

# On a universal scale: Economy in Bataille's general economy

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## Abstract

This article analyses the general economy of Georges Bataille (1897–1962) in relation to political economy. In the first section I present a critical perspective on economy that is necessary in order to appreciate Bataille's conception of general economy, which is presented in the second section. The general economy is first considered in a macro-perspective, which comprises the whole of the universe, second in a micro-perspective, where the subjective aspect of economy is maintained as non-objectified desire and inner experience. In the third section I turn to the general economy as it was explicitly intended, namely as a political economy. First I argue that the suggestions that Bataille himself presents are apolitical in an ordinary sense of politics, and that this can be shown to be due to some conceptual slides between nature and society and between history and ontology. I then sketch some postmodern attempts to legitimize respectively capitalism and communism, which refer to the general economy, but argue finally that Bataille can escape both, since he maintains the important distinction between need and desire. Although Bataille's conception of economy thus reminds us of aspects often overlooked by economy in an ordinary sense, it also contains some serious aporias, which means that it cannot constitute the theoretical basis of a new general political economy, as Bataille had hoped.

## Keywords

Georges Bataille, capitalism, desire, energy, political economy, postmodernity

In the wake of discussions following the publication of Hardt and Negri's *Empire* in 2000 there has been a remarkable resurgence of interest in the expression 'general economy'. The notion of a general economy can be traced back to, at least, Rousseau's article on economy in the French *Encyclopedia* from 1755. Here it signifies what has later become known as political economy, namely knowledge of the laws necessary to govern

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the household of a state.<sup>1</sup> From this original sense, however, the reference of 'general economy' can be displaced to include almost every aspect of human and social life,<sup>2</sup> and it is well known that the expression has also been discussed in such a much wider sense by Derrida and Baudrillard.<sup>3</sup> Known is also that these discussions draw heavily on the ideas of Georges Bataille,<sup>4</sup> and in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the death of Bataille, this article analyses his notion of general economy.

Bataille's theoretical work was published under the title *La part maudite. Essai de économie générale*,<sup>5</sup> which has adequately been translated into *The Accursed Share. An Essay on General Economy*.<sup>6</sup> The explicit point of departure of Bataille's general economy was political economy,<sup>7</sup> but in spite of this, the notion of economy eventually developed by Bataille is quite far from economy in the ordinary sense. In the light of the discussions just mentioned, this article is therefore dedicated to improve the understanding of the relationship between economy in an ordinary sense and economy in Bataille's much wider sense. The main questions guiding this investigation are thus three, namely what is economy, what does Bataille mean by 'economy', and how can Bataille's understanding of economy contribute to the ordinary understanding of economy?

Let me, however, just say a few words about the textual basis of this investigation. The first part of *The Accursed Share* was published in 1949 with the subtitle *1. La consommation*, i.e. '1. The Consumption'. Work on part two, *Histoire de l'érotisme*, i.e. 'History of the Eroticism', was first dropped in 1951; it was then rewritten in 1954, and eventually given up again the same year.<sup>8</sup> Part three, *La souveraineté*, 'The Sovereignty' was written in the same period, but also given up in 1954.<sup>9</sup> Bataille died in 1962, and the second and third parts did not appear as publications in his lifetime. Thus, for a long time it was common to refer to the only part published, namely the first part, as simply *La part maudite* i.e. *The Accursed Share*.<sup>10</sup> However, since the posthumous reconstruction of parts two and three, on the basis of the original manuscripts, in his collected works in the 1970s,<sup>11</sup> and especially since the publication of all three parts in English in the 1990s, this misunderstanding has been obvious.<sup>12</sup>

What is really important about this story, however, is that the scope of the original project indicates that Bataille had a concept of economy that has a much wider sense than the term economy normally has, and in Bataille's general perspective the latter is simply to be labelled 'restricted economy'.<sup>13</sup> This must be emphasized right from the beginning and kept in mind, especially since in this article the interpretation and analysis will focus mainly on the first part, *The Consumption*. The reason for this is simply that it is in this first part that Bataille most systematically discusses economy in both the ordinary and his own general sense. In spite of what has just been emphasized about the general title as covering all three parts and general economy thus comprising also eroticism and sovereignty, in the following the focus will mainly be on economy as discussed in the first part, *The Consumption*, alias *La part maudite*.

In the first section I sketch some limitations of the basic concepts of economy, with which it is necessary to be acquainted in order to understand Bataille's conception of general economy (1). First, a political critique of the principles of classical political economy and neo-classical economics (A), and then a critique of neoclassical economics for its scientific shortcomings (B). It is these critiques that are radicalized by Bataille's idea of a general economy, and in the second section I present the main theoretical aspects of this idea (2).

First, economy is considered in a macro-perspective, which comprises the whole of the universe (A), second, in a micro-perspective, where the subjective aspect of economy is maintained as non-objectified desire and inner experience (B). The third section analyses Bataille's general economy as it was explicitly intended, namely as a political economy (3). First I argue that the suggestions that Bataille himself presents are apolitical in an ordinary sense of politics (A), and that this can be shown to be due to some conceptual slides between nature and society and between history and ontology, which are symptomatic for Bataille's unclarified relation to politics (B). I then compare Bataille's general economy to postmodern attempts to legitimize respectively capitalism and communism, which both refer to the general economy, but argue that Bataille can escape them, since he maintains the important distinction between need and desire (C). Nevertheless, even though Bataille reveals important aspects of economy, as a kind of political economy, the general economy of *The Accursed Share* must be considered an inconsistent and thus unsuccessful project, and this is probably the reason why he gave it up, although the text was almost complete.<sup>14</sup> As often emphasized, it can be difficult to unite a theoretical point of view with practical intentions, just as it is difficult to overcome the abyss between the subjective perspective and the objective, but precisely because of this, as a final remark I find it worth maintaining that practically we nevertheless overcome these theoretical contradictions every day (D).

## I The limitations of economy

The ordinary use of the word 'economy' is ambiguous in a way that one has to explicate, but also to accept. The word 'economy' can thus signify both a real part of the empirical world, i.e. an object or a case, and the field of studies, which is directed towards such empirical matters.<sup>15</sup> Economy as a discipline can therefore be said to deal with economy as its object matter,<sup>16</sup> and economy typically does so in the sense that its aim is practical, namely to govern the economy. In more specialized contexts the latter sense is often labelled 'economics',<sup>17</sup> but that has not ruled out the ambiguity completely.<sup>18</sup> Common for both of the senses mentioned is the reference to the resources that human beings need to maintain and live their lives. In a modern society one can thus say that economy as a practical discipline plays a crucial role in the way economy as object matter develops. The ambiguity in the use of the word 'economy' thus reminds us, first, that economy as matter signifies the procurement, creation, distribution, circulation and finally the consumption or disappearance of the resources necessary for human life, second, that the optimal use of these resources demands a systematic investigation of the processes or activities, in which they are used, that is, economy as an empirical, theoretical and practical discipline, and, third, that these two aspects of economy cannot and should not be separated completely. These premises are accepted by ordinary economical thinking and the critique of political economy (A), but they are contested by the sociological critique of neoclassical economy (B), and this is Bataille's point of departure.

### A A political critique of economy

Metaphysically it is clear that nothing can be created out of nothing, that nothing can disappear completely, and that theoretically one can consider economy as a subject

matter in a purely scientific way. In the practical perspective it is equally clear that resources are created, just as some resources are accessible and others are not. Since the demands of human being in principle are almost insatiable, the accessible resources are always limited, and the point of departure for ordinary economical thinking is therefore the so-called 'law of scarcity'.<sup>19</sup> Ordinary economical thinking is rooted in political economy, and basic for this discipline is Aristotle's famous distinction between '*oikonomia*', which signifies the practical skill and know-how demanded to use the resources of a household in the best way possible, and '*chremastitike*', which signifies private business set in motion only in order to be rich, not considering any natural limitations.<sup>20</sup> This distinction between household and business, that is, between reasonable government of common resources and rational calculus of private opportunities of profit, is traditionally considered fundamental for economical thinking.<sup>21</sup> Today, however, it is considered of less importance,<sup>22</sup> probably since the public moral valuation of private business oriented towards profit is much more positive than just a few decades ago.<sup>23</sup>

This change in the relative valuation of the two aspects of economical activity is reflected in the development from early liberalism's classical theory of value as relative to labour, where value signifies utility and is created by the producer, to the neoclassical understanding of value as market price, where value is created by the willingness to pay of every single consumer.<sup>24</sup> This development means that economy from being a matter of what is good for human beings in an objective perspective becomes defined by what can be considered attractive in a subjective perspective, that is, in the perspective of the individual actor. In both cases, however, we are dealing with an activity, which is ruled by a want, and as an overall definition of economy we can therefore very well employ Bataille's definition of economy as the activity of searching for what we are missing.<sup>25</sup>

Such an understanding of economy, however, can be made the reason for various questions. First of all, the *we* employed in the definition is not that simple an entity. A state or a government can be in opposition to its citizens, and, put more generally, every collective unity of people, that is, a society, a group, a family, etc., can be in conflict with other collective entities as well as human individuals. In Adam Smith's classical political economy the conceptual solution for such conflicts was a combination of the famous idea of the invisible hand and a less famous emphasis on the double nature of human beings as both selfish and altruistic.<sup>26</sup> In relation to this solution, however, Karl Marx can be said to remind us that all historical societies so far have been characterized by the contradiction between some very specific groups of people, namely what can be called the classes of society. Classes are defined by their relation to the means of production. A class society is a society where some classes are in possession of an acknowledged right to the property of the means of production,<sup>27</sup> and having such a right means that these classes can prevent other classes from searching for what they are missing. In other words: in a class society some classes can thus exclude other classes from participating sufficiently in the economical activity, and that will eventually mean that people from the latter classes will die.

