

The Adventures of Dialectics

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* II (VI)



Universal history is progress in the consciousness of freedom—progress whose necessity we must recognize. (Philosophy of History, pp. 27–28)

Here, then, is the continuation of the [misery of morality](#). The previous chapter explored the contradictions of moral positions and their inadequacy, concluding with the necessity of a transition to **politics** in order to achieve justice. We thus enter into the dialectic of the historical awareness of our collective existence, with political history succeeding individual morality.

Written under difficult material conditions and requiring much more work than I had anticipated, I have not succeeded in simplifying this section as much as I would have liked. It is undoubtedly much longer and less convincing than the discussion of moral impasses, but it nevertheless contains valuable historical analyses that make The *Phenomenology of Spirit* so fascinating. (Antigone, Roman individualism, the overly reductionist critique of religions by the Enlightenment, the contradictions of freedom leading to revolutionary terror, etc.). As Marx pointed out:

"Unhappy consciousness," "honest consciousness," the struggle between "noble consciousness" and "base consciousness," etc., all these isolated parts contain (albeit in an alienated form) the elements necessary for the critique of entire domains, such as religion, the state, bourgeois life, etc. (Marx II p125)

I do not claim to account for all the richness of Hegelian dialectics, just to give a **glimpse** of its power of revelation and its indispensability in politics. If this could enable all those who claim to be anti-Hegelian (who isn't nowadays?) to know at least a little about what it is all about... For example, contrary to popular belief, it would be very beneficial for Marxists to return to Hegel to understand that there is no more abolition of classes than there is a general will, no matter how relentlessly the Terror seeks to impose its existence by negating what already exists.

The figures of morality could be represented by contemporaries, while the figures of politics refer to historical situations or **characters**, and are therefore less relevant today, even if lessons can be drawn from them for our own times and, above all, for the political action that they singularly illuminate.

Indeed, dialectics is no longer individual, it is collective with its **reversals** and changes of fashion, its always surprising backlashes, where, despite inevitable regressions, the awareness of our freedom (and our collective responsibility) progresses. In any case, it is very entertaining to follow its tribulations, from contradictions to perverse effects (from Conformism to Ethics, then to Law and Culture, and finally to mutual recognition in the democratic state as a self-aware collective intelligence).

Let us first summarize this historical journey, which we will then detail:

*Thus, the good will of **Conformism**, seeking to assert its belonging to its people, encounters in **opposition duties** (to the family, as divine law, and to the community, as*

human law), first guilt, then corruption, before alienating itself in a formal **law** that is the reign of separation and **private property** (culture and faith). The division between public good and private property leaves it up to each individual to choose between base conscience (self-interested victim) and **noble conscience** (ready for sacrifice and virtue). But sacrifice that does not go as far as death is ambiguous and falls into rebellion (the claim of base conscience). From then on, it is no longer sacrifice that counts but the rightness of advice, law, and command, their universal content as the language of power. However, this new appreciation of content is exhausted in the **flattery** of courtiers until it loses all meaning in the externality of cultural refinements. But the loss of meaning is already **faith** that knows itself to be being-for-another, an individual relationship to the Universal and a desire for the Other. The encyclopedic gathering of human knowledge, however, dissolves this confusion and individualism in the unification of everyone's knowledge and the constitution of a true collective intelligence. This rationalism opposed the obscurantism of religions and denounced the corruption of the clergy. But the **Enlightenment** also proved dogmatic (scientism) and fell into hypocrisy, the most base materialistic utilitarianism, and passivity. It even turned into political ideologies, as the active will of all, but the absolute freedom won by the French Revolution was monopolized by factions and sank into the **Terror** of mere suspicion and division of the general will, thus losing all effectiveness. The defense of the individual and his freedom emerged strengthened in the name of a new **moral consciousness**, represented by Kant, who claimed that the ineffectiveness of universality was a pure universal duty. However, the goal is devalued by this inaction and finally turns into the effective action of an unshakeable **good conscience** that knows that action is only valid through its intention, its own conviction, and its conscientious realization. But moral conviction is only valid when expressed and recognized by others; it is the language of **recognition** that unifies self-awareness, first in the confusion of the **beautiful soul**, which is also incapable of action. Moral judgment harshly condemns this passivity and incredible contempt for others, but it cannot avoid condemning itself in turn and confessing its faults, finally becoming equal to others in brotherly **forgiveness** and mutual recognition. For Hegel, this is pretty much the last word, but if history has refuted this contemplative end, absolute knowledge remains the knowledge of knowledge as the knowledge of a subject and history, a dialectical process of learning that continues to surprise us...

- The ethical order (from natural law to law)

a) Conformism (the reign of death and natural divisions)

Once we recognize our belonging to a community and political action as the only effective means, the first attitude is the "realistic" attitude of the conformist or loyal citizen who respects the laws of his people, for the same reasons that self-consciousness as consciousness of others had taken the form of ethical traditionalism but, unlike the moral point of view, imitation or the law of the heart, individual consciousness and action are thought of, from a political point of view, as distinct from a transcendent, external collective reality, the individual being **subject** to its law as to what is feasible and what is "right." (the collective may well be constructed, but it is nonetheless very real in its interactions with the individuals it organizes, despite what nominalists, realists, scientists, liberals, etc. claim).



It is a solid and enduring position (think of ancient Egypt). This time, the contradiction will not come from opposition to others, nor from a clash of civilizations, which will instead serve to unite the people in the war against their enemies. the contradiction of conformism is not external but

internal to its demand for legitimacy; it is its internal **divisions**, first and foremost the sexual division, considered in its universality as a simply given and natural reality, dividing roles and determining a whole series of dual affiliations: the division between women and men, between the family and the city, between divine law and human law, between night and day; but before pronouncing divorce and falling into ancient tragedy, the Conformist maintains a nostalgia for a natural order and an original sexual harmony. It is just as natural that at this stage, the absolute master is death (omnipresent), the natural negation of the individual, which reigns over the warrior as well as over the woman who buries the dead and maintains their cult.

- **Sexual division (man and woman)**



The Greek city is no longer a state of nature, but a cultural construct based on a "known law," an explicit human law that is therefore not immanent, immediate, or animalistic (implicit). Nevertheless, the ancient state retains a "**natural**" (ethnic and family) basis. Its internal contradiction is just as natural: it is the division into different families or communities but, more fundamentally, it is the difference between the sexes that implies that there are inevitably two ways of life in society: feminine and masculine, internal and external, private and public, family and war. On the one hand, men participating in the government of the city must separate their universality from their own family singularity in order to serve the common good (democracy is a division into geographical zones, the demes, whose primary purpose was to break family ties). On the other hand, women, attached to their particular homes, identify with their universal family function and do not consider the singularity of this husband or that child.

