Kant, Blows of Tears*

Tommaso Tuppini

1. Crying as a Sign

Kant lists in his writings different feelings that are able to induce men to tears. Quite possibly, the most significant phenomenology of crying and tears is to be found in the chapter *On Affects by Which Nature Promotes Health Mechanically* from *Anthropology*:

There are some affects by which nature promotes health in a mechanical way, and these include, in particular, laughing and weeping. Anger [*Zorn*] is also a fairly reliable aid to digestion, if one can scold freely (without fear of resistance), and many a housewife has no other emotional exercise than the scolding of her children and servants. Now if the children and servants only submit patiently to it, an agreeable tiredness of the vital force [*Müdigkeit der Lebenskraft*] spreads itself uniformly through her body. [...] Weeping—inhaling with sobs (convulsively) [*convulsivisches Einathmen*], when it is combined with a gush of tears—is likewise one of nature’s provisions for health, because of the soothing effect it has; and a widow who, as we say, refuses to be comforted—that is, will not hear of stopping the flow of tears—is taking care of her health without knowing it or really wanting it.¹

Crying and shedding tears of laughter are basically mechanical means, with which nature provides human beings in order to regain a healthy vital force. This vital force, *Lebenskraft*, is the feeling of life, and life is mind: “the mind [*Gemüt*] for itself is entirely life (the principle of life itself), and hindrances or promotions must be sought outside it, though in the human being himself, hence in combination with his body.”² Vital force is the concept that links inner life of mind with external occurrences, events of nature. Regarded as vital force, the whole of mind is considered

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1 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, translated by Mary J. Gregor (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974), 129–30.

2 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 159.

in itself, as complexity, but linked to the outer world that surrounds it. Environment is never neutral, it always assumes the value of hindrance or facilitation of vital force. Mind considered as vital force is therefore structurally bounded to what is external, to what has a natural, not mental, consistency and to which belongs the power to strengthen or weaken the mind.

Vital force finds itself in a healthy state when it is not stuck in the same condition, but swings back and forth, proceeds through “slight inhibitions” and “slight advancements.”³ Dynamism, ascending and descending the scale of intensity, is synonymous with a healthy state of the vital force. On the other hand, mind left to itself is trapped in an unhealthy condition of steady balance among its constitutive forces. This balance represents a dangerous cramp for the normal, healthy dynamism of mind. The young Kant saw the mind constituted by “real grounds [*Realgründe*]”⁴, that is, forces, drives opposing one another. The vital force is a clutter of forces; the inner forum of mind consists of tensions between these forces. Illness, bodily and mental, represents in itself a spastic condition of such forces, a *Krampf* of their reciprocal tension: “all pathological attacks in which man’s mind can master [...] feelings by sheer steadfast will, as the superior power of a rational animal, are convulsive (cramplike) in nature.”⁵ In order to modify the unhealthy state of mind, nature provides us with such affects, which have the function to bring the previously cramped vital force into motion again, to put the forces of mind, that is, the *Realgründe*, in a healthy state of conflict. Crying with tears is for Kant a typical example of those remedies that nature invented to restore health. A weeping widow is the most suitable figure of the human comedy with which it is easy to represent the situation of a suffering human being. The function of weeping is for Kant twofold, it has indeed an inner effect, but it works also as an exterior sign. Already in this twofold effect tears show an ambiguous character, suspended between inner and outer nature, freedom and nature. Both effects of tears (tears as having an immediate inner effect as well as mediation as an exterior sign) tend to free the mind of the weeper from its cramped com-

3 Kant, 1974: 100.

4 Immanuel Kant, *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy*, in *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, translated by David Waldorf and Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992a), 232.

5 Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, translated by Mary J. Gregor (New York: Abaris, 1979), 205.

plexion, from such situation, which is both, morally unfree and bodily unhealthy. Let's begin our analysis from tears regarded as exterior sign.

In weeping, human beings make show of their weakness, that is, of their dependence on the external world or other human beings for the preservation of their own freedom. The crying human being is a weak being. Tears show the fact that somebody is in need of help. In Kantian understanding such a weak being is generally portrayed as a woman. In the brief description above this woman is specifically a widow. The widow is a human being whose social weakness is due to the fact that she lost the (male) counterpart who used to protect her and guarantee her freedom. Weakness and anger are the two essential emotional states that induce human (female) beings to tears. Weakness and anger form an almost indissoluble conceptual pair in understanding the mediating function of tears. The tearful anger Kant is talking about, mostly in *Anthropology*, is always an anger arising from impotence. It is rage deriving from consciousness about lack of power. Tears are originated by the feeling of impotence, and anger appears more or less as an immediate consequence of such feeling:

Weeping accompanies the melting [*schmelzende*] sensation of impotent anger [*ohnmächtigen Zürnens*] with fate or with other men, when we have suffered an affront from them, and this sensation is chagrin [*Wehmut*].⁶

The sensation of impotence is described as “melting” by Kant. Such melting sensation is indicative of a soul, whose tension of forces is about to lower, whose vital force is hindered. As we previously read, for Kant, “hindrance or furtherance has to be sought outside.” In the case of impotent anger the hindrance factors are fate or other men. Both (fate in its dull imponderability, other men in their free unpredictability) are sign of a possible hindrance of my vital force, for the pragmatic exercise of my spontaneity.

From Kant, only women being aware of their impotence are allowed to cry. Men must not shed tears. “*Der Mann schähmet sich der Thränen. Sie fließen aus dem Bewustseyn seiner Ohnmacht.*”⁷ Men are allowed to let tears come to their eyes, but not to let them fall. Masculine tears exist, but they have to remain invisible. Sobbing and letting tears fall, weeping in a recognizable and visible way, is a matter for women.

