzt sich mit dem Deismus durch, mit einer Theologie und Metaphysik, die das Wunder aus der Welt verweist…" (Sshmitt, 1996: 43).

[4] The reason for the capitalized form of nothing is Bataille's usage of this word not as ontological category which denotes more than its usual sense does.

[5] Non-knowledge is the English translation of the philosophical concept developed by Bataille: *non-savoir*.

[6] Here the closeness between Bataille and Heidegger is highly prominent. To notice this point, it is useful to look at Heidegger's conceptualization of *Dasein*'s completeness (Ganzsein des Daseins) with death (Heidegger, 1986: 235-37).

[7] "Le savoir absolu se ferme, alors que le mouvement dont je parle s'ouvre. " (Bataille, 1976 : 403).

[8] To realize how death annihilates recognition, Hegel's *Phenomenology*: "This trial by death, however, does away with the truth which was supposed to issue from it, and so, too, with the certainty of self generally. For just life is the *natural* setting of consciousness, independence without absolute negativity, so death is the *natural* negation of consciousness, a negation without independence, which thus remains without the required significance of recognition." (Hegel, 1977: 114).

[9] Bataille clearly expresses the plight of the master: "Il y a surement une degradation de la souveraineté dès l'instant où la Lutte a l'Esclavage de 'adversaire vaincu pour fin. Le roi qui exerce le pouvoir et se laisse, au-delà de *ce qu'il est,* sans agir, reconnaître pour *ce qu'l fait,* pour sa puissance, entre dans la voie où l'Action est réellement efficace, et n'est plus de *pur* prestige." (Bataille, 1988: 353).

[10] (Hegel, 1977: 48).

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