"In the home of the ethical realm, it is not a question of this husband or that child, but of husbands in general and children in general. These relationships of women are based not on sensitivity but on the universal. The distinction between the ethical life of women and that of men consists precisely in the fact that women, in their destiny for singularity and in their pleasure, remain immediately universal and alien to the singularity of desire. On the contrary, in men, these two sides are separated from each other, and because men, as citizens, possess the self-conscious power of universality, they thus purchase the right to desire and at the same time preserve their freedom with regard to this desire."

This division of roles between the singular who defends the universal and the universal who defends the particular is initially presented as a harmonious and **complementary** (necessary, mystical, mysterious) union of the active and the passive, of struggle and work, of the spirit that says no and the flesh that says yes, of the extrovert and the introvert.

In fact, far from a natural harmony, this introduces a permanent **conflict** between contradictory logics that cannot agree, where each inevitably deceives the other, as we know only too well. The fact that this natural basis is disappearing today does not make it any easier to distribute roles, which are simply becoming less rigid but not any clearer, as things have become even more complicated and precarious, with constant negotiation and emotional blackmail replacing the law of the universal Father... At least this tends to overcome the opposition between the sexes in politics and the

separation of the private and public spheres, even if it takes the form of an apparently differentialist feminist demand.

- **Human law and divine law (war and family)**

The sexual division of labor carries within it the division of society and the **duplicity** of multiple allegiances between family and city, natural (particular) community and political (universal) community. The problem is not so much selfishness opposed to duty as the conflicts of interest between the different groups or communities to which we belong.



The family is the natural ethical community, while the city is a **constructed** community (*"Government is the effective spirit reflected in itself"*), a political state that will contradict the state of nature. Nature is the realm of the gods (Neter refers to the gods for the Egyptians), the birthplace of the vital forces and divine laws that come to us from elsewhere (heteronomy), which are opposed by artificial human laws that are the fruit of our freedom (autonomy). Divine law is upheld by women in the home, human law by citizens in battle, but there is no mediation between the universal (the state) and the particular (the family) in this pagan world that has already lost its unity.

Divine law bases the family on the worship of **the dead** and their burial, dealing universally with singularity by removing it from the living and consigning it to oblivion (with the consequence that we are only recognized as individuals once we are dead and buried). Similarly, human law, which is not natural but a product of our freedom, dissolves rather in peace and the enjoyment of the good life. It is not imposed without contestation and only truly brings us together in war (the "natural" state of confrontation between peoples or cities in the absence of higher laws to govern their conflicts). War is essential to social cohesion as a general mobilization that transcends individualism, manifests the precariousness of goods, and keeps the parts dependent on the whole. It is the destructive force of war, the reign of death as natural negativity, that constitutes the force of community preservation, its underground kingdom, the kingdom of the dead on which it is built and which has nothing of the enchanted kingdom of childhood that we imagine to be the kingdom of beginnings.

- **The ethical world as a totality**

Conformists call for a return to the old days of a just and harmonious order. It is impossible to say whether such a time of unity of all hearts really existed, but at least it was possible to believe in it and to want to preserve its memory in history.



Whether it was the blessed time of our smiling loves or the Homeric age of Greek greatness (if not the time of the fusion of social movements), **nostalgia** is always present for a golden age lost forever, for an immobile perfection frozen in eternity. This desire for order and totality, in the union of male and female, is, however, only the first of the illusions of the political awareness of our social solidarity and our collective existence, an illusion that will quickly be disappointed by the reign of justice and harmony of hearts.

"To know the law of the heart as the law of all hearts, the consciousness of the Self as the recognized universal order—this is the virtue that enjoys the fruits of its sacrifice..."

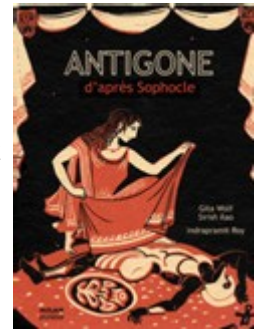
The wrong that, in the ethical realm, can be inflicted on the individual consists solely in this: that something happens to him purely and simply."

The curtain rises, the stage is set where what happens can only be a terrible fate in which these two laws **tear** each other **apart** and the original totality is revealed to be irretrievably divided.

b) Guilt (double bind)

We do not remain in this beautiful ethical life, in the harmony of consciences in obedience to the law, which is therefore only the first act of our tragedy. The beginning of the story is well known and already contains within it the entire sequence of events. For us, it all begins with the Greeks, and what will tear apart this beautiful harmony is the conflict of duties, illustrated by Sophocles'

Antigone in her confrontation with Creon, who had forbidden her to bury her brother, guilty of rebellion, on pain of death. It is human law that stands against divine law, introducing disorder into the city and a curse on the guilty. Antigone, unable to shirk her family duty to her brother, pays with her life, taking Creon's son and wife with her in death. We see that no law is superior to another and that it is just as impossible not to respect them as it is impossible to respect them both, because they contain contradictory injunctions.



It is no longer the simple diversity of laws that dissolves their legitimacy, as in the stage of traditionalist morality, where conscience sought guidance for conduct. Now it is certain that it finds its effectiveness in the community that shelters it, but it cannot renounce the original division it inherits between human law (of the city) and divine law (of the family). The legalistic citizen, conscious of himself as an immediate unity with the universal and with effective laws, finds himself utterly helpless in the face of the real **contradiction** of duties that arises in concrete practice and constitutes the tragedy of life.

This division of the mind is a division of knowledge, where "*the knowledge of one is the ignorance of another*," its schizophrenic **repression**. It is therefore a deceptive knowledge, and this opposition will dissolve the immediacy of the ethical order, the good will of moral conformism, which is found wanting, a victim of its own unconscious, whatever law it seeks to follow (if there is a contradiction in the law, we are all guilty). Every law emerges corrupt from this confrontation, right up to the highest levels of the state.

"Innocence is therefore only the absence of action, the existence of a stone and not even that of a child... He experiences that his supreme right is the supreme wrong, that his victory is rather his own defeat."

Since it is the action itself that makes us guilty, there is no need for female perfidy. It therefore seems unjustified to attribute the original fault to primitive Eve. If we can nevertheless say that "woman is **crime**" and that in every matter "we must look for the woman," it is only because woman here represents the particular and private interests, the shadow side of families in relation to public laws and the general interest.

"This femininity—the eternal irony of the community—alters the universal goal of government into a private goal through intrigue..."

From the beginning, the internal enemy of the ancient state was therefore the family. Yet it was the family that would ultimately triumph over the state, in the form of Philip and his son **Alexander the**

Great, who diverted politics and war to further his own particular (family) ambitions.

Paradoxically, by asserting his particularity, he thus founded the first universal empire, just as the confiscation of the state by a family whose ties are entirely natural effectively destroyed its natural ethnic base. This is the trick of history, where nothing is done without individual passions, but where singular passions, having to justify themselves and pass through reason, ultimately reinforce the universal (the fact that Alexander was trained by Aristotle is not unrelated).