⁶ Kant, 1974: 123.

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Reflexionen zu Anthropologie. Kants handschriftlichen Nachlaß*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. XV (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1928), 854.

Why? Because tears are basically a sign of impotence and in Kant's anthropologic frame the characteristic figure of impotence is the woman ("we call feminine ways weakness [*die Weiblichkeiten heißen Schwächen*]"⁸, "*Vom Nahmen Weib, Frauenzimmer. Sie muß schwach sein.*"⁹). But, as we already noticed, it is not a mere passive state of *Wehmut* (sadness, wistfulness or weakness) that induces tears. *Wehmut* in itself is the feeling of one's own impotence in front of something, which is beyond our capability to master (such as fate, bad luck, or offences suffered because of someone who is clearly stronger than us). But *Wehmut* can also be the preliminary state of anger, that is, the desire to overcome the present state of distress: "it is not always sadness [*Wehmut*] that makes women and children weep: anger [*Zorn*] can also reduce them to tears"¹⁰. *Ohnmächtiges Zürnen*, impotent anger, is the most precise expression that explains the state of mind that induces human beings to tears. Kant repeatedly emphasizes the link between tears and impotence and the fact that impotence evokes the emotion of being overcome, which is anger. Therefore, who sheds tears is not just powerless. While weeping, he or, better said, she is in a state of anger and anger in itself represents the regret to not be able to overcome one's own impotence.

Female tears are therefore a sign of awareness regarding one's impotence that can not be overcome without external help. Awareness of impotence to overcome one's impotence, to bring vital force in healthy motion again, doesn't exclude, rather, it requires the ability of someone else to perform it. That's the reason why crying with tears is never a mere passive behavior, but shows an attitude of reaction in dealing with one's own impotence. Thus tears are not just a sign of self-awareness, they also become a sign able to awake awareness (about my own impotence) in my neighbor. Tears communicate one's state of impotence to others. Flowing tears make others aware of the impotence I was previously aware of. Tears have a sign-value, a communicative skill. They represent a call for help addressed to others:

For their feeling of impotence against some evil that arouses a strong affect (whether of anger or of sadness) summons to its aid the external natural signs of it which (by the right of the weaker) then at least disarm a masculine soul. But this expression of frailty [*Zärtlichkeit*], as a feminine weakness, should not move a compassionate *man* to weeping, though it may

8 Kant, 1974: 167.

9 Kant, 1928: 567.

10 Kant, 1974: 130.

well bring tears to his eyes. [...] But if he were not moved at all, he would not show the compassion toward the other sex that his masculinity makes his duty.¹¹

Tears are shed mainly by women in order to call other people to their aid. A widow who lost her man sheds tears to have other men help her. Tears are natural signs of women's real or pretended impotence. Tears and the convulsive breathing that accompanies them are contagious. The communicative, mediating value of tears expresses itself in the first place by soliciting tears from a neighbor: "The sight of a man in a convulsive or epileptic seizure induces similar convulsive moments in the spectator."¹² It is the duty of men to help weaker human beings, that is, women, and to be sensitive to the communicative skills of tears. Women know that very well, therefore they often simulate an impotence that doesn't really exist: "*der Mann hilft aus Großmuth gern den weiblichen Schwächen ab, dies wissen die Weiber auch mehr als zu gut; daher affektieren sie bisweilen Schwächen, wo gar keine sind.*"¹³ In such cases, what we might call *theatrical*, tears are solicited from inside, they originate solely from the subject, not from an external situation that occurred, and are provoked arbitrarily. In front of real or simulated impotence, tears glisten in a generous man's eyes: tears are a sign of his tact, his sensitivity, his potential helpfulness. But tears must only glisten in a man's eye. Shedding tears would be extremely inappropriate for a man, because it would put him on the side of those who can not be helpful, because they need help themselves, also betraying an authentic duty to be active for other people's sake: "for Kant's own version of the Stoic sage has as its enemy not emotion but passive sentimentality. The latter, Kant holds, is a way of being emotional that makes no contribution to outward benefaction or altruistic regard. It is to take part in the suffering of others [...] merely sentimentally or passively. Thus, certain shows of sentiment are more acts of self-indulgence than active interventions on behalf of others."¹⁴

11 Kant, 1974: 130.

12 Kant, 1974: 54.

13 Kant, 1928: 581–82.

14 Nancy Sherman, "Concrete Kantian Respect", in *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol. 15 no. 1 (1998), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 129.

2. Crying For a Miracle

Tears are basically tears from angry grief—they are shed mainly by those (women and, as we will see, children or newborns) who make experience of their own impotence in front of a problem they can not face, an obstacle that occludes the space of their freedom. Tears are the visible signs that help is needed. “*Ohnmächtiger Zorn preßt Thränen aus. In Traurigkeit stellen sie uns als einen Gegenstand der Theilnehmung anderer Vor und zertheilen den Schmerz.*” They represent a call for compassion and sympathy. Tears are communicative and contagious. Therefore they represent an implicit double statement: 1. that I cannot overcome an event contrasting my freedom, and, 2. that someone must exist who can, and I cry for him. By shedding tears the one who is powerless shares the feeling of impotence with another being who is supposed to be able to face the upcoming event. In Kant’s sexist reconstruction: the woman sheds tears in order to obtain help from a grown up man. That’s the reason why the man is not supposed to weep: he should be able to help himself and others. The masculine human being is properly autonomous: he knows the *nomos*, the moral or intellectual rule that masters the matter of the upcoming event. His authentic autonomy prevents him from looking for solidarity outside the range of his own freedom. Nevertheless, he can not be deaf to the call for help from others who are not (yet?) autonomous and free. Tears that glisten without being shed in a man’s eyes are the sign of his sensitivity to the impotence of others (there are tears) and of his own power (tears are not shed, they only glisten).

