

Abstract of Doctoral Dissertation

Title: Stripping Thinking:
Georges Bataille and the Eroticism of Thought

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In this dissertation, by connecting the issues of knowledge and thought as found in the work of the French author and thinker Georges Bataille with eroticism, I attempt to locate Bataille's thought in the continuous endeavor of philosophy that dates back to ancient Greece.

There has been a tendency to see Bataille's thought as something that rejects intellectual functions and seeks to eradicate knowledge and thought. This is due to one of its keywords being "non-knowledge." Due to this tendency, scholars have understood other keywords, such as "ecstasy" and "excess," as being different from that which is intellectual. In order to bolster their argument for the validity of this reading, they have been apt to both highlight Bataille's criticisms of existing philosophy as well as place too much emphasis on one of his statements in *Method of Meditation* (1947) in which he says that he is not a philosopher but a saint or madman. For this reason, while exerting a great influence on major contemporary French philosophers like Michel Foucault and Jean-Luc Nancy, he has not been located and contextualized within the historical development of mainstream philosophy.

However, in recent years there has been momentum towards recognizing Bataille's philosophical thought thanks to the work of Boyan Manchev and Franco Rella, and therein we find efforts to clearly present him as a philosopher. Based on Bataille's set of lectures and manuscripts from the 1950s on "non-knowledge," we can clearly see that he makes statements regarding his own philosophy as "the unfinished system of non-knowledge", "the philosophy of laughter", seeming to go against his aforementioned claim that he is not a philosopher. Therefore, we cannot say that Bataille is an anti-philosophical thinker, and need to examine the nature of his own philosophical thought as well as his points of (dis)agreement with existing philosophy. Only by doing so will it be possible for us to understand Bataille's relationship to other philosophers.

From such a perspective, in order to make clear the details of the core supporting Bataille's

philosophical thought, I consider the issue of “thought” or “thinking” found therein. I do so because Bataille makes it clear in a 1952 lecture entitled “The Teachings of Death” that “non-knowledge”—a word that is almost a synonym for the thought of himself—is a term that, unlike our impression of the term, means not the rejection of knowledge but a knowledge, or a singular thought/thinking. In other words, the Bataillean thought does not cover issues that are different from knowledge in general but encourages us to consider to the greatest extent possible knowledge by expanding its existing forms. This was “philosophy” for him in a positive sense of the term. Therefore, in this dissertation’s first section “Non-Knowledge and Thought,” I make clear the nature of the keyword “non-knowledge” while comparing it with conceptual knowledge (chapter 1), identify the beginnings of “non-knowledge” in the “base materialism” of his *Documents* period (chapter 2), and closely examine his inseparable relationship with the philosophy of Hegel, by which Bataille was influenced via Kojève (chapter 3), making it clear that “non-knowledge” can be called “stripping thinking” that continuously cast off conceptional understanding, determinate meaning, and identification. Having done so, in the second part “Thought and Eros,” using as a guide his statement in *Method of Meditation* that he thinks like a girl undresses, I consider, while incorporating a literary analysis of his erotic novel *Madame Edwarda*, how the figure of the girl overlaps with his “non-knowledge” thinking (chapter 4). Then, in closing, I make it clear that “non-knowledge” thinking is part of the philosophical endeavor of loving and seeking knowledge. I do this both through Nancy’s understanding of Bataille and Plato’s writing as well as via an examination of the writing of Bataille himself. Based on this, I make it possible that Bataille’s “non-knowledge”, in other words, what we call “stripping thinking,” can be located within the history of philosophy, as well as examine his intellectual intersections with other philosophers, thereby concluding my dissertation (chapter 5).

Through the above, it becomes clear that “non-knowledge” is characterized by dis-possession or de-appropriation and contains within itself momentum by which knowledge continually transcends knowledge itself. Therefore, “non-knowledge” connects not to Eros in the sense of sexual love but philosophical Eros, which is based on excess, transcendent momentum, and insufficiency. In this sense, it is philosophy itself for Bataille. This dissertation, by bringing Bataille’s eroticism of thought into sharp relief, declares none other than a philosophical turn in research on Bataillean thought.