In the further scientification of economical thinking as it happened in the development of neoclassical economy this societal fact was typically ignored and with it also the issue of political conflict, namely the question about who the *we* of economy really are. Instead the classical liberal trust in the moral sense of human beings and God's foresight

was replaced by a trust in economy as a mechanical equilibrium system, where the stability was secured by an infinity of mutually counteracting bumps or pushes.<sup>28</sup> The point of departure of this neoclassical way of thinking was that the smallest unity in an economical system is the single economical actor. This actor must in an instrumentally rational way calculate the optimal use of resources as well as possibilities of profit, and the criterion of success is the greatest possible wealth. One can consider such an actor as an individual consumer, who rationally optimizes his or her private preferences, and this actor is as an ideal type called 'the economic man' or '*Homo economicus*'.<sup>29</sup>

Such an actor always acts in its own personal interest in the form of instrumentally rational selfish actions, and the measure of such actions is always the goal. A goal can be considered an expected result, a result again as the effect of an activity,<sup>30</sup> and if this effect is considered physically, then it is a bump or a push. Again such a bump is the result of a movement, and this is driven by the kinetic energy in subjective desire. The interesting conceptual slide in this way of thinking is the omission of the human intention passing from goal to result and effect. It is this displacement that makes the objectification of the subjective perspective in neoclassical economy possible, and, with it, that economy as a whole can be considered a mechanical system inherently aiming at equilibrium, which again makes possible the mathematification that today characterizes the established economical science.<sup>31</sup>

By this objectification of individual human action and the whole economical activity of society, however, the established economical science ignores the societal conflicts of classes; one can even, in a political economical perspective, criticize the scientification of neoclassical economy, in practice, to be covering up such political contradictions. The dominating neoclassical micro-economy pretends to be just scientific; in reality, however, it also functions as a political ideology. Neoclassical economy thus is unambiguous in its back-up to the basics of capitalism, namely the acceptance of economic man as the legitimate model for all economic action and thinking, in business as well as in households, both in business economy and political economy.

### ***B A critique of neoclassical economy in terms of science***

Apart from the well-known political critique of neoclassical micro-economy one can, however, also criticize the displacement mentioned above for being insufficient in making economy scientific. Such a critique can be noticed in, for instance, the writings of Émile Durkheim.<sup>32</sup> It is, however, only in the ethnography of Marcel Mauss that it really gets momentum. Mauss studied anthropological narratives and descriptions of exchanges in primitive societies, and in such reports he did not find any markets in the classical economical sense, just as there were no commodities or economic men in the strict sense in the exchanges. According to Mauss, in an empirical scientific perspective it is much more correct to speak of systems for interchange of gifts. Such gifts can be considered complete societal performances, and this means that even though interchanges of gifts of course are economical in the ordinary sense, they also have social, moral and religious significance. *Homo economicus* cannot be encountered in primitive societies, just as one cannot find the moral man of duty or the scientific man. Human actions have always been more than just economically rational, and therefore, according

to Mauss, calculating the intentions of economic man does not seem to be the best point of departure for economy as an empirically based science.<sup>33</sup>

Some of the theoretical problems caused by the neoclassical reductionism were apparently overcome by the Keynesian economy that dominated economical thinking from after the Second World War until the middle of the 1970s. It was considered to be very powerful in terms of empirical explanation, and it could therefore legitimately assert itself scientifically as well as politically.<sup>34</sup> That, however, also meant that it was hit very strongly by the stagflation crisis of the 1970s, since it allegedly could neither account for the crisis nor provide the tools to deal with it.<sup>35</sup> As a replacement of Keynesian economy most economists chose to return to variations of neoclassical micro-economy, and until very recently – i.e. until the financial crisis of 2008 – the model of *Homo economicus* has been the unchallenged point of departure for political thinking and the understanding of society as such. Typically the reconstruction has begun with a focus on individual preferences of one actor, and from considerations concerning the rationality of individual choices one has proceeded to the logic of society as a whole via game theoretical reasoning about interactive choices of a plurality of actors.<sup>36</sup>

There is, however, a rather widespread agreement that micro-economy cannot be said to fulfil the criteria that one would normally demand for something to be called a science. Micro-economy cannot provide precise predictions, which can be verified or falsified,<sup>37</sup> and neither in relation to Kuhn's nor to Lakatos' theories of sciences can it be considered a science.<sup>38</sup> It is therefore reasonable to ask what cognitive status micro-economy then is supposed to have, and here the best bid seems to be that micro-economy simply is a formalization of contract theory,<sup>39</sup> that is, a formalization of the core elements of the political ideology of capitalism. For Mauss it was obvious that even though economic man could not empirically be found in our past and only to a very limited extent in his present, it could very well be our future,<sup>40</sup> and today, after decades of neo-liberal ideological hegemony, there is even more reason to fear such a destiny.

If one prefers a political economy with a scientific basis, then there are still very good reasons to criticize micro-economy with its objectification and mathematification of economical activity presuming the existence of the ideal typical *Homo economicus*. That the choice rationality of *Homo economicus* is a normative ideal and thus not to be found in reality has, for instance, been emphasized by Jon Elster.<sup>41</sup> To be scientific one could equally well – or even with better reasons – investigate the economical interchange empirically as a societal and social whole, as was done by Durkheim and Mauss, and this is the point of departure for Bataille's general economy. Bataille thus shares Mauss' critique of the idea of economic man,<sup>42</sup> and it is within such a scientific perspective that Bataille can notice that economical science has satisfied itself with simply generalizing on the basis of an isolated situation, namely the actions of *Homo economicus*. Such an economic man always directs his actions towards a well-defined goal, and Bataille emphasizes that economical science by idealizing this situation as a general model for economy ignores the energy that makes economic activity possible, and more generally the flow of energy in living matter.<sup>43</sup> And a proper understanding of energy is, as it will be obvious below, of crucial importance to a material conception of economy such as Bataille's.

## 2 Economy in a wider sense

Bataille thus considers ordinary economical thinking, including both political economy and the neoclassical scientification of economy, as an inappropriate reduction, which is wanting both empirically and theoretically. He therefore distinguishes between such a 'restricted economy' and his own 'general economy'. In the latter, resources, production, circulation, growth and value are thought not just in relation to the societal or private economy, but also in relation to the economy of nature and the universe. Taken together this constitutes economy in the very broad sense mentioned in the first section, namely as our search for what we are missing.

When Bataille thus focuses on the resources that are necessary for human life it is then the ontological necessity that becomes important, and within such a theoretical perspective the traditional practical aims of economy are placed in brackets. From the very beginning Bataille's perspective means a displacement, since such a theoretical perspective means that material resources are not just useful things or commodities, but primarily forms of accessible energy: 'Essentially wealth is energy; energy is the basis and measure of the production.'<sup>44</sup> In the first of the following two subsections I sketch the way in which economy according to Bataille must be considered on a universal scale. In this perspective wealth is resources and resources energy. Plants of the fields and animals are energy, which our labour makes disposable. We can devour plants and meat and thus appropriate the energy that we had expended in our labour efforts. Energy is the basis and measure of all production, and the general economy must therefore account for the flow of energy through the universe, through nature and through society (A).

As described above, economy in the ordinary sense is normally about the practical handling of human resources. Here one distinguishes between micro-economy and macro-economy, where the former deals with the perspective of the single economical actor, whereas the latter assumes a management perspective at a larger collective unit, typically the society as a whole. A macro-economy in Bataille's theoretical sense, however, comprises an objectified descriptive account of the energy as such and all of its movements on earth, that is, the flow of energy in everything earthly going from the physics of the earth to the political economy of human society through the biological, the social and the historical, affecting the conscience and therefore ultimately also thought, science and philosophy. Bataille can therefore allow himself to remark that the object of the general economy is not completely separated from its subject,<sup>45</sup> and it is the subjective aspect of the general economy that is analysed in the second subsection. It is shown how Bataille presents a micro-economy that also takes the subjective desire as its point of departure, but that does not objectify it as kinetic energy and instead attempts to preserve the experience of the desire and its objects as inner experiences (B).

### A The flow of energy

In its most basic sense science demands that a phenomenon is shown to be governed by laws. In the first part of *The Accursed Share* Bataille therefore presents those laws, which are valid for the objective basis of the general economy. Natural laws are normally assumed to be universally valid, and this is also the case here. When Bataille speaks

of 'the scale of the universe' it is to be understood quite literally, that is, that the laws of the general economy are also valid for suns, planets and their mutual relations. For the earth as a whole the ultimate source of wealth is the sun, which both is producing and reproducing us, that is, by its surplus makes us alive and thereby calls forth our surplus of living energy. When seen from the earth the radiance of the sun is unilateral in its expenditure; in this radiance energy is expended and lost without any calculation, without any retribution.<sup>46</sup>

Following the principles of the theory of relativity Bataille considers energy as matter in a fluid form. As living organisms on the surface of the earth we are just passages, where the energy surplus of the sun is accumulated and as matter for a time made accessible for earthly growth and activity. Energy is only accessible in this sense, if there can be created a difference between warmth and cold, and this is created by the sun and by the release of accumulated energy. The difference, however, disappears again by the earthly exploitation of the energy, and it is this movement of consumption that Bataille first focuses on. According to the second law of thermodynamics, what happens because of the temperature differences on earth can be considered just one stop in the course of the energy on its way to the infinite tepidness of the universe. According to Bataille, as part of the growth of living matter on earth, we are thus involved in delaying the flow of the energy, but when the limits of growth are reached, all of the non-accumulated energy will be lost into the universe.