Being hindered in one’s own freedom means not to experience coincidence between inner and outer freedom. It means the impossibility of being not just practical (i.e. being free, moral, self-determined, which has to be always possible), but pragmatic, that is: acting in a world that often resists against the expressions of our self-determination: “The man whose happiness depends on another man’s choice (no matter how benevolent the other might be) rightly considers himself unfortunate.”¹⁵ Unfortunate is by definition the weeping human being, who solicits by tears the intervention of other beings in order to gain outer freedom: “if one’s options are not at one’s disposal a person can lack sensuous

15 Kant, 1974: 135.

outer freedom. If others determine what our options are, we are not free to go and do as our inclinations propose.”¹⁶

The being that female tears are calling for is nevertheless a being whose inner and outer freedoms have to coincide. The only being able to save, properly said, has to be a being who doesn't know unhappiness and dependence. If this is the state of things, no human being can expect to be saved by another human being. It belongs to all human beings to suffer from the lack of coincidence between inner and outer freedom, that is, to be hindered in the expression of their freedom by fate or other human beings. Impotence is structurally a part of the human finite condition. The call for help that comes from human impotence is a call for power. But only an absolute power, that is, a being whose inner freedom coincides with his outer freedom, can be properly called for help in distress and unhappiness. “Now the idea of a being commanding according to moral-practical laws contains the idea of a *person* having all *power* [in] relation to nature as a sense object”¹⁷, but “a being, which has unrestricted power over nature and freedom under laws of reason, is God.”¹⁸ God, the quintessence of personality, therefore of freedom as self-determination after the fulfillment of the moral law, is the one whom we properly ask for help when we cry.

“The concept of *God* is that of a *person*—hence, that of a being who has rights, but against whom no other possess a right.”¹⁹ It is exactly this lack of symmetry that justifies the fact that tears can be shed in front of God much more than in front of another human being, that is, a finite being. A human being can call another human being for help when he/she suffers. But another human being might himself need help, therefore being unable to offer help to others. There is only one being who never suffers injustice and that is God. God is freedom and absolute expression of this freedom in front of the natural world, which often contradicts our expression of freedom. Crying because of one's impotence is crying for more freedom, for experiencing the coincidence of inner and outer freedom, that is, crying in this world for the advent of God as absolute power. God cannot be impotent in front of nature, or fate, or human beings,

16 Holly L. Wilson, *Kant's Pragmatic Anthropology. Its Origin, Meaning, and Critical Significance* (Albany: SUNY, 2006), 63.

17 Immanuel Kant, *Opus Postumum*, translated by Michael Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 213.

18 Kant, 1993: 200.

19 Kant, 1993: 218.

therefore he is the only being who can properly help or at least can be evoked *a priori* for help. The person who sheds tears is basically always asking for a divine intervention, that is, for a miracle. A miracle happens when the outer world seems to be arranged in an order that supports my inner freedom and offers to it an adequate expression.

An event in the world that does not happen according the order of nature is a miracle. The word *miracle* is supposed to mean an event which does not happen in conformity with recognized nature, although it could be in conformity with a higher order. We are amazed [*wir wundern uns*] only when something is contrary to the cognized order of nature.²⁰

Miracles point at the presence of “God’s hands”²¹ within nature. Human beings ask for miracles when they are hindered in the pragmatic exercise of their freedom. We may define such entity as the God of religion and prayer. Obstacles represented by hostility from other human beings or nature are removed by the God of religion and prayer: “The overthrow of Sennacherib by means of an angel”, or “the passage of the children of Israel through the Red Sea” are the best examples of miracles. To the people of Jerusalem under siege or Jews fleeing from the Egyptian army, nature or other human beings posed obstacles that God removed through mediation of nature. The same outer world, which functions via mechanical criteria and doesn’t have anything to do with human freedom, suddenly seems to support human projects.

One likewise endeavors to explain the passage of the children of Israel through the Red Sea, in that one says: the wind so divested a part of the Red Sea of water that the children of Israel were able to go through. Here the cause lies indeed in nature, but it does not occur according to the order of nature that a wind had to blow then, when a people was oppressed and persecuted by a foreign king; thus a special direction is required here.²²

That makes the miracle, in spite of the rarity of its occurrence (miracles “must be only seldom”²³), an essential modus of being helped, in order to restore the previously menaced outer freedom. Nature and outer world miraculously assume a direction, the same direction of the steps of the fleeing Jews, who are seeking to preserve their freedom from the Egyp-

20 Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, translated by Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 38.

21 Kant, 1997: 39.

22 Kant, 1997: 39.

23 Kant, 1997: 41.

tian menace. If I call for help I am basically calling for a miracle, that is, for the removal of the hindrance that nature or human beings might represent, towards my free action. In the greatest distress I might call for an intervention from the outside over something which I have no control or authority: *nur noch ein Gott kann uns helfen!* This is the same God, for whom there is no difference between inner and outer freedom.

3. Being Moved and Being Unconscious

But if shedding tears and asking God for a miracle is a female business, waiting for miracles is not worthy of a free, autonomous man. Experiencing miracles means to abdicate one's own freedom. We encounter more miracles in life than we might think we do. Or at least, we react in front of worldly events as if they were miracles, yet they are not. In a remarkable passage from his precritical essay *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, Kant mentions the case of a scholar who is put in front of a demonstration of a theorem of mechanics, in which bodies sliding on chords drawn with different inclinations from the highest point of a circle take the same time in order to cover their distances. What to the man of knowledge appears as a theorem doesn't make the same impression on a smart, yet untrained, student.