In any case, this marked the end of Greek citizenship, reduced to Hellenistic culture opposed to the barbarians, which would continue in **the Roman Empire**, also the heritage of the Emperor, putting an end to the contradiction between private and public life, between man and citizen, through the abolition of citizenship and public life!

c) Alienation (the Empire of Law)

The decline of citizenship was not immediate and remained very relative. This is not surprising, as dialectics always progresses through **partial** negations. Previous conquests remained intact, as did the contradiction, which was not eliminated but would now be expressed in a law that incorporated it in its formal and impersonal rigor.



It is indeed the law that will establish itself as the protection of citizens against **the arbitrariness** of power. When there is a conflict of legitimacy, when corruption and guilt have become widespread, the individual finds himself at the mercy of the most complete arbitrariness. If there is therefore an urgent need to free them from this arbitrariness, it is nevertheless necessary to bring the political question of justice back to the isolated individual and their legal guarantees, somewhat like the failure of traditionalism had led to the hedonistic withdrawal of moral consciousness. The difference is that this is no longer an individual stance but a political issue: the restoration of equality of individuals before the law and the institutionalization of both private property and adversarial debate between prosecutor and defense attorney.

While formal law must protect citizens from arbitrariness and ensure equality for all before the law, it does not determine its content, which is instead reinforced by arbitrariness. Indeed, since what matters is that the law be the same for all, its universality is based on exceptions (the will of the Emperor). As a result, the effectiveness of the law (or the spirit) becomes completely **alien** to self-consciousness in its objectivity (this is what Marx called fetishism, the alienation of the subject in its product, where its own operation turns against itself as if it came from an external reality).

"Its being there is the work of self-consciousness, but it is also an immediately present effectiveness foreign to it, which has a special being, and in which it does not recognize itself."

- Culture (the mind becoming alienated from itself)

The first act is complete, taking us from natural ethics to rational law, from our original community to the universal (Catholic) empire, but also from citizenship to culture. The Empire effectively deprives citizens of political action, transforming them into **slaves** of the Emperor. The world of Law is one of cold justice that is imposed on everyone without asking their opinion.

This foreign character of the Empire and the Law separates form from substance and **exiles** us to this world where we are left with only the alternative between an ineffective "here and now," the world of Culture, and the beyond of the world of Faith (which is flight from the world). It was not

until the Enlightenment that this separation and sacrifice were denounced, bringing the beyond of faith back to the here and now of the world and reducing the world to the useful on the one hand and the unknowable absolute on the other.

"Then the kingdom of faith as well as the real world collapse, and this revolution produces absolute freedom; with it, the spirit, previously alien to itself, has completely returned to itself, leaving this land of culture and passing into another land, the land of moral consciousness."

But this is only a foretaste, and we are not there yet, since we take up the dialectic again with the experience of **Roman** law and its medieval consequences.

a) The reign of separation and private property (culture and faith)



We have therefore entered the reign of separation and of the isolated individual, "unhappy consciousness" in direct relation to the Emperor or to God, destroying the natural unity with his community (and its "intermediate bodies"), a time of "collaborators" such as Flavius Josephus. With *the pax romana* relieving citizens of their own defense and depriving them of any political action, individuals lost interest in the state over which they no longer had any influence and withdrew into their inner lives (Stoics) or their private property (Epicurus' garden). This was a forced return to a simple (slave) morality and the rise of **individualism** (of the property owner). The citizen became the bourgeois, a legal entity identified with his interests and wealth. At first glance, this seems very paradoxical, since we are supposed to follow the historical dialectic of our collective consciousness, but this is precisely what must be emphasized: individualism is a collective ideology and not at all a natural state or our original situation (man is a gregarious animal, and even political according to Aristotle). Individualism is the product of the collective awareness of the separation of individual consciousnesses, reduced to their representation in a common figure where they become alienated (Emperor or God). The collective is nothing more than a multitude of individuals gathered under the control of a single individual and sharing only their servitude to the same Master. This connection between Empire and individualism will be constantly verified, with Napoleon among others.

The citizen, now a bourgeois property owner, is no longer a soldier but at the mercy of the Emperor's troops. He then goes through **three** successive **stages**: *"He begins by becoming a Stoic (disinterested in the world), then a Skeptic (denying this world), then a Christian (seeking refuge in the other world). Thus, private property is the foundation of Christianity"* (Kojève, p. 116). But the Stoic quickly becomes "bored" (sic), and the skeptic, who may believe himself to be alone in the world in his private property, falls into countless contradictions. These are not positions that will last very long; the Christian synthesis will be much more durable and useful to the Empire.

It is not without reason that **Christians** changed the meaning of the word "*religio*" to mean "to connect" (rather than "to transmit religiously," which comes from *relegere*, not *religare*, according to Cicero, according to Gaffiot or Benveniste), because they found a universal link (*catholicon*) between all citizens regardless of their race, even if it was transcendent, accessible only through inner prayer and for strictly individual salvation. From now on, the world will be divided between *the here and now* (the earthly city) and *the hereafter* (the city of God), but this world is the valley of tears of an unhappy consciousness that lives for an ideal with no hope of redemption except in the other world.

The world of culture is the "atheistic" or "profane" version of this separation between the individual and his effectiveness. The intellectual bears witness to his opposition to reality (*"Language is born of discontent"*), taking refuge in an **imaginary** and ideal world that turns away from the real. The man of letters is someone who dreams of *"absolute satisfaction in this world, but who also wants to obtain it immediately, that is, without making the effort of negating action necessary for the real transformation of the world (...)* Just as the religious Christian can take pleasure in the unhappiness of his conscience, the atheist Christian can be content with the pure joy that intellectual life gives him" (Kojève, p. 110), at least at first...

- **Noble Consciousness and Vile Consciousness (feudalism)**



It is on this new stage, divided between God and Caesar, church and castle, faith and culture, that feudalism developed after the decline and **fragmentation** of the Roman Empire, which had become Christian and overly bourgeois. We thus witness the internalization of this division, which takes over from the sexual division that is increasingly repressed and codified by the "courts" of courtly

love.

Long before Napoleon imposed it on Europe with his Civil Code, Roman law survived the Empire through the **canon law** of the Church. Legal personality and property rights remained in force, allowing women's rights to be recognized, at least in marriage and inheritance, which would greatly enrich the Church. Pico della Mirandola saw this as recognition of the "dignity of man," but if feudalism was indeed based on private ownership of the seigneurial domain, it was at the same time caught up in a web of allegiances.