The earth receives and accumulates energy received from the sun, and it creates an abundance of more or less accessible forms of energy. The living matter gets its life by consuming energy from this abundance provided by the sun, but this consumption just accumulates more energy. In principle, the living matter will exploit the abundance of energy to extend itself as much as possible,<sup>47</sup> which means that the living matter will accumulate and grow as much as the physical conditions such as space allow. It will use as much energy as possible for growth, and the rest will be lost in the form of warmth. The immediate limit for the growth of an individual is spatially given by other individuals, whereas the absolute limit is the size of the biosphere of the earth. The pressure of life extends life to all parts of accessible space, and that means that if some location experiences a temporary extinction of life – for instance, because of a fire in the forest – then life will start invading again immediately after the fire has been extinguished. The pressure of life is as a steam kettle, always at the edge of exploding.<sup>48</sup> Neither growth nor reproduction were possible did not plants and animals dispose of surplus energy, and it is the pressure of this surplus that ultimately can be expressed as explosive violence. Thus, in the general perspective the economical problem is, always, how life can consume the surplus energy, which is the result of the biological activity supported by the donations of the sun.<sup>49</sup>

The essential pressure of life has carried it beyond various relative limitations. Plants are extreme: They use almost all their energy for growth and reproduction; the functionally necessary energy is insignificant. With the tall trees life has overcome the immediate lack of space at the global surface, but there is nevertheless an absolute spatial limit for the growth of plants. One solution to this problem is the development of higher-order organisms, which accumulate energy by destroying plants without themselves growing to the same extent. The growth of those eating is replacing the growth of those



being eaten, but that also means that the overall growth rate of life is reduced and that a larger part of the energy therefore will be lost. Herbivore animals develop at a slower rate than eatable plants, and for Bataille the consumption by living organisms of living matter is therefore clearly a lavish use of energy. Herbivore animals find energy reserves in plants, carnivore animals in herbivores, and the nutrition is first used for growth, then for activity, and then for sexual reproduction.

The extravagant development of colours and forms in the life of plants and animals, the invasion of space by insects and birds, and not least the development of carnivores, all contribute to the dissipation of energy.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless the sun and the biological processes of life always produce a surplus in the individual organism as well as in life as a whole. For Bataille the decisively new thing about the human being is that it is the answer to the surplus problem of life in general.<sup>51</sup> The human being is part of this life, including its labour and technique, but while the essence of life is to accumulate energy and thus produce an even greater surplus, the essential for the human way of being is to consume, that is, to liberate the energy of the universe for its final loss. By its very activities the human being liberates much more energy than it can accumulate by itself. As an organism the human being is in itself a luxury, that is, an extravagantly complicated and – in relation to the continued existence of life – completely superfluous result of life's own surplus energy. And on top of this the human being has also the special ability to make the energy accumulated on earth, i.e. wood, coal, oil, water and wind, accessible to human use and thereby increase its own wealth of resources.<sup>52</sup>

When the human being arrived at earth the space was already filled with life, and it was therefore necessary to find new means to make room for another organism. The solution became the specifically human way of organizing and consciously exploiting dead matter, and Bataille can therefore consider labour and technique as a modality of the extension of life. Energy resources are transformed through human beings and their animals to substances of nutrition, and the technical know-how is constantly being increased; but every new technique has a double effect in relation to the human being and the human society as living unities: a new technique consumes an important part of the surplus energy of living nature, but through this consumption an even bigger amount of accessible energy is provided. The development of the means of production has made possible an extension of the elementary movement of growth beyond its former limitations. This development can be said to have strengthened the living matter with 'annex apparatuses', composed by immense amounts of dead and thereby inert matter, and by doing this it has increased the energy resources that we have at our disposal.

According to Bataille capitalist accumulation inhibited the luxurious expenditure of feudalism, but the Second World War marked the provisional limit of the capitalist development of the means of production. Surplus leads to an increase of the means of production, which leads to further growth and even more surplus; but for every living system there is a final limit for growth in relation to the surroundings. War is an example that shows how the constant accumulation of energy under capitalism created a pressure, which finally exploded in the biggest orgy of destruction in human history. The pressure of the excess energy, however, was also relieved in a more peaceful way, namely by the general rise in the standard of living, which took place during the war. More and more people became employed in the service sector, the salaries were raised and the working hours were shortened.<sup>53</sup>

For Bataille the still lesser demand for labour manifests itself by unemployment in capitalist societies. This indicates that to use the excess energy it is no longer sufficient to invest energy in producing more equipment and increasing the production in general. The idleness of unemployment, however, only represents a passive solution to the surplus problem, and Bataille wants to argue that this kind of crisis will be worsened to the degree that the human being distances itself from active solutions. Luxury represents such an active solution; it is considered an evil only because economy in the ordinary sense assumes the universal validity of the law of scarcity and thus considers the world as constituted by poverty and in need of productive labour. For Bataille the problem is quite the opposite; the world is sick of wealth, and the apparent scarcity is only a sign of the misuse of energy.<sup>54</sup> As Bataille sums up:

The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if its excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically.<sup>55</sup>

Bataille's macro-perspective on economy thus leads to a theoretical account of the objective basis of economical activity in the flow of energy in earthly life. This account is based on what today can be considered general knowledge stemming from physics, chemistry and biology, and as such it is in a contemporary ecological perspective quite uncontroversial.<sup>56</sup> In relation to economy, however, it is still controversial. As a science neoclassical economy objectified human desire as energy, and that made it possible to use the mechanics of classical physics as a model for further scientific development.<sup>57</sup> The reason why Bataille's general macro-perspective is still interesting today is that economy as a science has not changed that much since then, and to the extent it has, it has actually become even more objectifying since the 1970s, as it was indicated above in the first section. That there are limits to growth, materially as well as economically, was already indicated in the same decade by the Club of Rome, and that animated a heated debate in the global intellectual public.<sup>58</sup> But apparently that did not affect mainstream economics. Only relatively few contemporary economists have attempted systematically to incorporate reflections on externalities such as the objective biological conditions of economical activity in economy proper, and even fewer have ventured into the development of something that could be called bio-economy or ecological economy.<sup>59</sup> As macro-economy Bataille's general economy thus still has something to tell economy in the ordinary sense, and this is also the case if one considers his micro-perspective.

### ***B Desire and inner experience***

According to Bataille economy can thus be considered as our search for what we are missing. In a practical perspective we focus on the *we*, as we did in the first section. In a theoretical perspective, however, this definition makes it relevant to ask more

closely about the *what*, e.g. whether we always know *what* we are missing, or *what* the relationship is between the *what* that we are searching for, and the *what* that we are missing. Humanity as a whole can thus be seen as wanting something, which no specific human beings or groups are actually looking for, since nobody knows about this want. If we consider the flow of energy through human beings, then our objective interests as living human beings in a society often are in contradiction with our individual, subjective desire. We are not always conscious about our objective needs, neither is the desire always clear and unambiguous, and on the unconscious level it can even be hard to distinguish between needs and desire. In economical contexts, however, one has typically been content with distinguishing between objective needs, which can be conscious and unconscious, and then subjective desire, which is always conscious and can be coincidental with those objective needs, be they conscious or unconscious.

In ordinary economical thinking one normally chooses to regard this potential contradiction as part of the political issue concerning the distribution of power and wealth mentioned above. As a collective unit a society can thus be said to have objective needs, which can be expressed as its preferences, and these preferences must then in a democratic society be made reconcilable with the subjective desires of the citizens, which, however, are also expressed as their desires as a whole. The idea is thus that the individual preferences of the citizens can be aggregated into a sum, which then expresses the united preferences of the society. The principles behind this construction, however, have been shown to be, if not contradictory, then at least deeply problematic.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, if the conscious subjective preference of the single individual human being not necessarily expresses its objective needs, and that neither needs nor desire can be expressed adequately as preferences, then the theoretical problem becomes even greater. In short: if desire does not reflect need and none of them reflects preferences, then how do we know *what* we ourselves are missing?

For Bataille the opposition between need and desire is not a difference, which will disappear as a result of, for instance, enlightenment, scientific investigations, better technique, or more democracy. This opposition is simply an essential trait of being human. Desire thus does not direct itself towards the same objects as needs. The point of departure for Bataille in this analysis is the Marxist critique of capitalist society of his contemporaries, which emphasized how capitalism reifies the human being by transforming human workforce to just a commodity.<sup>61</sup> For Bataille this critique is radicalized by Friedrich Nietzsche, who considers human degradation as inherent in the transformation of human activity to goal-orientated work. Simply by working you make yourself a tool for the survival of yourself or others, and you thereby reduce yourself to a slave.<sup>62</sup> The Marxist critique of capitalism as a historical formation to be overcome by history is therefore radicalized to a general critique of civilization, which is directed towards the society as such,<sup>63</sup> although Bataille still focuses on the modern industrial society.<sup>64</sup>

In the general economy Bataille wants to connect the objectively given material aspects of economical activity with the subjectively given inner life, that is, he also wants to understand energy in the subjectively given form, namely as the inner experience of desire. That means that for the general economy 'a human sacrifice, the construction of a church or the gift of a jewel is no less interesting than the sale of wheat'.<sup>65</sup> The character of desire means for Bataille that if economy is about what we are missing, then economy

cannot consist only in production and circulation of things, just as the economical problems cannot be considered only theoretical or technical problems. Ordinary economical thinking can consider human actions as commodities, that is, as things, and it is precisely by this reduction of human life that ordinary economy according to Bataille is 'restricted'. For Bataille it is only by introducing the subjective desire as such in economical thinking that it can be made clear that the human being cannot be objectified as a thing. For a human being itself life is not about being a thing, but about being sovereign, i.e. being free in the moment experienced, independent of any task to be completed.<sup>66</sup> There is for Bataille an irreducible and principled opposition between the objective needs of the human being as such and this subjective desire towards being sovereign, and it is only with the introduction of such a desire in economy that one can seriously begin to think of economy as a general economy.

If economy is our search for *what we* are missing, but our subjective desires do not reflect our objective needs, then *we* cannot in principle know *what we* are missing. That means that economy both theoretically and practically must be thought more generally than one ordinarily does. It is not enough to solve the in-itself unsolvable problem of preference aggregation mentioned above. When Bataille speaks of economy he does not just mean something more than and different from both classical political economy and neoclassical economy; he also means something more than what is claimed by the economical sociology and ecological economy mentioned above. Bataille puts the case acutely by saying that we in our economical activity are searching for a good, which in the end must escape us, because the complete satisfaction of the subjective desire, i.e. the sovereign and without any compromise unproductive pleasure, would result in a drainage of all accessible resources and therefore ultimately and quite literally in death. In a certain sense we are very well aware that our desire for sovereignty is self-contradictory, and we can therefore be said subjectively as well as objectively to be separated from this good that we desire, namely by the awareness produced by the inner experience of anxiety for actually having this desire satisfied.