I once explained this theorem, along with its proof, to an intelligent student. I recall that once he had thoroughly understood all the details, he was as impressed by it as he would have been by a miracle of nature [*Naturwunder*]. One is, indeed, amazed and rightly astonished to find, in such a seemingly straightforward and simple thing as a circle, such wondrous unity of the manifold subject to such fruitful rules. Nor is there a miracle of nature [*Wunder der Natur*] which could, by its beauty and order, give more cause to amazement, unless it did so in virtue of its cause being less apparent, for wonder is a daughter of ignorance [*die Bewunderung eine Tochter der Unwissenheit ist*].²⁴

What is understood in English as “impressed” is in German *gerührt*. Now, *gerührt* means rather “touched” or “moved”. Kant doesn't mention tears here, yet surely an emotional situation is involved. What actually touches the sensitivity of the student? The amazing thing is that “order and har-

24 Immanuel Kant, *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, in *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, translated by David Waldorf and Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992b), 138.

mony, along with such necessary determinations, prevail throughout space, and that concord and unity prevail throughout its immense manifold [*in einem ungeheuren Mannigfaltigen, Zusammenpassung und Einheit herrsche*].”²⁵ The scholar is touched by the uniformity of events occurring in the previously prepared circular space, that is, by the presence of a rule that unifies and frames the manifold of the given space. Or, as Kant says, its monstrous manifold. *Ungeheuer* is actually something that provokes fear and puts into desperation the one who has to face it. The fact that the monstrous manifold of space is dominated (*herrscht*) by a certain unity amazes (*überrascht*, literally: being overrun) and astonishes (*in Bewunderung gesetzt*) the scholar. This intensity of surprise is prerogative of a sensitive, but not well-trained mind. The feeling of a dazzling surprise in front of the development of a theorem of mechanics is only possible for a scholar who doesn’t perceive the events occurring as consequences of a theorem, but as natural events, having an order in themselves, fulfilling the expectations of our rationality, but without any active intervention of our knowledge. An intelligent scholar, indeed. But still just a scholar. In the couple old/young, Kant/scholar only the second party feels emotion in front of the rebirth of a mechanical truth. The reason is that the untrained scholar’s mind is not aware of itself and takes the theorem with its accompanying proof as an event of nature fulfilling our expectations, that is, more or less for a miracle.

If the widow is moved by her own incapacity to overcome practical difficulties, because of lack of spontaneity and strength, and therefore cries, in the case of the student it is surprise that arouses emotion. External obstacles induce the woman who expects something like a miracle, to tears. Tears are shed in front of an obstacle, and its overcoming is imagined as a miracle. In the case of the scholar, the event of being surprised happens in front of a miracle that has not been requested, yet occurs anyway. Miracles—as we already saw—happen when the subject and the world walk in the same direction, when the needs of human spontaneity find fulfillment in the conditions of outer world without having actively taken part in the determination of such conditions. The regularity immediately perceived from bodies sliding on chords drawn within a circular space appears as a natural event that seconds our rational striving for unity, therefore as a miracle.

The student mistakes the theorem for a miracle of nature only because he is not aware his own mind has projected the rational frame of

25 Kant, 1992b: 137.

knowledge on the plan of outer nature, which is in itself meaningless. Such lack of awareness induces the student to take the result of his understanding as an unexplainable givenness. The scholar is touched because he mistakes a product of his mind for nature, inside for outside, rule for miracle. The woman asks for masculine, that is, potentially divine help in order to be delivered from external nature that hinders, she is asking for God's hand. The scholar is surprised and touched by having received such help without even having asked for it. Amazement, *das sich Wundern*, is the emotional sign that points to a miracle. Now, the scholar, *in Bewunderung gesetzt*, is surprised and amazed in front of the dominating uniformity of how bodies slide with regularity within a circular space. Nature in itself, its monstrous manifold, seems able to provide the systematic unity of experience that confers regularity to phenomena, as the waters of the Red Sea were parted by the wind exactly at the moment when the fleeing Jews needed it.

If something is felt as a miracle it means that a danger has to be faced. In fact, a significant danger has been averted from the scholar. What poses a threat to the scholar's freedom? We already named it: the *ungeheueres Mannigfaltige* of space, the monstrous manifold, something that contradicts our rational striving for unity. This character of monstrosity rests on the fact that the multiplicity of space is opposed to the discipline of conceptuality. We are put in front of a panorama of spacial *dissecta membra*. Such dismembered *datum* is the material reality the intelligent scholar has to face, manifold without unity. The theorem of sliding bodies puts us in front of something like a systematic, logical truth: that the monstrous manifold of nature might appear as unified, coherent wholeness. The material manifold is inhabited by the possibility of ideal and of relation, but one doesn't coincide with the other, even if our first tendency is to do like the scholar, that is, to attribute the unity to the spacial manifold itself, to make nature out of mind.

For the young Kant we have to postulate an ultimate position, that is, a God as personality or free being, as the condition of relation, as ground that makes possible those systematic truths, the uniformity of experience which is fully separated from the material content of such experience. "The more unity one finds, the more one uncovers economical laws that govern several different phenomena according to one simple, perfect principle, the more one can be convinced of the necessity of a God."²⁶ The