This led to a new version of the conflict of duties, which raised the question of feudal loyalty, marked by so many betrayals and torn between wealth on the one hand (the interests of the landowner) and service to the state on the other. The lord is a bourgeois who wages war, a knight. He is no longer a peasant, he is a nobleman, but he has an estate to make profitable; he is no longer just a warrior, a predator living off plunder. This contradiction of duties inevitably produces a conscience **torn** between his interests and service to the state. Conscience and interiority are revalued because personal judgment must arbitrate between good and evil each time, until the "last judgment." This is a step forward in the consciousness of freedom and self-awareness.

"Sovereignty and wealth are therefore present for the individual as objects, that is, as things of which he knows he is free and believes he can choose between them, or even choose neither... Thus, consciousness as being-in-itself and for itself finds in the power of the state its simple essence and its subsistence in general, but not its individuality as such... in this power, it finds rather the operation denied as a singular operation and subject to obedience... On the other hand, wealth is good; it leads to universal enjoyment, it is distributed and provides everyone with consciousness of their Self... On the other hand, in the enjoyment of wealth, the individual does not experience his universal essence, he obtains only ephemeral consciousness and enjoyment of himself... Effective consciousness possesses both principles within itself."

It is the struggle between the "base consciousness" of the self-interested victim who asserts his rights and the "noble consciousness" of sacrifice for the universal. Singularity and universality remain as irreconcilable and unsatisfactory as divine laws and human laws, but this time the conflict is no longer "tragic"; it is no longer a quarrel between gods but a conscious calculation of interests that turns into "**comedy**," if not farce. Certainly, the chivalrous spirit will want to cultivate the

sublime, heroism, and virtue, but when it does not fall into the ridiculousness of a Don Quixote or die in combat, its glory will threaten legitimate power or some rival and thus fall back into personal ambition and the demands of a vile conscience...

"Noble conscience is the heroism of service, the virtue that sacrifices the individual to the universal, and in so doing brings the universal into being... This conscience therefore gains through this culture self-esteem and the respect of others... others find in it their essence in action, but not their being-for-themselves. They find their thoughts or their pure conscience fulfilled in it, but not their individuality. This self-consciousness is therefore valid in their thoughts and enjoys honor."

But if sacrifice and chivalrous heroism, even sound judgment, bring glory and power, they become **suspect**, *"and suspect is the advice given for the universal good, which in fact reserves for itself, against the power of the state, its own opinion and particular will... and falls under the determination of a vile conscience, one that is always ready for rebellion."*

- **The language of power and flattery (the courtier)**

We are making great strides in this history of the forms of collective power and its representation. Feudalism was based on a powerful moralism of the given word, punctuated by perpetual betrayals, and its power depended on the goodwill of its servants, which proved to be **ambiguous**.



With the Renaissance, there was a return to forms and content, to ancient culture. Attention was no longer focused on inner purity and loyalty, but on outward appearance, the **language** used and its accuracy, and not only in the arts. It was an active, efficient, even technical form of speech. It was as much the law of the Prince as the advice he sought, which could prove decisive. We are therefore no longer really in the separate world of culture.

"It is the power of speech as such that brings about what is to be brought about. In language, 'singularity being for itself the consciousness of itself' enters into existence as such, so that this singularity is for others..."

Language, which is unique to humans, gives the Mind a concrete existence as a mediator, a third party, between power and its servants. It is the language of power that will flourish in Versailles as the language of the court in the service of the sovereign, but since the latter is an individual ("I am the State"), this language will invoke him by his **name**, which is also his title, the name having become the new foundation of identity and rank in this kingdom of the beautiful mind.

"In the name, the singular is valued as purely singular, no longer only in one's own consciousness, but in the consciousness of all."

All this fine talk would eventually degenerate into mere **flattery**, and noble consciousness would lose its sense of honor by identifying itself, like a courtier, with the base consciousness greedy for wealth and honor. This bad conscience, which has become totally alien to itself, will produce a new, more elitist culture (snobbery), jaded and disdainful of all content and of the artificial world in which it lives, cut off from life and the people, a conscience torn by its own vanity (the aristocrat no longer risks his life) and its impending disappearance, a mind that has become overly critical and believes in nothing but widespread perversion.

b) The realm of the Enlightenment (scientism)

With the Enlightenment, we are at a decisive moment on which we still largely depend. The snobbery of "connoisseurs" has not lost its relevance, nor has the search for meaning, and there are still quite a few believers, but we are still largely dominated by scientism and utilitarianism, which formed in **reaction** to the devotees of the end of Louis XIV's reign. For the first time, perhaps, atheism is becoming fashionable, at least among libertines and philosophers, as the new religion of reason.



The overcoming of faith and the formalism of good manners will once again be a return to content. Indeed, the **encyclopedic** gathering of knowledge and techniques will suffice to reestablish a common truth and make the dispersion of specialized knowledge the intellect of all. *"By this simple means, intellect will succeed in resolving the confusion of this world."* This was the emergence of collective intelligence and learned societies, dissolving the individualism of the mind and the limits of isolated consciousness.

From this foundation of verified knowledge, rationalism subjected religions to its dissolving criticism, but its **propaganda** was hardly distinguishable from Christianity's criticism of idols and fell into the most platitudinous utilitarianism (or calculating economism) before asserting itself as a transformative political ideology.

• Criticism of religions

It was first the claims of faith that were discredited in the eyes of simple reason, which recognized religions as human creations, denouncing the corruption of the clergy and the ignorance of the people, who were ruled by a cynical and pleasure-seeking despotism behind the apparent devotion of its Tartuffes. The problem is that by slandering faith in this way, scientism falls into another faith that is just as blind to the knowledge of the community and the disinterestedness of scholars, thus feeding another **lie** and another dogmatism.

"The Enlightenment therefore appears to faith as distortion and falsehood because it makes it see the otherness of its moments... But the Enlightenment itself, which reminds faith of the opposite of its separate moments, is just as unenlightened about itself."

The worst thing is that by denying all truth to faith, by refusing to understand it as if it were enough to be delivered from it in order to be delivered from all dogmatism, the consciousness that wants to be rational leaves no room for self-consciousness itself or for any notion of freedom! If religion speaks of man believing it is speaking of God, scientism speaks of the animal believing it is speaking of man, thus amputating him of his share of **freedom**, of all his human relationships and of the world of the mind he inhabits through language.

"The Enlightenment expresses itself as if, by a sleight of hand performed by conjuring priests, something absolutely foreign and absolutely other had been substituted in consciousness in place of essence!"

The error consists in acting as if faith were directed toward a concrete object (the stone of statues or the bread of the host) and as if its foundation were purely contingent, event-based knowledge, rather than the consciousness of the universal as such. The criticism does not realize that it is merely repeating Abraham's criticism of idols! *"It therefore imagines that religious faith bases its certainty on certain singular historical testimonies"* and thus believes it can refute it through exegesis, when

in fact it is merely expressing the believer's doubts about his faith and that of the Church. Her **mistake** is above all to imagine that religion is nothing but an error that does not even need to be explained, that contains no truth and no necessity, a mere hallucination of a consciousness that projects itself outward, gives itself self-certainty, and values itself in its own eyes.