It is because of this dynamical and contradictory structure that Bataille has chosen to call his work on economy *The Accursed Share*.<sup>67</sup> The point is that no matter how far one organizes one's life and doings in a rational, goal-orientated and reasonable way, no matter how much one is objectified, there is always something left, which does not let itself be sublated. That we are going to die, for instance, is an incontestable, objective fact, but still we can never subjectively be reconciled with this fact. As Bataille remarks, we are actually lying to ourselves, when we curse death.<sup>68</sup> Death is objectively part of life, and Bataille's general economy is precisely about those objects of our subjective inner experience, which most clearly signal us that we cannot expect the continuity that religion typically promises us, that is, those objects that show us decay and death, where we would have preferred to see a life continued into eternity. These objects are in a Christian perspective the accursed leftovers of reality, but they are also objects of desire, at one and the same time both attractive and repulsive. The point for Bataille is that, because these objects are perishable and thus only transitory, instead of cursing them, in principle, we could choose to adore and love them for the very same reasons, and as such subjectively reconcile ourselves with the objective flow we are part of,<sup>69</sup> namely the infinite movement of consumption departing from the radiation of energy from the sun.

Bataille's intention with the general economy is thus to reconcile the world of decay with the inner life and subjective experiences of the human being. The perishable world in general he considers materially as the general flow of energy, which constantly demands consumption and loss, and which ultimately will mean the destruction of all the resources we can accumulate. This movement, however, can according to Bataille be described independently of the inner life of the human being,<sup>70</sup> and the general economy can therefore be introduced by an ordinary scientific description of the objective basis of the inner life, such as has been done in the first part of this section. To complete the ambitions behind the general economy, however, it is necessary not just discursively to reconstruct the logic of the inner life, as is done in *History of Eroticism and Sovereignty*. It is also necessary to construct texts that adequately express the genuine inner experiences, and this is what Bataille attempted to do in his aphoristic work, *La summa athéologique, The atheological summa*. This work, however, was never completed either, but it was planned to include, among other texts, *The Inner Experience, Guilty and On Nietzsche*.<sup>71</sup> In this article, however, we stay within the discursive reconstructions of the general economy, as it is laid out in *The Accursed Share*.<sup>72</sup>

What is important then to Bataille, is that there is always a surplus of energy, and that economy, understood as our search for what we are missing, is in itself an activity supported by this surplus. Only from a restricted point of view can there be necessity and scarcity, and it is therefore an inadmissible reduction, when the restricted economy considers human beings as isolated beings constantly fighting against each other over resources. According to Bataille one can consider the general movement of filtering the energy through life as animating the human being with energy, and one can identify the sovereign actions of human beings with this unstoppable flow of energy towards the final loss. Sovereignty is the subjectively given, i.e. the inner experience of desire, which devotes the human being to glorious deeds, which, however, in an objectified and productive perspective can only be considered useless consumption.<sup>73</sup>

It is precisely this idea of an excess of energy in the subjectively given as well the objectively given, which according to Bataille distinguishes general economy from economy in an ordinary sense. The general economy investigates the bubbling and boiling of life, which is caused by the circulation and passage of energy in everything living, i.e. in plants, animals and human beings, including their inner experiences.<sup>74</sup> Human beings must simply be considered as a part of life, i.e. as part of the movement of energy, which leaves the sun and comes down to earth, and in this theoretical perspective everything within the historical and social reality of human beings is just a delay in the flow of the energy. The specifically human way of being, however, also includes something subjectively given, namely lived inner experiences of the individuals, and it is in these inner experiences that some objects can be presented as cursed or damned. Therefore the title *The Accursed Share*.

### 3 An unpractical political economy

The theoretical-empirical perspective on economy makes it possible for Bataille to see donations of gifts and squandering with excess resources where ordinary economists see scarcity and barter between instrumentally rational egoists. In a political economy,

however, theoretical analyses must be followed up by practical recommendations, and this is also the case in Bataille's general economy. As mentioned in the introduction, Bataille considered *The Accursed Share* as a work about political economy, i.e. as a piece of practically orientated macro-economical thinking, and the theoretical analysis of the general economy must therefore be able to give reasons for a specifically political organization of the economy. His general recommendations about getting rid of the problematic surplus by giving gifts actually give him reasons to make some apparently very explicit political statements on the global scale, but since he does not relate to anything less than the world economy, and since he is not concerned with justice, his recommendations are beyond what would normally be called the political sphere (A).

To this disappointment must be added, I will argue, that the whole idea of the general economy is based on some very problematic conceptual slides between the natural and the societal level and between what is ontologically necessary and what is merely historical. By his way of conceptualizing human reality Bataille tends to disregard what is specifically political in this reality, and because of this he also seems to give up on having ideals concerning the government of society (B). And even worse, apparently the actual political economy, which is best supported by the general economy, is the kind of laissez-faire liberalist economy recommended by the modern inheritors of neoclassical economy, namely the postmodern neo-liberals. However, it can be argued that Bataille's general economy does not in the end back up a globalized capitalist economy, since it maintains the fundamental distinction between needs and desire, which will always imply a critique of capitalism (C). The attempt to overcome conceptually this opposition, together with the contradictions between theory and practice, as well as the objective and the subjective, is a philosophical challenge that makes the general economy an impressive idea of dialectical thought, but in all likelihood also an almost impossible practical political project (D).

### *A The ontological necessity of the gift*

In the global macro-perspective the economical activity of the human being is driven by nature's movement of consumption. The sun creates an excess of energy, which is accumulated in the earth itself, and life's ordinary growth on earth accumulates even more energy. Until now we have lived well without knowing the laws and principles governing this movement, and according to Bataille this ignorance has not affected the movement as such. The point for Bataille, however, is that he does not believe it is possible in the long run to maintain a conflict between the movements of the universe and those of human beings. The reason for our failure in the solutions of our immediate problems is allegedly this basic ignorance and the resulting lack of reconciliation, and if the human accumulation is not reconciled with energy's movement of consumption, the result will be a catastrophe.

The general economy makes plain that the energy must be lost in the end without any return, whether we want it or not. The political point for Bataille is that we can decide whether this will happen with or without our voluntary consent. We can decide whether we want to give gifts or not, that is, whether the loss is going to happen in an honourable way, or it will happen in a catastrophic way. It is up to us to decide if human beings in

their actions should demonstrates their desire to be sovereign, i.e. demonstrating themselves as being animated by the movement of consumption, or if we should simply wait for the movement to cause a societal explosion in the form of a war.<sup>75</sup> According to Bataille we can in a decisive moment choose if we want to let our actions be governed by the laws of the universe or not, but only for a while; if we do not choose to act in the right way, the consequences in the long run will be disastrous. The steam in the kettle will always get out.

A practical perspective is, as mentioned above in the first section, always limited. The limitation, however, does not have to restrict itself to a single household or an organization, a city-state or a nation; it can also be limited in the ambitious way that Bataille limits the general economy, namely to humanity as a whole, i.e. as the unity of all specifically human inhabitants of the surface of the earth. If the general economy is to be understood as a political economy, then one must understand the world population as one big household to be ruled by a world government, and actually Bataille was involved in the public discussion concerning such a government just after the Second World War.<sup>76</sup> No matter the form of political rule, the general economy tells us that war can only be prevented, if the richer countries donate their surplus to the poor countries. In pre-industrialized societies the surplus is used for festivals and useless monuments like, for instance, pyramids and cathedrals. Modern societies have used the surplus on providing welfare, which makes life easier, and increasing the relative amount of time for leisure. That, however, has not been sufficient to use the excess. In the 20th century the greatest part of the excess has been left to the kind of loss that takes place in wars, and they have grown to catastrophic proportions. For Bataille it is the recognition of this fact that must imply a Copernican turn of the economy, that is, a transformation of the restricted economy into a general economy. The global economical development demands that the United States disregard profit in some parts of its economic activities and donates commodities without return;<sup>77</sup> the economy of the United States is simply – in the eyes of Bataille in 1949 – the most explosive living mass that has been seen in history.<sup>78</sup>

With such an economical analysis Bataille can thus be quite satisfied with the political development in those years. The establishment of the United Nations was at that time by many considered a step towards a world government,<sup>79</sup> and the United States actually organized its global economical politics in a way that could be considered consistent with Bataille's recommendations. This was the time when the United States – after the summit in 1944 at Bretton Woods – was one of the major driving forces behind the establishment of global economical institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to which it also contributed the main part of the financial basis, just as it committed itself to the large-scale political-economical schemes such as the Marshall Plan and the Truman doctrine. Considered as a whole, Bataille regards this development as revolutionary since it renounces 'the rule that capitalism is based on',<sup>80</sup> namely profit; what happens is accordingly that commodities are donated without any compensation.

The goal was obviously the revitalization of the global economy, which was supposed to be in the objective interest of every single individual, but because of the uncertainty of the actual outcome of these political initiatives, Bataille can emphasize that the plans contained a large element of gambling.<sup>81</sup> Bataille also finds it remarkable that we have to do with collective yields, which are meant to be answers to collective needs, just as the provision of financial credit is transformed from a business into a societal function.<sup>82</sup>

Considered as a whole Bataille finds it substantiated that the world was dealing with a negation of the basic principle of capitalism, that is, of the idea of the isolated egoistically instrumentally rational calculus of private profit, and that this negation points in the direction of a totally different principle, namely the communist principle, from everybody according to their means, to everybody according to their needs.

The aid of the United States to Europe after the Second World War thus for Bataille becomes an illustration of the general point, namely that it is necessary to expend. The assumption of the instrumental egoism of 'economic man' can neither in theory nor in practice be the basis of political-economical interventions on a global scale. Bataille nevertheless considers the United States an almost classical or even ideal typical capitalist society, and he therefore asks, how it was possible to gather political support for financing such general global schemes, and on these premises the answer can only be: the fear of the Soviet Union. Bataille thus sees perfectly clearly that the global economical interventions of the United States could be regarded as a grand-scale economic warfare against the Soviet Union, and he emphasizes that the politics of the communists is a crucial factor in the development of world economy. It was the pressure from the communists that made it necessary to conduct the kind of politics that raised the standard of living in the western world and thus necessitated a fundamental change in economy.