26 Diane Morgan, *Kant Trouble: The Obscurities of the Enlightened* (London: Routledge, 2000), 126.

presence of God means the necessity of a unifying, systematic principle that makes possible the single regulated experience we perform from time to time. This is not the God of religion and prayer, who miraculously suspends the order of things, the supernatural being whose intervention is “contrary to the cognized order of nature”, as we read before. Now God stands for a figure that summarizes in himself all human spontaneity, the order that our mind puts in the manifold of nature, that in itself doesn’t follow any intellectual regularity: “God and the world. Freedom and nature. [...] There is a God, not a world-soul in nature, but a personal principle of human reason.”²⁷ This is rather the God of philosophy, in front of which it is no use to cry and shed tears. But the student is not aware of the existence of such a God, in the first place because he is not aware of the power of his own mind. Him being touched and amazed is the proof of his ignorance about himself, therefore of the God of philosophy as principle of human reason. The student is basically moved by unconsciousness of intellectual rules that give a structure to reality. Kant doesn’t say if the student’s amazement is accompanied by tears or not, but we might imagine that the student gets emotional without shedding tears and without even letting them glisten in his eyes. Tears belong to a conscious experience. Unconsciousness of one’s own power and faculties rather produces emotion without tears. In Kant, one always knows why he or she is crying, there is nothing like unconscious weeping. Tears are about the awareness of one’s need for help (or readiness to give it, as for the tears just glistening in somebody’s eye). The student doesn’t need to shed tears, because he doesn’t even know he needs to be helped (the help his Kant teacher might give him in order to become fully aware of his determining intellectual power). From his perspective, the manifold of bodies presents itself as already uniform and organized. The being touched of the student has a significantly different meaning than the impotence of crying women, and from sensitivity of the helpful man. Different, yet not totally unrelated. The crying woman is a being hindered in the expression of her inner spontaneity. The helpful man with tears only glistening in his eyes is a being partly affected by unhappiness of the woman, but potentially able to remove the hindrance and to return to the weaker being her negated freedom. The tearless being touched of the student means a radical unconsciousness about one’s own intellectual life, the ignorance of the unity, the regularity that gives shape to the given space: the unity is ignored in his constructive powers and therefore deprived of itself. The student

27 Kant, 1993: 225.

(like the widow) is deprived of his freedom, but not from the outside, rather from inside, from himself, from his unconsciousness of it.

The regularity of how bodies fall on the chords drawn within a circular space is essentially a proof of existing spontaneity as the determining power of the mind. Freedom already corresponds, for the young Kant, to the spontaneity, activity, and personality which are bases for the lawfulness of (moral or intellectual) experience: “*spontaneity* is action which issues from *inner principle*.”²⁸ But also for the Kant of the critical period, beyond any distinction between knowledge and morality, “personality as the unified exercise of freedom is analogous to the unity of apperception itself as the product of the exercise of our cognitive spontaneity, and is maximally pleasing as answering what is our most fundamental need of all, our need for unity itself.”²⁹ The reason why the scholar is touched in front of the sliding bodies is the lack of awareness, that is of apperception, perception of himself and his own power to build concepts. What Kant defines as the ignorance of the student is therefore an ignorance about himself, unconsciousness. The student doesn’t lack understanding skills, because Kant tells us that he is intelligent and apparently gets the whole path of the proof. The scholar does make use of his own understanding. But he doesn’t know he makes use of it. His being touched comes from undergoing an unconscious intellectual experience. The scholar doesn’t know he knows, he doesn’t know what he knows, nor what he can make with his knowledge. Following development of the proof the scholar understands the unifying function of the law, which is necessary to give coherence to the manifold of events, but he doesn’t understand from where the theorem originates; he is not able to comprehend a difference between the existing manifold and the unifying law. The student puts together what is supposed to stay separated. He thinks of the regularity of nature’s events as something that rests on them, and it is such erroneous thought that touches him deeply. Such fantastic, surprising unity rests on the fact that the function of the unifying law remains unanalyzed and therefore unconscious. The student is still convinced that is possible to ground his own knowledge in outer nature and therefore remains unfree. To the contrary, the free, autonomous being, who

28 Immanuel Kant, *A new Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition*, in *Theoretical Philosophy 1755–1770*, translated by David Waldorf and Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992c), 25.

29 Paul Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law and Happiness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 115.

makes proper use of his knowledge, institutes himself as a separate being, independent from the occurrences that surround him in the external world: “in Kant [...] autonomy is what makes an independent, separate individual; autonomous, that is, made individual and therefore true is the one who has separated himself and purified his I from the residue of dependence, urges, and conflicts, in order to be able to think and act independently: truth, neutrality and freedom are bound together.”³⁰ The knowledge act, as intentionally directed on the outer world, the action turned toward outside, presupposes the institution of difference, presupposes distance, therefore skepticism toward the fantastic unity of regularity and matter the young student shows still to believe in. Such belief in unity is the naïf empiricism of those who think to receive everything as it is from the outside, without an active intervention of their own. It represents the condition of those who have not yet conquered themselves as free and intelligent beings. The free and intelligent subject institutes itself in the previous separation from outer reality: “discernment addressed to objects implies, as its first and minimal requirement, to draw a distinction between the object and the one who knows, therefore self-consciousness. Intentionality as direction toward something arises through the act of distinguishing oneself from things, and this overlaps with the possibility to represent something as external. [...] Self-consciousness [...] arises from an original partition between what is in the subject and what is outside it, and this character of externality is instituted by such difference.”³¹ The singularization of the intellectual subject, its institution as spontaneity and separated entity, is provoked by such difference that breaks a never existing or mythological unity between inside and outside, knowledge and thing, subject and object, inner and outer freedom.

30 Massimo Bracalenti, “L’ascolto e la neutralità terapeutica” in Raffaele Bracalenti (ed.), *Da inconscio a inconscio. Considerazioni sul problema dell’attenzione ugualmente fluttuante in psicoanalisi* (Napoli: Guida, 1994), 113.

31 Claudio La Rocca, “L’intelletto oscuro. Inconscio e autocoscienza in Kant” in Claudio La Rocca (ed.), *Leggere Kant. Dimensioni della filosofia critica* (Pisa: ETS, 2007), 71.