"The Enlightenment, for its part, isolates religious determinability as an immutable finitude, as if it were not a moment in the spiritual movement of essence, not nothing, not even something being in itself and for itself, but something disappearing."

It could not be clearer: religion must disappear, but on condition that its truth and necessity are recognized as a moment in historical reflection, its **role** in the construction of our collective consciousness and the embodiment of freedom of the spirit, a moment that must be overcome but understood and continued in another way.

- **Utilitarianism**

The critique of religion will apply more specifically to **denigrating** religious discipline and its sacrifices, its self-denial and even its mortifications, which excessively value the material pleasures it denies itself.

Simple reason "finds it inappropriate to reject a possession in order to know and show oneself to be free of possessions, to reject enjoyment in order to know and show oneself to be free of enjoyment...The act of discarding a singular possession or renouncing a singular pleasure is not a universal action... it is too naive to fast in order to show oneself free from the pleasures of the table, too naive to chase away the pleasure of love from the body, as Origen did, in order to show oneself free from it."

Criticism does little better, however, which *"places the essential in intention, in thought, and thereby spares itself the accomplishment of the liberation of natural ends."* In seeking to reveal the interplay of interests behind apparent sacrifice, a shift nevertheless takes place that will have major consequences, namely, judging actions according to their **usefulness**. This marks the emergence of *homo economicus*, the subject reduced to rational calculation and devoted to the optimization of his enjoyment. Every being, being also a being-for-another, can indeed be reduced to the useful, but this generalized utilitarianism leads to taking the means (the tool) for the end (the work) and measuring quality by quantity (the price).

"The useful is the object insofar as self-consciousness penetrates it with its gaze and possesses in this object the singular certainty of itself, its enjoyment (its being-for-itself)."

Morality itself takes on the meaning of usefulness for enjoyment (which brings "Kant closer to Sade," as Lacan pointed out), having no other function for enlightened consciousness than to optimize pleasures by controlling their excesses.

"Reason is a useful means of setting a suitable limit to this excess...Measure therefore has the function of preventing pleasure from being interrupted in its variety and duration, that is to say, the function of measure is measurelessness. - As everything is useful to man, man is also useful to man... To the extent that he cares for himself, he must also care for others."

- **Ideology**

The Enlightenment's critique of faith consists in "knowing that the supreme good is the knowledge of finitude as true," which values the present moment and concrete utility that cannot be satisfied by a purely verbal critique that serves no purpose and cannot be realized. The outcome will therefore be a shift to political ideology, leaving the ethereal world of culture and the hereafter to return to Earth and build a more humane world, to make this world our world. It is then that atheism loses its unity and **divides** itself between idealism and materialism.

"The Enlightenment comes into conflict with itself, a conflict it previously had with faith, and divides into two parties. One party proves itself the victor only because it in turn splits into two parties. For in doing so, it shows that it possesses within itself the principle it previously fought against and has eliminated the one-sidedness with which it first entered the scene. The interest that was initially divided between it and the other is now entirely directed toward it and forgets the other, since this interest finds in itself the opposition that absorbed it. At the same time, however, the opposition has been elevated to the victorious higher element and is represented there in a clarified form. In this way, the schism emerging in a party, which seems like a manifest misfortune, rather reveals its fortune."

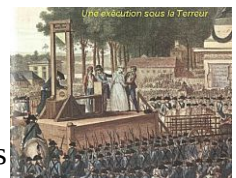
(This last quotation, taken up by Debord in "The Real Split in the Situationist International," is one of the best definitions of the four-stage dialectic of position-opposition-division-composition.)

One might think that it is **idealism** that must be eliminated from rationalism in favor of pure, hard materialism, but the materialist who rejects all freedom is on the side of passivity, while idealism represents the activity of consciousness that sets itself a goal and transforms the world to bring it closer to its ideal. Materialism wants to see only the reality of the object, denying the intervention of consciousness, but paradoxically it immediately makes the object a being-for-another, so that it can only be considered from the point of view of its usefulness, thus reducing everything that exists, including man, to the status of a means.

If faith must accept the criticisms of science, which are its own, and therefore abandon its double language, it cannot be satisfied with the passivity of the spectator, nor with the prosaic world of finitude abandoned by the spirit. It is the aspiration for a better world on the part of the dissatisfied intellectual that will make it possible to overcome materialistic utilitarianism and the reign of commodities through political **ideology**, a collective ideology that is neither true nor false at first, but which wants to become true and be verified in reality, that is, politically.

c) absolute freedom and terror (anarchy-terror-State)

Another decisive moment, and how decisive, since it is the event that structures this entire history and lies at the origin of the Hegelian **dialectic**, the transition to politics not having taken place without terrible contradictions! It is the French Revolution that allows us to read the whole of (Western) history and understand its stake in the liberation and humanization of the world, in the realization of Christianity in the Rights of Man.



We are at the point where "consciousness knows... that its being-in-itself is essentially being for another," no longer in the moral sense but in the utilitarian sense, and knows that it finds its effectiveness as **the active will** of all.

"It is then that the spirit is present as absolute freedom; it is self-consciousness that understands itself and thus understands that its self-certainty is the essence of all spiritual masses in the real world as well as in the supersensible world; or, expressed conversely, that essence and effectiveness are the knowledge that consciousness has of itself... The world is solely its will, and this will is universal will... It is truly universal will, the will of all individuals as such."

This identification of each person's consciousness with the effectiveness of all "has removed its barriers; its goal is the universal goal, its language the universal law, its work the universal work... Universal will is concentrated in itself and is singular will, opposed to which stand universal law and universal work... it allows nothing to detach itself from it in the form of the free object passing before it."

This ideal society devoted to the universal leaves no room for singularity, differences, or interests accused of dividing the Republic (one and indivisible). Its representatives do not represent their constituents but only a fraction of the general will, requiring the negation of all particularities. It is the reign of a totality without mediation (the Le Chapelier law establishing freedom of enterprise by prohibiting coalitions, corporations, agreements, and unions). Its idealism is that of external thought and the **absolute power** of an effective and sovereign collective consciousness that is the negation of the self-consciousness of individuals. This totalitarian freedom ultimately reveals itself as the simple destructive negation of the particular.

This abstract universalism "can therefore produce neither a positive work nor a positive operation; all that remains is negative operation; it is merely the fury of destruction... it divides itself into simple, inflexible, cold universality and into the discreet, absolute, harsh rigidity of the selfish punctuality of effective self-consciousness... The only work and operation of universal freedom is therefore death... It is thus the coldest and most flat death, with no more meaning than cutting off a cabbage head or swallowing a sip of water."