Bataille stresses that this kind of welfare politics catches the United States in the conflict between defending the ideal of free enterprise and arguing for the necessities of the state. The very tension between communism and capitalism, i.e. what became known as the 'cold war', results in an economical development of the same kind as what was the result of the two world wars, namely freedom of spirit, relaxed relations between human beings, and the development of state enterprises and public services. The result as a whole will, according to Bataille – and we are still in 1949 – be a 'dynamic peace', which basically will be maintained by the threat of war and the continued armament in both camps.<sup>83</sup> In spite of this material basis it will primarily express itself as a competition between types of economical organization,<sup>84</sup> i.e. between the constant primitive accumulation in the communist world and the reluctant accumulation in the modern bourgeois world.<sup>85</sup>

Bataille thus puts his finger on the basic tensions, which are found in the political economy after the Second World War, and he understands very well that carrying through the Keynesian economical programmes will create the foundation for what we today know as the European welfare societies. In his general economical perspective Bataille is positive towards the redistribution of material resources by the state. It is, however, not primarily because the welfare society would be a more just order of society, but because in such societies there is a better balance between accumulation and expenditure than in the communist societies known then, which were biased towards accumulation. Despite Bataille's strong and consistent political engagement at the left wing,<sup>86</sup> his way of thinking economically must therefore be characterized as almost apolitical, maybe even anti-political,<sup>87</sup> or beyond good and evil, as Nietzsche would have phrased it.

### *B Between sociology and ontology*

It is in this theoretical perspective it is worth taking a closer look at Bataille's general economy. In relation to the critiques of economy by Durkheim, Mauss and Marx, the general



economy represents a crucial displacement, respectively, from the societal level to the natural, and from the historical to the ontological. The ordinary conception of wealth in terms of money, capital and value is extended in the general economy to comprise all resources, which then are interpreted as accumulated energy. Correspondingly a displacement takes place from the ordinary economical talk about exchange of commodities and circulation of goods to Bataille's description of the movement of the energy in the resources, that is, its flow through everything living. It is these displacements from economy to ecology, which makes it problematic to strive for unlimited profit, accumulation and growth in economy, and which thus gives reasons to Bataille's recommendations about expending the excess.

The displacements, however, are not complete. What happens is rather a constant sliding back and forth, which means that Bataille does not distinguish clearly between economical profit in terms of money, surplus production in the form of commodities and excess energy, just as he does not distinguish clearly between gifts, consumption and loss. As Bataille sees it, surplus is in all senses a problem for human life. The continuous displacement back and forth, however, has some problematic consequences. It means, for instance, that it is the truth of the laws for life's movement of consumption, which should be acknowledged and given as reason for actions at the societal level, i.e. not the laws of economy or society as such. Bataille quite clearly means that his analyses of pre-industrial societies such as the Aztecs before the Spanish conquest and Tibet before China's invasion is a sufficient basis for understanding the dynamics of modern industrial societies and giving them political recommendations.<sup>88</sup>

The movement of energy is regarded by Bataille as an 'eternal necessity',<sup>89</sup> but we can nevertheless, as mentioned above, choose how to relate to it, i.e. whether it should be accumulated until the point of exploding, or it should be expended and squandered away before then. Bataille does not, however, go into much detail about who the *we* really are, and as will be clear in the following, it is actually because Bataille does not have any really good idea about how society should be organized politically. When Bataille is moralizing, he appeals to the acknowledgement of the natural ontological necessity, not to the societal or historical necessity. Furthermore the knowledge of this necessity is regarded as motivating in itself, and that means that for the human being, neither its will nor its actions are bound causally by the eternal necessities of nature. Bataille thus maintains a rather traditional liberal concept of freedom, and this concept of freedom also puts itself through in Bataille's general economy.

With regard to economy, Mauss thus considers generous interchange of gifts as the empirically original form of exchange. Interchange of gifts presupposes a higher degree of inequality than both barter and sharing, and the result of the interchange of gifts is typically a reinforcement of the inequality, since the donor in exchange gets higher social status and thereby power, whereas the recipient loses on both scales.<sup>90</sup> Mauss is thinking of himself and is also recognized as a socialist, but he nevertheless thinks that morality and politics should be based upon such a generosity,<sup>91</sup> and this way of thinking practically is taken over by Bataille, again with a clear conscience about what giving gifts presupposes and will imply.<sup>92</sup> By Bataille the structural inequality is even radicalized to the extreme, since he considers the sun as the ultimate donor and thinks of political economy only in the global perspective of a world government; but where Durkheim and Mauss consider society as a whole as analogous to an organism, which demands reasonable,

but also authoritarian, government,<sup>93</sup> Bataille considers sovereignty to be the essence of every single human being and societal life as in itself reifying. Bataille thereby sharpens the Marxist critique of capitalism as well as the classical liberal contradiction between the individual and the society, and even though Bataille does not regard equality as being significant politically, as is the case with traditional liberals and socialists,<sup>94</sup> he clearly distances himself from authority as a legitimate principle of government.<sup>95</sup>

Without acceptance of authority, however, it is not possible to make politics in an ordinary sense, that is, no regulation of social life can take place. The result is that as a political economy on the normal political scale the general economy turns out to be almost equivalent to a very liberal market economy, that is, an economy with few limitations. In the classical liberalism of Adam Smith the societal rule primarily takes place at the individual level, since every human being is gifted with the ability of having moral sympathies. The strong moral appeal of the general economy shows that for Bataille the main instrument for regulation is also the morality of the individual. Apparently he imagines that a fundamental change can be achieved in the moral outlook of every individual, in order for him or her not just to accumulate, but also to consume. As mentioned, the general economy makes Bataille favour the bourgeois society in relation to the communist, not because of justice, but because of the flow of energy. What is really worrying, however, is that the prime examples analysed of societies in ideal balance with regard to the flow of energy, i.e. pre-Columbian societies in America and Tibet before the Chinese invasion, are societies with strongly authoritarian forms of government, and that this does not seem to bother Bataille that much. Even though Bataille considers his general economy as a political economy, apparently he is not worried by the various forms the political government of a society can take, i.e. monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy.

The apolitical perspective of Bataille's general economy seems to go hand in hand with an apolitical understanding of social reality as a whole. Such a way of understanding social reality is characteristic of the early Protestant liberals, namely the idea of a single individual facing the absolute. This absolute is first of all God, then the state, but can eventually also be the market, when it has been hypostasized as a self-sustaining entity, as is the case in neoclassical economy. The ideal typically gained from this way of thinking is freedom in the negative sense of 'freedom from'. What is missing in such an understanding of social reality, is the importance of all the institutions of a modern society, which mediate politically between the absolute and the particular at various levels. Recognizing the value of such intermediary institutions, as was also done by Durkheim,<sup>96</sup> typically spurs ideals about a 'freedom to', namely to participate in the civic rule of society.<sup>97</sup> The point to be made here is that, in spite of the critique levelled against both fascism and communism, Bataille does not stress any ideals about how society should be governed, and the reason is probably that he never got over the qualms of parliamentary democracy so widespread in Europe among both leftist and rightist in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>98</sup>

Bataille's anti-authoritarian traits are also expressed in his indifference to money. Throughout the development of the general economy he thus discusses, sometimes in great detail, resources, things and commodities, just as he deals with sacrifices, gifts,

labour, trade, growth, saving, accumulation and wealth; but when it comes to money, he just states, quite simply and almost in passing, that money is a form of energy.<sup>99</sup> That means, however, that Bataille ignores a basic piece of knowledge gained by the classical political economy, namely that money, as Locke notes, has the special quality that, when recognized as of value, it allows almost unlimited accumulation of wealth. This is not the case with produced goods and not at all with living and thereby perishable resources.<sup>100</sup> It is the very social recognition of the value of money that makes it a specific social resource, where the energy precisely is depending on the actual recognition. Bataille's disregard of money can therefore be interpreted as a disregard of what is specifically capitalist about modern society, since precisely capital could never come into existence without money in this sense.<sup>101</sup>

Bataille clearly sees that desire can be directed towards something perishable, just as it can be directed towards something immaterial like value; but apparently he has not noticed the societal mediation, which bestows on money almost magical value, that is, what Marx calls the fetish character of money.<sup>102</sup> In the natural scientific energy perspective of the general economy this is of course a recognition of a fictional resource, but as Locke clearly sees, the acceptance of this fiction is crucial for the development of social inequality as distinct from the naturally given inequality.<sup>103</sup> Dead matter is socially recognized as valuable, in the form both of houses, money, jewellery and of consumer goods such as washing machines, and social inequality is primarily expressed through the social adaptation, organization and distribution of dead matter. In the general perspective dead matter, however, is not as perishable or explosive as living matter, and there are therefore no urgent practical reasons, nor any ontological necessities with respect to energy, which call upon the one in possession of such an excess to expend it without any retribution.

In the perspective of societal economy the accumulation of wealth can be a problem, since it can be a sign of surplus production and lack of purchasing power. This problem Keynesian economics solved politically by a continuous redistribution of the socially recognized dead values, that is, primarily money. It is, however, not the energy movement of life that necessitates this redistribution, but the social misery that makes the exploited masses boil over in rage against the ruling injustice. One can thus experience a social pressure from parts of society despite the exploitation that actually strips them of their natural living energy. Bataille, however, does not distinguish between use-value and exchange-value, he has no specific concept of plus-value and no systematic concept of capital either. Since he does not share the objectively orientated theory of labour-value of the classical political economy of Locke, Smith and Marx, but takes sides with the neoclassical conception of value as subjectively constituted by desire, it becomes difficult for the general economy to criticize economical inequality at the societal level. As mentioned before, accumulation is for Bataille not primarily a problem in relation to the societal distribution of economical goods; it is mainly a problem because of the pressure generated by the surplus energy. Bataille is not really interested in the distribution of goods at a societal level, nor in the form of government in a society, and I think it therefore quite fair to characterize the general economy as apolitical in the same sense that liberalism can be considered apolitical.<sup>104</sup>

### C Postmodern capitalism and communism

Bataille considers his general economy a political economy, and even though it can be thought of as apolitical, one can of course detect a more or less implicit preference for a kind of economical principle, as I have also argued. The problem is that the kind of economical thinking that actually can get some legitimacy from Bataille's general economy, precisely is a kind of economical thinking that normally is considered very questionable from a left-wing perspective. According to Jean-Joseph Goux the general economy can be considered a precursor of the postmodern way to legitimize capitalism, which is found with the modern neo-conservative ideologist George Gilder. With reference to Mauss Gilder thinks of modern capitalism as an economy of excess, which provides objects for desire, before they are in demand. Desire as such is undetermined and can be formed according to the possibilities for satisfaction, which are offered. That means that it is supply that determines demand, not the other way round.<sup>105</sup> According to Gilder capitalism is irrational as a system, and it is precisely its nucleus of play and gambling, which has secured its ideological success confronted with the rationality of socialism. In postmodern capitalism you do not know which object your desire will be directed towards, and all kinds of satisfaction of desire can be developed into a profit-making industrial production of objects. In such an economic system, however, one cannot distinguish at a fundamental level between necessity and luxury, that is, between needs and desire, such as it has traditionally been the case in political economy. In consumer capitalism objective utility is finally reduced to a contingent choice,<sup>106</sup> a preference, which at the same time expresses subjective needs and desire.