4. Tears of Freedom

Such singularization, the original separation of freedom and nature, the drowning of their false unity, is linked to the very early discoveries of life, to birth, and once again to tears:

The inclination to freedom seems to be the reason why even a child who has just emerged from his mother's womb enters the world with loud cries, unlike any other animal; for he regards his inability to make use of his limbs as *constraint* and so immediately announces his claim to freedom (an idea that no other animal has). [...] The *tears* that accompany his screaming a few months after birth reveal that his feeling of uneasiness comes, not from physical pain, but from an obscure Idea (or representation analogous to it) of freedom and hindrance, *injustice*; they express a kind of exasperation when he tries to approach certain objects or merely to change his general position, and feels himself hindered in it.³²

Self-awareness, the perception of inner freedom, represents an act of singularization, putting a distance from the world, in which it becomes now problematic to express one's own power and also be pragmatic (that is, to tend to bring inner and outer freedom to coincidence.) This is the same reason why women cry. But the cry of the newborn, even if it possesses the same origin, has a different meaning. It is not a call for help. The newborn suffers the same injustice the weak suffers and that grown up men are sensitive to (injustice is the Kantian name for a lack of coincidence between inner and outer freedom, it is the objective concept for what is subjectively felt as impotence). But unlike women, the newborn (whom at this point we can easily imagine having a masculine sex) doesn't want to be helped. He cries not because he wants somebody to help him, but because he wants to be alone, to be delivered from everybody and everything, even his own body, except his own freedom. He sheds tears due to the fact that his birth has broken the unity between freedom and nature: "this image of mankind leads Kant to a strange interpretation of the first cry of the newborn child [...]. If the newborn child cries, it is not to demand what is necessary for life and existence, it is to protest against his dependence in regard to others."³³

The claim to singularization, to loneliness, as the last proof of power and independency, is demonstrated in the soul of the newborn and by his

32 Kant, 1974: 136.

33 Tvetan Todorov, *Life in Common: An Essay in General Anthropology*, translated by Katherine Golsan and Lucy Golsan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 6.

desire to restore the lost unity of inner and outer freedom from which he came. He cannot stand injustice, a structural condition of finite existence like the human one.

Man's self-will is always ready to break forth in hostility toward his neighbors, and always presses him to claim unconditional freedom, not merely independence of others but even mastery of other beings that are his equal by nature—something we can see in even the smallest child. (*Footnote*: The cry of a newborn child is not a note of distress but one of indignation and raging anger; he is screaming not from pain but from vexation, presumably because he wants to move about and his impotence feels to him like fetters restricting his freedom.)³⁴

The sense of injustice arises at the same time as consciousness. Being conscious, trespassing the threshold that parts unconsciousness from consciousness, means to have a sense of injustice, that is, the gap between inner and outer freedom. The newborn cries as soon as his sense of freedom is hindered by the givenness of his body, from the moment of his birth. The presence of a hindrance produces the rebound of the previously unconscious freedom to itself, therefore making it conscious. It is particularly useful at this point to compare the figure of the newborn with the one of the student previously considered. We must conclude that the scholar is active, he makes use of his determining power, but in an unconscious way: he misunderstands his own understanding as a product of nature, as a *Naturwunder*. The scholar is in a certain way deprived of his own activity, because he is not aware of the difference between freedom and nature. He guiltily deprives himself of his own activity, because he lets such activity persist in an unconscious state. To the contrary, the newborn cries because of his lack of activity. He can not make use of the freedom he possesses. The newborn is conscious of his freedom and of the bodily conditions that deprive him of such activity and it is this awareness that makes him cry. The scholar is touched by the presence of an activity he doesn't know he already possesses. This activity is radically absent within him, because it is present in front of him as a miraculous externality. He mistakes the possession of a power of his mind for the surprising *chance* of a miracle, and this surprise makes him emotional³⁵. The newborn is hin-

34 Kant, 1974: 188.

35 The link between tears and miracle, almost 150 years later, will particularly draw to itself the attention of Georges Bataille. Tears are induced by the surprising character of an event which is impossible to foresee, as remarked in his unpublished essay, *On Sovereignty*: "for many years I was struck by the ambiguous aspect of tears, which a happy event provokes as readily as misfortune [...]. I had

dered in taking advantage of the same spontaneity the scholar doesn't even know to possess. The difference between the two situations lies in the different degrees of consciousness both exemplary figures possess of their own spontaneity. The fact that the newborn cries and the scholar does not, forces us to conclude – a bit paradoxically – that the newborn has a higher degree of consciousness about own freedom than the scholar.

5. Building Concepts

The conceptual figures of tears and crying are therefore strictly bounded to questions about awareness and consciousness. The problem of consciousness has been present to Kant since the two great essays of 1763, *The Only Possible Argument* and *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy*. The path that leads to the critical figure of apperception is clearly drawn from those precritical essays.

If you ask a man of even the greatest learning at a moment when he is relaxing and at rest to recount something to you or to share part of his knowledge of things with you, you will find that he knows nothing in this state, that he is empty and that he has no definite thoughts or judgments. But stimulate him [*Gebt ihm nur Anlaß*] by asking him a question or by expressing a view of your own, and his learning will reveal itself in a series of activities. And the tendency of that succession of activities will be to make both him and you aware of his understanding of things.³⁶

Such man of greatest learning finds himself in a situation which is not very different from the one of the young scholar. Both of them ignore what they are supposed to know: they don't know that they know, and

observed that on occasion these tears would well up in my eyes in circumstances that left me disconcerted. [...] Then it dawned on me [...] that a *miracle*, that only a miracle, caused those happy tears to arise. A miracle, or, if not, something that seemed that, since in such circumstances we cannot expect a repetition of the same fact. In any case, we cannot expect it from our efforts... This *miraculous* quality is conveyed rather exactly by the expression: *impossible and yet there it is* [...]. From the beginning, this content, the *miraculous*, that I ultimately recognized where one would least expect it, in the object of tears, seemed to me to be in basic agreement with humanity's expectation." in Fred Botting—Scott Wilson, *The Bataille Reader*, (Malden: Blackwell, 1997), 306. Bataille's miracle in front of which tears are shed is hard to assign to the God of religion and prayer, rather to the eventmental God as Uninvited Guest which we will briefly consider at the end of this essay.