Consciousness experiences in Terror the **contradiction** of a universal that claims to be based on the individual consciousness of all and ends up turning against all, who become suspects, unable to eliminate the conflict between particular wills and social differences, the non-coincidence between citizens and their government. To escape the paradox of absolute freedom that suppresses all freedom and of a Revolution that devours its children, we must admit the irremediable division of society (into classes or factions).

*The government itself, which claims to carry out this universal will, is the product of the ruling **class** and "can therefore present itself only as a faction. What we call government is only the victorious faction, and precisely in the fact of being a faction lies the immediate necessity of its decline; and the fact that it is in government makes it, conversely, a faction and guilty... Opposite it, as the effective universal will, there is only the pure ineffective will, the intention. Being suspected replaces being guilty."*

*And the **suspect** can only be brutally destroyed because "nothing can be taken away from him except his very being... the terror of death is the intuition of this negative essence of freedom... The universal will is converted into a negative essence and proves itself to be the suppression of self-thought or self-consciousness... The individual consciences that have felt the fear of their absolute master, death, lend themselves once again to negation, ordering themselves under the masses."*

"Absolute freedom has therefore reconciled within itself the opposition between universal will and singular will. The mind, having become alienated from itself, driven to the height of its opposition, in which pure will and pure willing are still distinct, reduces this opposition to a translucent form, and thus finds itself there. - Just as the realm of the actual world passes into the realm of faith and intellect, so absolute freedom emerges from its self-destructive actuality to enter another realm of self-conscious spirit, where absolute freedom in this non-actuality has the value of truth... This is its new form, that of the moral spirit, which has come into being."

- Morality (post-revolutionary ideologies)

The title of this chapter may seem surprising in a political history, but it is not a step backward, because this morality is opposed to natural and simply given ethics: it is the advent of a constructed, "artificial," rational morality, a conscious product of the "self-assured spirit," and above all, morality as a collective ideology, an ideology of rejection of politics. This period of the Napoleonic Empire and German idealism, which was very short compared to the importance it is given, is undoubtedly overrated because it corresponds to Hegel's formative years. It can be interpreted as **the internalization** of the different moments of the Revolution (abstract universal—individualistic liberalism—rule of law) and the reappropriation by consciousness of its history and its freedom, knowledge of its own effectiveness, which is "absolute knowledge" and "the end of history."

"For it is essentially the movement of the Self in abolishing the abstraction of immediate being and becoming consciously universal... What consciousness does not know has no meaning and cannot constitute any power over it. In its will imbued with knowledge, all objectivity and all worlds have been absorbed. It is absolutely free because it knows its freedom, and it is precisely this knowledge of its freedom that is its substance and its goal and its sole content."

a) The moral view of the world (Kant)

The reign of terror, seeking to stifle all subjectivity, ends up turning into the promotion of **subjectivity** as our most precious asset and the effective will of the citizen, but this is a free subjectivity, independent of all Nature, which it opposes and approaches with its rational categories, its interpretative framework (Critique of Pure Reason). The "moral vision" of the world (Critique of Practical Reason) consists in this separation and total independence between nature and morality, as between object (thing-in-itself) and subject (universal). If it finds its duty within itself ("Act in such a way that your action can become universal law"), thus removing the externality of ethics, it is, on the one hand, commensurate with its own knowledge and, on the other hand, completely disconnected from any particularity.



(One could say that it is a matter of overcoming the arbitrariness of the general will, of moving away from an overly capricious subjectivism in order to achieve a common **objectivity**, justifying its universality and, by giving content to the collective will, making the freedom of each individual the goal of all). However, from then on, the effectiveness of conscience, its action, is paradoxically indifferent to the reality in which it must act.

Finally, since moral consciousness, despite everything, has a **natural** and sensitive ("pathological") side due to its concrete existence, it involves *"the opposition of oneself and one's impulses,"* with the conflict ultimately being resolved in *"a unity such that it arises from the knowledge of the*

opposition of the two. Only such unity is effective morality." However, this composition of opposites is never achieved and proves to be an infinite task:

"Consciousness must therefore promote this harmony itself and make constant progress in morality. But perfect fulfillment must always be postponed to infinity... Perfection is therefore not actually attainable; it must only be thought of as an absolute task, that is, as something that always remains a task to be fulfilled... Contradictions of a task that must remain a task and yet be fulfilled."

Confronted, moreover, with the plurality of duties that are imposed on action, but which are no longer sacred duties since they are determined (no longer universal), it becomes aware of its moral **imperfection**, "an awareness whose knowledge and conviction are imperfect and contingent... whose goals are affected by sensitivity," its morality can then only be measured by the merit attributed to it.

With merit, "the vision of the world is complete. For in the concept of moral self-consciousness, the two sides, pure duty and actuality, are posited as a single unity, and both are thus, not as being in and for themselves, but as moments or as suppressed. This becomes explicit for consciousness in the last part of the moral worldview; consciousness posits pure duty precisely in an essence different from its own, that is, it posits it partly as a represented entity, partly as something that is not what is valuable in and of itself."

Whereas it was the necessity of effective action that was supposed to lead to privileging the subjective side of **merit** over universal law, we instead enter into a new contradiction of moral consciousness, which thus loses all effectiveness!

"It regards its own effectiveness, as well as all objective effectiveness, as inessential... The proposition now reads as follows: there is no morally perfect effective self-consciousness."

The moral vision of the world destroys itself and falls into **the hypocrisy** of "a whole brood of contradictions devoid of thought." All it can hope for is to be "a step toward perfection"...

"What is valid for consciousness is rather the intermediate stage of non-perfection—a middle state that must at least be progress toward perfection... It is therefore the thought in which morally imperfect knowledge and will are valid as perfect."

Awareness of its imperfection denies it any **satisfaction** in this world (except by the grace of God), which moral consciousness laments constantly.

"Precisely, it is claimed that it is a fact of experience that in our present world morality is often unhappy, while on the contrary immorality is often happy"!

Yet we cannot accuse others of immorality, since we cannot attribute to ourselves unassailable morality. What is expressed in this way is therefore nothing but "envy cloaked in morality," that is, the opposite of morality. In the end, we no longer know where we stand; it is a complete **failure**, since there is no longer any immorality or moral action that is not ambiguous! We must move on to something else (aestheticism, religiosity, solidarity).

"His return to himself is rather only the awareness that his truth is a false truth."

b) Romanticism (post-revolutionary intellectual)

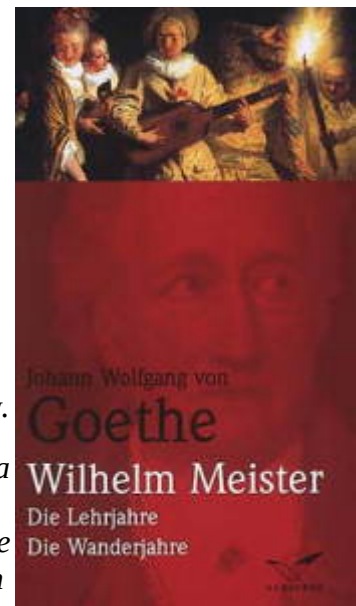
Universal law has revealed all its contradictions, both morally and politically. While consciousness sought objectivity within itself, it found only an unattainable beyond. The next step will be to find **oneself** in individuality (poetry), then in universality (mysticism), and finally to conclude with their active union (politics). This is post-revolutionary romanticism, the ideology of freedom for which man is the only moral value but which does not really act in the world and does not seek to be truly recognized by others (it neither struggles nor works), seeking only to live in accordance with itself.