Using this way of thinking in the development of a postmodern ideology for post-bourgeois hedonist consumer capitalism thus places Bataille, who think of himself as a radical leftist, in 'bad company'.<sup>107</sup> The general economy does not seem, as Bataille had hoped, to offer a clear alternative to an in-principle always restricted capitalist economy; quite on the contrary, it actually seems that the principles of general economy precisely are what capitalism needed to expand beyond its own ideological contradictions and limitations, in particular the conflict between neoclassical economy as a mechanical system, including the ideal of *Homo economicus* and then the idea of value as defined by subjective preferences, demand and desire. Economy in Bataille's general sense thus seems to be realized as part of the neo-liberal world order, which is actually not an order at all, and the general economy can therefore be considered the ideological foundation for postmodern desire-capitalism run amok.

If one today, however, declares oneself to be a communist, as do, for instance, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt,<sup>108</sup> then it is precisely this kind of capitalism, which we have to go through in order to achieve the final liberation of humankind. This time, however, the liberation is not thought to be the result of the efforts of the proletariat. For the postmodern communist liberation is brought into being by the class, which now carries on history, that is, the subject of postmodern history or the most recently chosen people, i.e. the so-called 'multitude'. The modern welfare society is a disciplinary society in the sense, which Gilles Deleuze attributes to Michel Foucault,<sup>109</sup> that is, a form of bodily control, which makes possible both modern government and production.<sup>110</sup> Disciplinary society is a factory society, where the postmodern society is characterized

by the aspiration to avoid factory work.<sup>111</sup> Right now we are experiencing the transition from the disciplinary society to the control society, i.e. a transition from discipline as something transcendent to discipline as something immanent,<sup>112</sup> and this is a process, where discipline is internalized as self-discipline and self-management.

The requirement of postmodern capitalism of an ever-increasing demand, however, causes a liberation of desire. The result is, according to Hardt and Negri, the creation of a new, generalized desire. This desire is not directed towards simple satisfaction of needs, but can precisely direct itself to pleasures in all kind of forms, that is, towards luxury, play, game, art, etc., and it is this generalized desire that according to Hardt and Negri is transformed into the desire of the multitude for liberation.<sup>113</sup> Such a desire does not recognize any limitations; it is the desire for life as such, including the desire simply to exist and reproduce.<sup>114</sup> It is with this desire for liberation that the multitude creates the social spaces, where new forms of life and cooperation are developed.<sup>115</sup> It is this general desire for liberation that gives reason to and motivates the modern slogans demanding global citizenship, basic income and the reappropriation of the means for the production and reproduction of life.

Gilder emphasizes the constitutive significance of the undetermined desire for postmodern capitalism, while Hardt and Negri express great confidence in the political possibilities of a generalized desire for a future beyond capitalism. For Bataille, however, it cannot be desire that has the key to a future just society. Bataille would think it quite right to characterize generalized desire as a desire for liberation, but he does not believe in the possibility of a final reconciliation of a multitude constituted by an infinity of individual desires. As mentioned, Bataille emphasizes that desire is directed towards something in reality unachievable, namely sovereignty. Sovereignty is the exact opposite of the servitude and rationality implied in productive labour,<sup>116</sup> and it is therefore only possible as an exception,<sup>117</sup> as a subjective rupture in the objective logic of production and reproduction; as Bataille clearly underlines in his analysis of Stalin's idea of communism, sovereignty can never be the goal of history.<sup>118</sup>

Sovereignty is the manifestation of desire as inner experience, and they are both irreducibly subjective. The general economy will, however, as science and ontology, as philosophical anthropology and thus as metaphysics, emphasize the real ontological necessity of subjective desire for the specifically human way of being. The subjective desire for individual sovereignty cannot be sublated, as puritan idealists have often hoped. Bataille maintains the contradiction between needs and desire and the irreducible reality of both. He does not, though, give ontological primacy to the subjective desire; it is still the satisfaction of needs through the negation of nature by work and morality that civilizes, and in contrast to Gilder, Hardt and Negri Bataille can therefore not condone postmodern consumer capitalism ideologically, neither as a goal in itself, nor as a necessary step towards the coming of a communist society.

### *D In the end: theoretical aporias, but also practical hope*

As should be clear by now, I think Bataille's general economy runs into some serious aporias, when considered as a political economy. Goux thinks that this might be caused by Bataille's historical situation as placed in a period, where capitalism was only about to

develop into its postmodern consumer form.<sup>119</sup> Such an explanation, however, would only make the insufficiency of Bataille's general economy a historical problem, which we supposedly should have overcome by now, and this is clearly not the case. As I hope to have shown beyond any reasonable doubt, the understanding of economy is definitely not something of which there today can be made an academic consensus, actually, quite the contrary after the emergence of the contemporary financial crises.

To sum up Bataille's aporias, one can say that at the ontological level he clearly oscillates between the universal economy of energy and the individual experience of desire, and that in his normative recommendations he oscillates between moral appeals to the individuals and a wish for a world government to control the flow of energy on and in the earth as a whole. Economically Bataille maintain a macro-perspective on such a universal scale that one cannot distinguish clearly between energy and matter, while he in his micro-perspective makes the very rationality of planning and organization suspicious in itself. Where he in the micro-perspective fights against the reductionism and objectification of desire in neoclassical economy, in the macro-perspective he himself reduces everything to energy.

In a practical perspective one can consider the natural foundation of society as consisting of energy in different forms, some of which make energy accessible to human exploitation. In spite of the theory of relativity and our knowledge of the world as one big ecosystem, in a practical perspective it therefore makes good sense to distinguish between dead and living matter and between matter and energy.<sup>120</sup> These distinctions make plain the conflict between on the one side the circulation of money and commodities understood mechanically as dead matter and on the other side living organisms that are transformed quantitatively and qualitatively because of the accumulated energy inside living matter. The traditional models of economical thought are clearly hostile to the self-organizing life of nature,<sup>121</sup> and this is with good reason. Economy in the ordinary sense aims at the optimal management of resources, and management is possible only if one assumes an appropriate degree of standstill and unchangeability; if everything moves and emerges by itself, then conscious management is impossible.

Bataille's theoretical fight to think the unreduced desire and the flow of energy in nature into economy leaves an impression of economy as totally unmanageable and uncontrollable in a practical sense. The anti-authoritarian, theoretical perspective means that the general economy loses its character of political economy and instead transforms itself into a scientific ontology, the alleged necessity of which contributes to legitimate ideologically a total liberation of desire and consumption, which in turn can legitimate a capitalist development without any restrictions. As mentioned, this was clearly not Bataille's intention, but the conceptual logic in this part of his thinking does not leave him much choice. However, in this account of the objective basis for the general economy, as it is presented in the first part of *The Accused Share*, one does not see many signs of the dialectical thinking, which is the foundation of the other two parts,<sup>122</sup> and this tension makes the project as a whole vulnerable to critiques of inconsistency. Actually Bataille himself became aware of the problems with reconciling the wish for political result, which was connected with the account of the objectively given, and the more in-depth reflections concerning the inner subjectively given experiences,<sup>123</sup> and he actually ended up declaring the very attempt to create the connection between the subjective

experiences of eroticism and sovereignty and what is objectively given by the use of resources as deeply problematic.<sup>124</sup>

It is thus as political economy that the general economy turns out to have its greatest limitations. The basic problem is that with Bataille's extended sense of economy it becomes very difficult to recommend a definite economical strategy at the ordinary political level. His main concern is the material conflict between the human being and life as such, between the human expression of desire, which liberates energy for loss, and the accumulation of energy on the earth and in nature in general. The human being has in the historical development of civilization developed a still greater consumption of energy, and it is thus not just capitalism, which is self-destructive, but the very human way of being. What Bataille has pointed out at the individual and the historical level is actually an ontological problem. The full actualization of the potential of human desire in sovereignty can lead only to emptying out all disposable energy resources on earth, and that will mean the end, if not of life as such, then at least of the human way of living. The complete realization of the human potential of civilization liberates the energy piled up in and on the earth to take up again the interrupted flow, which destines energy to a final loss in the tepidness of the universe.

The human being is theoretically a negation of nature, i.e. negation is our specific human way of being. This negation, however, we handle in practice every day. With the kind of ecological awareness that has become common today, we can see quite clearly that it is the human destiny to destroy its own collective natural habitat much more thoroughly than any other species has done in the history of the earth; but it will probably still take a while, until we have completed this self-defeating project, and hopefully we can with the right way of organizing politically the streams of energy and matter postpone it for some generations. We might even – if we are politically wise and very lucky – end up realizing Bataille's hopes of reconciling ourselves as cosmopolitans with nature and life in general and thus through the right kind of world governance fulfil the dreams of contemporary utopian ecologists. There is still a lot to fight for politically and economically, in theory as well as in practice, and the general economy of Bataille reminds us that in contrast to the restricted model of neoclassical economy, developing a political economy today means that we must include the ecology of the earth, the household of society and the business of the individual enterprises. Sometime in the hopefully distant future it might be simply over with, if not the specifically human way of being as such, then at least the very modern way of living that we know from the contemporary western societies, and precisely therefore we must use the time until then in a reasonable way.