36 Kant, 1992a: 236.

they are deprived of their own knowledge which is of a form of freedom. The amazement and the emotion of the scholar is echoed by the relaxed indifference of the man. Scholar and man are both potentially able to form concepts in order to understand and master outer reality, that is to become active, to be spontaneous, but they don't do it. The scholar ascribes the conceptual consistency of experience to nature itself (he makes a miracle of nature out of spontaneity). The man of greatest learning is in the present unable to construct conceptuality, because nature or other beings haven't yet stimulated him to such performance.

Apperception, or awareness, is not merely becoming aware of what is already present but not previously perceived. Becoming aware of the real forces of the soul has in itself a constructive meaning that needs to be emphasized. Becoming aware of the conflict among forces taking place in the inner forum of the soul means, already for the pre-critical Kant, being able to build concepts that can be applied to external reality. Becoming conscious has an explicit constructive value. When the soul succeeds in being clear about itself, the conflicting encounter of its forces might build concepts:

The soul embraces the whole universe with its faculty of representation, though only an infinitesimally tiny part of these representations is clear. It is, indeed, the case that concepts of every kind must have as the foundation on which alone they are based the inner activity of our minds [*der inneren Thätigkeit des Geistes*]. External things may well contain the condition under which concepts present themselves in one way or another; but external things do not have the power actually to produce those concepts. The power of the soul [*Denkungskraft der Seele*] must contain the real grounds of all concepts, in so far as they are supposed to arise in a natural fashion within the soul.³⁷

The soul has a power to think, *Denkungskraft*, and it can build concepts with the real grounds already present within it. Those concepts built in the soul prefigure the synthetic a priori judgments of the forthcoming *Critique of Pure Reason*. "The question how synthetic a priori judgments are possible can be regarded as further development of the question that Kant posed in his work from 1763: how is knowledge about the relation between real grounds regarded from the perspective of their consequences, as well as, in the state of their opposition possible, even if those real grounds are not founded in external things, but in the inner activity of our

37 Kant, 1992a: 237.

mind, in so far as it contains the real grounds for any kind of concept?"³⁸ The form of the concept (or we might say: conceptuality in itself) is the form that opposition among real grounds acquires within the soul, when the same opposition becomes conscious. Real grounds within the soul, mere potential forces, become concepts only if they cross the threshold of consciousness. It is not to deny that for Kant is very possible to make an unconscious use of already disposable concepts. But in order to build concepts and judgments (*Denkungskraft* is a creative power), it is necessary to be conscious, to let the real grounds of the soul cross the threshold of consciousness, which produces, starting from the material of their unconscious reciprocal opposition, an aggregation into a coherent construct. Consciousness transforms forces and is in itself constructive power. It gives the form of conceptuality to opposition among real grounds of mind. Real grounds provide the matter for those concepts that are elaborated by consciousness. But—Kant says it clearly—the solicitation to consciousness, and to elaboration of concepts, doesn't come from consciousness itself. It doesn't come from the forces taken as matter for concepts either. Consciousness, in order to build concepts, needs a solicitation that is external to the soul both in its energetic and rational consistency.

6. Blows of Reality

The situations of the young scholar and the man of the greatest learning are similar, but at the same time, not identical. They both presently live in a state of unconsciousness. The first is unable to build a concept of the surrounding events, even if stimulated by external occurrences (he is put in front of a theorem of mechanics somebody else is developing). The latter isn't giving shape to concepts, because nothing in the environment stimulates him sufficiently. In both cases the *Denkungskraft*, the power to build concept, is sleeping, and stays undeveloped. Being touched, being amazed, in front of a concept taken as an occurrence of nature, is the clearest sign of the scholar's unconsciousness of his own spontaneity. Inactivity and indifference are the signs of the same unconsciousness for the man of greatest learning. If the newborn of *Anthropology* cries because an external matter resists the use he wants to make of

38 Heinz Eidam, *Dasein und Bestimmung. Kants Grund-Problem* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2000), 121.

his spontaneity, the young scholar of *The Only Possible Argument* does make use of such spontaneity (he develops the proof of the theorem, he unifies the manifold of the space after certain rules), but he is not aware of his spontaneity as such; he is not aware of the fact that this activity belongs to him as inner power. The man of greatest knowledge, on the other hand, doesn't make use of his spontaneity, because he is not sufficiently stimulated to do it. We are put in front of three different ways of being hindered in the exercise of spontaneity. The external world might hinder the expression of inner freedom just with its presence. But also its absence can represent a problem to spontaneity. The man of greatest learning cannot adequately form concepts, that is, be spontaneous, because the external world does not solicit him sufficiently. An excess of presence hinders the expression of spontaneity and confines freedom in its inner circle of pure self-referentiality, but lack of pressure on the soul prevents freedom from instituting itself. If an excess of external pressure from the outer world can endanger the expression of freedom, total lack of it might be deadly for the existence of freedom itself.