"It takes itself as that which, in its contingency, is fully valid, which knows its immediate singularity as pure knowledge and pure action, as effectiveness and true harmony."

- **Good conscience or inner conviction (Schiller, Goethe, Jacobi)**

Moral duty was intended to be universal but could not reduce the contradiction with sensitivity, to the point of dissolving into ineffectiveness. *"Something should be thought and posited as necessary that would at the same time be inessential."* This devalues the goal, which is set so as not to be achieved and is therefore no longer valid as a goal of action. Conscience will therefore henceforth be guided in concrete action by its inner conviction and good intentions (a position close to the last figure of morality, that of "reason examining the laws"). As a result, "good conscience" regains within itself the immediacy of self-satisfaction that was denied it by the rigor of an inflexible moral law.

"It is simple action in accordance with duty, which does not fulfill a particular duty, but knows and does what is concretely right. It is therefore, in general, above all moral action as action, in which the previous inoperative consciousness of morality has passed... But in the unshakeable certainty of good conscience, it is no longer possible to shake or examine duty."



The progress of consciousness consists here in understanding, as Jacobi said, that "the law is made for man and not man for the law." However, moral law then becomes identified with one's own **conviction** and can no longer be valid for everyone.

"Duty is no longer the universal passing before the Self, but is known in this state of separation to have no validity. It is now the Law that is for the Self and not the Self for the Law."

Clearly, action based on personal conviction is open to arbitrariness if it does not **conscientiously** examine the issue (if conscience decides, it is responsible).

"It is therefore up to it to know exactly and to assess accurately the circumstances of the case." It must admit, however, "that it does not know the case in which it is acting and that its claim to assess all the circumstances conscientiously is futile." Ultimately, "this conscience takes its incomplete knowledge, because it is its own knowledge, as sufficient and complete knowledge."

This position of total self-determination seems very comfortable, but it contains its own contradiction. Since good conscience knows that one must first act, without recognizing "any

content as absolute," it finds itself absolutely **free** to follow the laws or to break them. Moreover, given that "charity begins at home," it can even put its selfish interests before its duty to others.

"In the same way, what others call violence and injustice fulfills the duty of asserting one's own independence against others; what they call cowardice fulfills the duty of preserving one's own life and thus preserving the possibility of being useful to one's neighbor."

"The more one cares for oneself, the greater one's ability to serve others; not only that, but one's very effectiveness consists solely in being and living in solidarity with others."

- **The language of recognition (Rousseau)**

It does not take a genius to understand the weakness, even the ridiculousness, of a self-satisfied good conscience. The only criterion for moral action is now the fact of being recognized as such by others, the relationship of equality between the Self and the Self replacing the relationship to the Law. Morality therefore depends on the **recognition** of the other, where it is not so much the effect of one's action, but the free self-consciousness that is recognized by others, which is already a new figure of morality, no longer reducible entirely to its interiority.



"Pure duty is the essential moment of behaving towards others as universality. It is the common element of self-consciousness, and this element is the substance in which the operation has subsistence and effectiveness, the moment of becoming recognized by others."

"Consequently, the operation is only the translation of its singular content into the objective element within which this content is universal and recognized, and it is precisely the fact that it is recognized that makes the action effective."

"It is not the determined, it is not the being-in-itself that is the Recognized, but only the Self that knows itself as such."

Moral action is now judged by the recognition of the other, which elevates singularity to the universal, reducing it at the same time to symbolic action and the expression of one's innermost conviction. It thus becomes **language** or communication unifying self-consciousness (language is the materiality of the mind).

"What matters is the conviction that this action is duty, and this conviction is effective in language. Thus, once again, we see language manifesting itself as the being-there of the mind. Language is self-consciousness, which is for others, which is immediately present as such and which, as this self-consciousness, is universal self-consciousness. It is the Self that separates itself from itself, becomes objective as pure: $I = I$, and which, in such objectivity, maintains itself as this Self, and at the same time immediately merges with others and is their self-consciousness. The Self understands itself as well as it is understood by others, and the fact of understanding it is precisely the being-there that has become Self."

"Its intention, precisely because it is its intention, is the Right. We only require that it knows this and that it expresses its conviction that its knowledge and its will are right. The utterance of this assurance removes the form of its particularity from itself; the fact of utterance recognizes the necessary universality of the Self."

- **The Beautiful Soul (Novalis)**



We are approaching the dénouement, but first we must face one last distraction: the reduction of the universal to language itself and the immediacy of mystical consciousness, which contemplates itself and suppresses all exteriority, renouncing the transformation of thought into being and "finds itself only as lost."

Consciousness that has nothing more to expect from life, already lived, and aspires only to flee through suicide. The outpouring of confessions inaugurated by

Rousseau would indeed fuel literary **romanticism** and the confusion of the beautiful soul, which is also incapable of action, but whose interiority is thus entirely revealed in a language that is no longer that of separation but of self-expression.

"It is moral genius that knows that the inner voice of its immediate knowledge is the voice of God."

"This solitary divine service is at the same time essentially the divine service of a community... Contemplating oneself is its objective being, and this objective element consists in the expression of its knowledge and will as universal... It is the word of the community expressing its own spirit... All exteriority as such disappears for it."

"This absolute certainty into which substance has resolved itself is the absolute untruth that collapses into itself; it is the absolute self-consciousness into which consciousness sinks."

"Absolute certainty of oneself is therefore immediately transformed for it as consciousness into a dying echo, into the objectivity of its being-for-itself; but the world thus created is its discourse, which it has also heard immediately and whose echo only returns to it."

This lack of mediation is what makes this last figure the **poorest**, a simple movement of disappearance and absolute untruth (the closer one gets to the truth, the more one can be in error, the error here consisting in the hastiness to believe that everything is won in advance without having to do anything!).