## Notes

I owe a lot to people who have commented on and criticized the earlier Danish versions of this article. Let me therefore thank the participants in the study circle under Nordic Summer University, 'Critique and Analysis of Society under Global Capitalism', the reviewers and editors of the Norwegian journal *Agora*, which published the final version in Danish ('I universets målestok. Om økonomi i Batailles generelle økonomi' [On the Scale of the Universe: On Economics in Bataille's General Economy], *Agora* 23(3), (2005): 111–38) and especially Luise Li Langergaard, to whom I owe the present structure.

1. Cf. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Economie ou Œconomie' [Economy or Oeconomy], in M. Diderot (ed.) *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* [The Encyclopedia, or Reasonable Dictionary of the Sciences, the Arts and the Professions], vol. 5 (Paris: 1755), p. 337 f.; available @: <http://www.taieb.net/auteurs/Rousseau/economie.html>
2. Cf., for example, Akseli Virtanen, 'General Economy: The Entrance of Multitude into Production', *Ephemera* 4(3) (2004): 209–32 (pp.212f.).
3. Cf., respectively, Jacques Derrida, 'From Restricted Economy to General Economy', in his *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1978), and Jean Baudrillard, 'When Bataille attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy', in Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (eds.) *Bataille: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
4. Cf., for example, respectively, my 'The Inner Experience of Living Matter: Bataille and Dialectics', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 33(5) (2007): 597–615 (pp.599ff.) (where, however, I have some reservations about Derrida's reading of Bataille), and Paul Hegarty, *Jean Baudrillard: Live Theory* (London: Continuum Press, 2004) (cf. William Pawlett, 'Book Review: Symbolic Exchange and Beyond', *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* 3(1): (2006).
5. Cf. Georges Bataille, *La part maudite. Essai de économie générale. 1. La consommation* [The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy. 1. The Consumption] (hereafter cited as *La consumption*), in Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes* [Complete Works] (hereafter cited as *OC*), vol. VII (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).
6. Cf. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. I (New York: Zone Books, 1991), vols II and III (New York: Zone Books, 1993).
7. Cf. Bataille, *La consumption*, p. 19.
8. Cf. Thadée Klossowski, 'Notes', in *OC*, vol. VII, p. 470 f. It was, however, only given up as part of *The Accursed Share*. In 1957 Bataille published the 1954 version as a book in a single volume under the title *L'érotisme* [The Eroticism] (cf. Francis Marmande, 'Notes', in *OC*, vol. X, p. 689), but without anything mentioned about the original context of the text.
9. Cf. Klossowski, 'Notes', in *OC*, vol. VIII, pp. 523 and 592 f.
10. This misunderstanding was supported by the French new edition of Georges Bataille, *La consumption*, which was simply given the title *La part maudite* [The Accursed Share] (Paris: Minuit, 1967). The text was introduced by Jean Piel, but the introduction did not explain the change of title, nor anything about Bataille's original intentions with the three volumes of *The Accursed Share*. The subsequent German, Spanish and Swedish translations of *La consumption* are based on this edition – as is indicated by the titles given to the translations, respectively *Der verfertete Teil* (in Georges Bataille, *Das theoretische Werk* [The Theoretical Work] (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1975), *La parte maldita* (Barcelona: Icaria, 1987) and *Den fördömda delen* (Stockholm and Stehag: Brutus Östling, 1991) – and since in the Spanish edition they have even translated the introduction by Piel, the misunderstanding has gained a strong international foothold.
11. Cf. Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'érotisme* [History of the Eroticism] and Georges Bataille, *La souveraineté* [The Sovereignty], in *OC*, vol. VIII (1976), pp. 7–165 and 243–56.
12. Nevertheless the English translation, which as mentioned has contributed to placing *La consumption* in its right context, is also referring to the French 1967 edition as the original text (cf. *The Accursed Share*, vol. I, p. 4), that is, neither the original 1949 edition, nor the text as it was published in the collected works in 1976. The misunderstanding can therefore be



- difficult to avoid, even when an effort is made to refer to the original text (cf., for example, Miwon Kwon, 'The Art of Expenditure', in Cai Gou-Qiang, *I Want to Believe*, ed. by Thomas Krens and Alexandra Munroe (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2008), p. 73).
13. Cf. Bataille, *La consumption*, p. 33.
  14. I have discussed this issue in more detail in my Danish mag.art. thesis *Suverænitet* [Sovereignty] (Copenhagen: Filosofisk Institut, 1992), pp. 117–35, but have not published anything about it so far in other languages, and I do not know of other discussions of this issue.
  15. Cf., for example, Carsten Fenger-Grøn and Jens Erik Kristensen, 'Behovet for en kritik af den økonomiske fornuft' [The Need of a Critique of the Economic Reason], in Carsten Fenger-Grøn and Jens Erik Kristensen (eds) *Kritik af den økonomiske fornuft* [Critique of the Economic Reason] (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzel, 2001), p. 20.
  16. Cf., for example, *ibid.*, p. 15.
  17. Cf., for example, Paul A. Samuelson, *Economics*, 10th edn. (Tokyo: McGraw-Hill Kogakusha, 1976), p. 3.
  18. Cf. *ibid.*, where 'economics' is defined as 'political economy'.
  19. Poul Nyboe Andersen, Bjarke Fogh and Poul Winding, *Nationaløkonomi* [National Economy] (Copenhagen: Einar Harcks forlag, 1952), pp. 14 f.
  20. Aristotle, *Politics*, in Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), *Pol.* 1257–8.
  21. Cf., for example, Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (1921–22)* [Economy and Society (1921–22)], 5th edn. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1972), pp. 43–53 (part 1, ch. II, §§ 8, 10 and 11). Cf. also Andersen, Fogh and Winding, *Nationaløkonomi*, p. 13.
  22. Cf., for example, Shaun Hargreaves Heap *et al.*, *The Theory of Choice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 245 ff.
  23. Cf., for example, Fenger-Grøn and Kristensen, 'Behovet for en kritik', pp. 21 ff.
  24. Cf., for example, my 'Value, Business and Globalisation – Sketching a Critical Conceptual Framework', *Journal of Business Ethics* 39 (1-2) (2002): 161–7 (pp. 162 f).
  25. Cf. Georges Bataille, '[Ebauche d'avant propos]' [Sketch to a Preface], in *OC*, vol. VII, p. 472. This note was meant as an addition to the preface in the new edition of *La consumption* as part one of the complete edition of *La part maudite*. As mentioned above in the Introduction, this edition was planned to be published in 1954, but was given up. Nothing indicates, however, that Bataille changed his mind on the subjects analysed here. See also below, note 49, 69, 123 and 124.
  26. Cf., for example, James Ottesen, 'Adam Smith's Marketplace of Morals', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 84(2) (2002): 190–211 (pp. 208 ff.).
  27. Cf. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* [The Capital], vol. 2, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke* [Works] (hereafter cited as *MEW*), vol. 24 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1973), pp. 37 f; cf. also, for example, Anders Lundkvist, *Hoveder og hoveder* [Heads and Heads] (Copenhagen: Frydenlund, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 45 ff.
  28. Cf., for example, Karl-Heinz Brodbeck, *Die fragwürdigen Grundlagen der Ökonomie* [The Questionable Basis of Economy] (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000), pp. 36–58.
  29. Cf., for example, Hargreaves Heap *et al.*, *Theory of Choice*, pp. 62 ff.
  30. A similar displacement can be detected in the development from teleological ethics to consequentialism (cf. for example, my 'Deontology – born and kept in Servitude by Utilitarianism', in *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy*, vol. 43 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2008), pp.

- 69–96 (p. 90) and *Forskning etik konsekvens* [Research, Ethics Consequence] (Copenhagen: Politisk Revy, 2003), pp. 34–42, and both historically and conceptually these displacements are closely interrelated (cf. Elie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1955), pp. 264–81).
31. Cf., for example, J. Steven Winrich, ‘Self-Reference and the Incomplete Structure of Neoclassical Economics’, *Journal of Economic Issues* xvii(4) (1984): 987–1005 (pp. 987 ff.) and Alexander Rosenberg, ‘What is the Cognitive Status of Economic Theory’, in Roger E. Backhouse (ed.) *New Directions in Economic Methodology* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 216–35 (pp. 223 ff.).
  32. Cf. Emile Durkheim, *Ethics and the Sociology of Morals* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993), pp. 60 ff.
  33. Cf. Marcel Mauss, ‘Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l’échange dans les sociétés archaïques’ [Essay on the Gift: Form and Reason in the Exchange of Archaic Societies], in Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie* [Sociology and Anthropology], 3rd edn. (Paris, PUF, 1966), p. 272 (cf. also my ‘Marcel Mauss. Kvinder, høfligheder og talismaner: Gaven som fuldstændig social kendsgerning’ [Marcel Mauss: Women, Courtesies and Talismans], in M. Hviid Jacobsen, M. Carleheden and S. Kristiansen (eds.) *Tradition og fornyelse i sociologien* [Tradition and Innovation in Sociology] (Ålborg: Ålborg Universitetsforlag, 2001), p. 79).
  34. Cf. Samuelson, *Economics*, pp. 205 f.
  35. Cf., for example, *ibid.*, pp. 856 f.
  36. This way of thinking is, for instance, reflected in the structure of the book by Hargreaves Heap *et al.* mentioned above, *The Theory of Choice*.
  37. Cf. Rosenberg, ‘What is the Cognitive Status’, pp. 216 f.
  38. Cf. Daniel M. Hausmann, ‘Kuhn, Lakatos and the Character of Economics’, in Backhouse, *New Directions*, p. 205.
  39. Cf. Rosenberg, ‘What is the Cognitive Status’, pp. 232 f.
  40. Cf. Marcel Mauss, ‘Essai sur le don’, p. 272.
  41. Cf. Jon Elster, *Juicios salomónicos* [Solomonic Judgments] (Barcelona: Gedisa, 1995), p. 11.
  42. Cf. Bataille, *La consumption*, p. 71. For an interesting analysis of the asymmetrical relationship between Bataille and Mauss, see Jean-Christophe Marcel, ‘Bataille and Mauss: a Dialogue of the Deaf?’, *Economy and Society* 32(1) (2003): 141–52.
  43. Cf. Bataille, *La consumption*, pp. 30 f.
  44. Georges Bataille, ‘L’économie à la mesure de l’univers’ [The Economy on the Scale of the Universe], in *OC*, vol. VII, p. 9.
  45. Cf. Bataille, *La consumption*, p. 20.
  46. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 34 f.
  47. Cf. Bataille, ‘L’économie’, p. 11.
  48. Cf. Bataille, *La consumption*, pp. 36 f.
  49. Cf. Bataille, ‘[Ebauche à l’Introduction théorique]’ [Sketch of the Theoretical Introduction], in *OC*, vol. VII, p. 476. This unpublished sketch was meant as an addition to the introduction of the first part of *La part maudite. I. La consumption*’ in the contemplated 1954 edition. See also note 25 above and 124 below.
  50. Cf. Bataille, *La consumption*, pp. 169 f.
  51. Cf. Bataille, ‘L’économie’, p. 14.