"She lacks the strength to alienate herself, the strength to make herself a thing and to bear being. Consciousness lives in the anguish of defiling the splendor of its interiority through action... Its operation is a nostalgic aspiration that only loses itself by becoming an object without essence, and beyond this loss, falling back on itself, it finds only loss; - in the transparent purity of its moments it becomes an unhappy beautiful soul, as it is called, its light gradually extinguishes itself, and it vanishes like a formless vapor dissolving into the air."

c) The Great Forgiveness (final reconciliation)

The world of the beautiful soul is not lasting; it is an evanescent world that fades and disappears. Moral judgment harshly **condemns** this passivity and inconsistency. A good conscience was only valid in and through action. The beautiful soul wanted to be universal, abolishing, without doing anything, all distinctions between the universal and the singular. Now, as a particular form of knowledge, singular consciousness once again opposes other singular consciousnesses,



which it judges morally, seeing their true motives and denouncing their pretences. "Duty is only in words, and its value is that of being for another." What was pure interiority is unmasked as hypocrisy and contempt for others.

But this moral judgment itself is denounced as passivity, inaction, pure **denigration**, unable to prevent its own judgment from condemning itself in turn, thus equating itself with those it condemns.

"It is hypocrisy that wants us to take the act of judging as an effective operation." However, if this critical judgment "explains with its intention different from the action itself and sheds light on its selfish motives. Similarly, every action can be considered in terms of its conformity to duty, just as it can be considered in terms of its particularity... Is the action crowned with glory? This judgment knows this interior as a search for glory... No action can escape such a judgment, for duty for duty's sake, this pure goal, is what is without effectiveness; it has its effectiveness in the operation of individuality, and action thus has the side of particularity in it. There are no heroes for their valets; but not because the hero is not a hero, but because the valet is the valet, with whom the hero has no business as a hero.

Moral judgment, as the valet of morality, thus introduces **contradiction** and reflection into moral action. But by becoming aware of its own hypocrisy, moral judgment knows itself to be the equal of the one it criticizes and expects a similar confession and recognition from the other. Ultimately, it is moral judgment that is condemned for its harshness and denies itself as judgment of the other ("Judge not, and you will not be judged"):

Indeed, moral judgment first takes "the obstinate attitude of a character always equal to itself and the silence that withdraws into itself and refuses to lower itself to another... The judging conscience thus shows itself to be the conscience abandoned by the spirit and denying the spirit."

"The beautiful soul, therefore, as the consciousness of this contradiction in its irreconcilable immediacy, is dislocated to the point of madness and dissipates in nostalgic consumption."

Fortunately, "The wounds of the mind heal without leaving scars." Or rather, they are necessary moments that will be preserved, but they are only moments that must be overcome. "The Self that performs the action is only a moment of the whole, just as knowledge, which distinguishes the singular from the universal through judgment." Finally, judgment turns into self-examination and self-criticism, the initial condemnation is transformed into **forgiveness**, finally reaching the absolute spirit, which is reconciliation, mutual recognition, awareness of the relationship between the self and others, of the universal singularity that makes us all brothers (and must lead to the universal but divided state, born of revolution and based on the right to defense, mutual assistance, and human rights).

"The forgiveness that such consciousness offers to the first consciousness is the renunciation of oneself, of one's ineffective essence... The word of reconciliation is the spirit that contemplates pure self-knowledge as universal essence in its opposite, in pure self-knowledge as singularity that is absolutely within oneself—a mutual recognition that is the absolute spirit."

"The Yes of reconciliation, in which the two Selves withdraw from their opposed being-there, is the being-there of the Self extended to duality."

- The end of knowledge



For Hegel, this is pretty much the last word, what Kojève somewhat hastily called "the end of history." However, we seem to be quite far from politics and rather in the realm of morality or **religion**, with forgiveness and final reconciliation consisting of recognizing that we are all sinners, guilty, inadequate, even hypocritical, but always with mitigating circumstances (and so, contrary to Kojève, we can say that it is the renunciation of wisdom and the admission of its limits, but without renouncing the greatness of the spirit, the presence of desire and dissatisfaction, the presence of the infinite at the heart of our finitude, at the heart of decay itself. It is not even the wisdom of no longer claiming wisdom, because that is not renouncing it; it is rather the "mourning of mourning," as Catherine Malabou says). The political challenge can only lie in moving away from religion and an idealized vision of ourselves, toward a true reflexive autonomy that is conscious of its collective nature, of our responsibility, a transition from history as something endured to history as something conceived, to an active and ambitious but prudent and charitable politics, a true revolution of love, the realization of the universal in its concrete singularity "extended to duality."

It should be noted that the chapter following this historical journey is a return to the history of religions, where the unity of self-consciousness is objectified in successive religions (natural, aesthetic, revealed) where it becomes aware of itself in an idealized representation. But this unity projected into the hereafter must still deny itself as religion and as transcendent reality in order to finally abolish the separation of the sacred in the other world and bring Heaven back to Earth (realize the Christian religion). It is the "understood religion" that Hegel calls **Absolute Knowledge**, which is knowledge about knowledge, the knowledge that all knowledge is the knowledge of a subject (the product of the interaction of the Self with the non-Self, according to Fichte), and therefore the knowledge that there is no omniscient God, that all knowledge results from learning and can be mistaken (Hegel constantly insists that we cannot know everything). "Hegel's philosophy of the absolute is also knowledge of its own relativity" (B. Bourgeois). Absolute knowledge is thought thinking itself as thought (of a subject); it is the reflexivity of self-consciousness. It is therefore a question of reappropriating our own operation, which turned against us and opposed us in its objectivity. Absolute knowledge completes the succession of figures of self-consciousness through the consciousness of the unity of its moments as a process by which self-consciousness alienates itself in the other in order to return to itself; and thus returns to collective action after having strayed into religion.

This is neither the end of religion, nor the end of history or science, but simply the affirmation that it is our own work and the affirmation of our freedom. Is it only the end of illusions, perhaps, and of the belief in life after death (accepting that we are mortal)? There is still an afterlife, however: our responsibility to future generations, the world to come, and the realization of our projects (our projection into the future). Hegel never completely abandoned religion, whose spiritual truth (human freedom and dignity) and unifying character he was keen to preserve, but what he defended was a "humanized" religion, a simple **mediation** between science and politics, in other words a unified, popularized, and controlled version of the specialized sciences, the practical (ethical) translation of theoretical knowledge, an infinite process, knowing itself as such, where the universal is linked to singularity.

"It is I who am this I and not another, and who at the same time am also immediately mediated or am I suppressed and universal... It is indeed the spirit that runs through itself... Science does not manifest itself until the spirit has attained this self-consciousness... Time is the pure external Self... time therefore manifests itself as the destiny and necessity of the spirit that is not yet complete within itself."

Gentlemen!

*We are living in an important era, in a state of ferment, in which the Spirit has taken a leap forward, has surpassed its previous concrete form and is acquiring a new one. The whole mass of ideas and concepts that have prevailed until now, the very bonds of the world, are dissolving and collapsing into themselves like a dream vision. A new emergence of the Spirit is preparing itself; it is philosophy that must first greet its appearance and recognize it, while others, in impotent resistance, remain stuck in the past, and the majority constitute its emergence en masse, but still unconsciously.
(Lectures at Jena, 1806)*