52. Cf. Bataille, *La consumation*, pp. 42 f.
53. Cf. *ibid.*.
54. Cf. Bataille, 'L'économie', p. 15.
55. Cf. Bataille, *La consumation*, pp. 29.
56. Cf., for example, Erik Christensen, 'Det økologiske økonomiparadigme' [The Ecological Paradigm of Economy], in Fenger-Grøn and Kristensen, *Kritik*, pp. 175 f. and Jesper Hoffmeyer, *Samfundets naturhistorie* [The Natural History of Society] (Charlottenlund: Rosinante, 1982), pp. 13 f.
57. Cf., for example, Brodbeck, *Grundlagen*, pp. 33–40, who shows how mechanics served as the ideal for classical political economy.
58. Cf. Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows and Jørgen Randers, *Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972). One of the major contributions to the Danish debate was Inger Christensen, Niels I. Meyer and Ole Thyssen (eds.) *Vækst* [Growth] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1979).
59. Cf., for example, Christensen, 'Det økologiske', pp. 175 f.
60. Cf., for example, Hargreaves Heap *et al.*, *Theory of Choice*, pp. 212 ff.
61. A typical example is the analysis by Georg Lukács in *Die Verdinglichung und das Bewußsein des Proletariats* [The Alienation and the Consciousness of the Proletariat]; see Georg Lukács, *Werke* [Works] (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1968), vol. 2, p. 257–397.
62. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* [Beyond Good and Evil], in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke* [Works] (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), vol. II, p. 732.
63. Cf., for example, my 'At tage fat om ondets rod. Batailles radikale civilisationskritik' [To Grab it by the Roots: Bataille's Radical Critique of Civilization], in René Rasmussen and A. Sørensen (eds.) *Excesser – om Georges Bataille* [Excesses – about Georges Bataille] (Århus: Modtryk, 1994), pp. 198 ff.
64. Cf. Bataille, *La consumation*, pp. 123–35.
65. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 19.
66. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 177. See also my 'Om arbejdets patologi – og suverænitets mirakuløse umenneskelighed if. Bataille' [Of the Pathology of Labour – and the Miraculous Inhumanity of Sovereignty according to Bataille], *Psyke og logos* 26(2) (2005): 730–52 (pp. 739 ff.).
67. Cf. Bataille, 'Ebauche d'avant propos', p. 472.
68. Cf. Bataille, *La consumation*, p. 41.
69. Cf. Georges Bataille, 'Le mouvement général de l'ouvrage' [The General Movement of the Work], in *OC*, vol. VIII, p. 535. This unpublished sketch was meant to be the preface to the 1954 edition of the whole of *The Accursed Share*. See also the notes 25 and 123.
70. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 536.
71. Cf. Thadée Klossowski, 'Annexe 6', in *OC*, vol. VI, p. 365. For a recent and very precise reading of Bataille primarily based on these texts, see Bruce Baugh, 'Bataille: Negativity Unemployed', in his *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 71–92.
72. This is also the case with my articles on the subject matters more closely related to volumes two and three of *The Accursed Share*, the above-mentioned 'Inner Experience' and 'Om arbejdets patologi'.
73. Cf. Bataille, *La consumation*, p. 31.

74. Bataille actually reconstructs the sexual reproduction as if – and it is ‘as if’ – even primitive sexed organisms could be attributed inner experiences (cf. Bataille, *L’erotisme*, in *OC*, vol. X, pp. 100 ff.; cf. also my ‘Inner Experience’, pp. 604 f.).
75. Cf. Bataille, *La consumption*, pp. 29 ff.
76. Cf. Bataille, ‘Le gouvernement du monde’ [The Government of the World], in *OC*, vol. XI, pp. 402 ff.
77. Cf. Bataille, *La consumption*, pp. 32 f.
78. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 161. For the same reasons, today Bataille would probably be very preoccupied with the economical development in China.
79. Cf., for example, Hans Kelsen, *The Law of the United Nations* (New York: Praeger, 1950) (cf. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 5 f. and 416).
80. Bataille, *La consumption*, p. 164.
81. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 168.
82. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 167.
83. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 174 ff.
84. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 162.
85. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 148 ff.
86. Bataille has at various occasions been accused of fascism, but this, I have argued, is a totally misleading characterization (cf. my ‘Georges Bataille: At tage ved lære af fascismen: Mellem modstand og analyse’ [Georges Bataille: to Learn from fascism: Between Resistance and Analysis], in Carleheden and Kristiansen (eds.) *Tradition og fornyelse i sociologien*, pp. 255 f.).
87. Cf. Antonio Campillo, *Contra la economía* [Against the Economy] (Granada: Comares, 2001), p. 4.
88. Cf. Bataille, *La consumption*, p. 47.
89. *ibid.*, p. 31.
90. Cf. Mauss, ‘Essai sur le don’, pp. 152 ff.
91. Cf., for example, my ‘Marcel Mauss’, pp. 84 ff.
92. Cf. Bataille, *La consumption*, pp. 73 ff.
93. Cf., for example, my ‘Marcel Mauss’, pp. 84 ff. and my ‘Durkheims ansats til en etik for det moderne samfund – og en metodologisk kritik af den filosofiske etik’ [Durkheim’s Rudiments to an Ethics for the Modern Society – and a Methodological Critique of the Philosophical Ethics], in Anni Greve (ed.) *Sociologien om velfærd – gensyn med Émile Durkheim* [The Sociology of Welfare – Revisiting Emile Durkheim] (Frederiksberg: Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 1998), pp. 79 ff.
94. Cf., for example, my ‘Praktisk filosofi i lyset af Georges Bataille – om lighed, etik og menneskelighed’ [Practical Philosophy in the Light of Georges Bataille], in Carsten Bagge Lausten and Anders Berg-Sørensen (eds) *Den ene, den anden, det tredje. Politisk identitet, andethed og fællesskab i moderne fransk tænkning* [The First, the Second, the Third – Political Identity, Otherness and Community in Modern French Thinking] (Copenhagen: Politisk Revy, 1999), pp. 211 f.
95. Cf. my ‘Georges Bataille: At tage ved lære af fascismen’, pp. 254 ff.
96. Cf., for example, Emile Durkheim, *Leçons de sociologie* [Professional Ethics And Civic Morals] (Paris: PUF, 1997), pp. 99 f. and 129 f.; cf. also Annie Greve, ‘Velfærdsstatens sociologi –

- les corps intermédiaires' [The Sociology of the Welfare State – the Intermediary Bodies], in Greve, *Sociologien om velfærd*, pp. 48 ff.
97. Cf., for example, Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 295.
  98. Cf. my 'Georges Bataille: At tage ved lære af fascismen', pp. 251 ff.
  99. Cf. Bataille, 'L'économie', p. 13.
  100. Cf. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), book II, § 50, pp. 301 f.
  101. Cf. Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. 1, *MEW*, vol. 23 (1975), p. 161.
  102. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 107 f.
  103. Cf. Locke, *Two Treatises*, pp. 301 f.; cf. also my 'Value, Business, and Globalisation', p. 162.
  104. Cf., for example, Vincent Valentin, 'Libéralisme, anarchie et démocratie: perspectives contemporaines' [Liberalism, Anarchy and Democracy: Contemporary Perspectives], in Blaise Bachofen (ed.) *Le libéralisme au miroir du droit. L'État, la personne, la propriété* [Liberalism in the Mirror of Law: the State, the Person, the Property] (Lyons: ENS Editions, 2008), p. 230.
  105. Cf. Jean-Joseph Goux, 'General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism', *Yale French Studies* 78 (1990): 206–24 (pp. 210 ff.).
  106. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 220 f.
  107. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 223 f.
  108. Cf. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 350.
  109. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 419 f.
  110. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 243 f.
  111. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 261 ff. and 274 ff.
  112. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 330 f.
  113. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 250 ff.
  114. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 349.
  115. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 397.
  116. Cf. Bataille, *La souveraineté*, pp. 324 f.
  117. Cf. my 'At tage fat om ondets rod', pp. 191 ff.
  118. Cf. Bataille, *La souveraineté*, p. 322.
  119. Cf., for example, Goux, 'General Economics', p. 224.
  120. Cf., for example, Hoffmeyer, *Samfundets naturhistorie*, p. 14.
  121. Cf. Brodbeck, *Grundlagen*, pp. 125 ff.
  122. Cf., for example, my 'The Inner Experience of Living Matter', pp. 597 ff.
  123. Cf. Bataille, '[Ebauche pour une Introduction générale]', [Sketch for a general introduction] in *OC*, vol. VIII, p. 595. This sketch was meant to be the general introduction to the 1954 edition of the whole of *The Accursed Share*. See also above, note 25 and 69.
  124. Cf. Bataille, '[Corrections et notes pour une réédition de *La Consumption*]' [Corrections and Notes for a New Edition of The Consumption], in *OC*, vol. VII, p. 482. These were corrections for the never realized 1954 edition. See also above, note 25 and 49.