The newborn cries for help and is ready to shed tears. The scholar is touched, but apparently without shedding tears. The balance within the soul of the man of greatest knowledge results in a tensional state that is too weak and apparently destines him to everlasting unconsciousness, until something from the outside pops up to disarrange the inertial balance of his forces. All three figures are presently deprived just of their own freedom. But the newborn is deprived of the faculty to express his freedom. He is potentially, practically free, not pragmatically, and is aware of such limitation. The scholar and the man of greatest learning, on the other hand, are not aware of their lack of pragmatic freedom. In order to become active and spontaneous again these latter two need to be put in the same situation as the newborn, which is to newly feel the pressure of the outer world. The newborn is trying to make use of his freedom, but he feels the resistance his body opposes to this performance, becomes aware of his potential freedom, and cries. The obstacle his body presents to the use of freedom is to the same extent the reason why freedom becomes conscious for him and might be performed in the external world, when the present distress is overcome. The external body works as a rude awakening that reveals the activity of the subject (spontaneity, freedom) to the subject itself. The inner forces of the newborn, the balance among the real grounds of his soul, are put in motion by the resistance that the body opposes to submit to those forces. Bumping into his body as an external matter induces the newborn to the painful conscious-

ness of his spontaneity that is therefore awakened and hindered by the same worldly factor. The man of greatest learning needs a similar occasion that he cannot give to himself but he might expect from something or someone else (for instance: the questions people might ask him). In order just to be there, to exist, spontaneity needs to encounter some resistance, some *Anlaß*, some blow that causes external pressure. The inertial equilibrium of inner forces needs to be shaken, so that the soul becomes spontaneous, forces awaken and become active, and produce concepts able to unify worldly reality.

Such vision of external pressure as something that puts forces in a condition of imbalance is clearly presented by Kant in order to explain how the man of greatest knowledge can become spontaneous again. The casual, unforeseeable event from outside is what brings the equilibrium of forces into unbalance and produces the activity of the soul:

Without any doubt, the real grounds of this occurrence had long been present in him, but since the consequence, as far as consciousness was concerned, was zero, those real grounds must have been opposed to each other. Thus it is with the thunder which, invented by art for our destruction and carefully preserved in the arsenal of a prince ready for a future war, lies in menacing silence until, touched by a treacherous spark, it explodes in lightning and lays waste to everything around it. Tensions constantly ready to explode lay dormant within it, the prisoners of powerful forces of attraction, waiting for the stimulus [*Reiz*] of a spark of fire, to be released.³⁹

The relaxed man of greatest learning, in order to become active and free, needs to be stimulated,⁴⁰ exactly like a certain amount of gunpowder needs a tinder, so that its hidden forces, previously kept in a inertial

39 Kant, 1992a: 236–37.

40 The stimulus that the man of greatest knowledge needs in order to develop his conceptuality recalls the story of stimulating elderly Kant, from the biography of Thomas de Quincey: “And I remember, in particular, that upon the very last Monday of his life, when the extremity of his weakness moved a circle of his friends to tears, and he sat amongst us insensible to all we could say to him, cowering down, or rather, I might say, collapsing into a shapeless heap upon his chair, deaf, blind, torpid, motionless—even then I whispered to the others, that I would engage that Kant should take his part in conversation with propriety and animation. This they found it difficult to believe. Upon which I drew close to his ear, and put a question to him about the Moors of Barbary. To the surprise of everybody but myself, he immediately gave us, by the way, that in the word *Algiers* the *g* ought to be pronounced hard (as in the English word *gear*).” Thomas de Quincey, *Last Days of Immanuel Kant, and Other Writings*, (Edinburgh: Black, 1862), 155.

state of balance, get unleashed until final destruction, go from zero up to a certain level. The menacing quiet of the gunpowder is the *analogon physicum* of the relaxation of the man of greatest learning. Both the gunpowder and the man are waiting for stimulus to express their sleeping forces, to become active, to transform their premises into consequences, that is (in case of humanity) to transform the real grounds that are in a state of inertial balance into concepts.

The *Reiz*, stimulus, for the gunpowder to unleash its destructive power echoes the *Anlaß*, occasion, that the man of greatest learning needs in order to build concepts. Before the encounter with the stimulus or the occasion, before being hit by something external, the forces within the soul find themselves in a condition of balance that doesn't allow them to cross the threshold of consciousness. Such state hinders the construction of concepts: conceptuality is so far wrongly regarded as a miraculous fact that belongs to external nature. The perfect balance of real grounds, the rest of the forces, means that the soul is unconscious of its own activity. Kant found a notion in 1763 to signify unconscious representation, the lack of any apperception: this is the concept of nothing, or "*nihil privativum*", that is, "zero, the lack of a clear representation."⁴¹ To be pulled out of such a null and void unconscious state and become spontaneous again, both the scholar and the man of greatest learning need a stimulus or an occasion from outside. The same occasion the newborn finds in the resistance of bodily givenness. The minimum we have to presume in order to produce awareness about spontaneity and freedom is therefore a certain "sensitivity of the soul [*Reizbarkeit der Seele*],"⁴² the excitability of mind. Excitability of mind means availability to random encounters and readiness to meet unforeseeable, external reality. Freedom and spontaneity can not build concepts or judgments, in which they frame and make reality foreseeable, until they are activated by the unframed and, at this extent, unforeseeable reality of things. The soliciting reality is clearly connoted by Kant as a reality without shape. An occurrence in which the undetermined part prevails over the determined features: an already developed theorem of mechanics is not able to solicit adequately the attention of the student; the words able to awake the man of greatest learning from

41 Kant, 1992a: 228.

42 Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, translated by John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley—Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 46.

his intellectual slumber possess the form of a question. They are not categorical statements, but a crystallization of doubtfulness.

What duty does this excitement or nature's stimulus actually perform? It brings the inertial-balanced forces of the soul into motion, so that they become able to create concepts, so that soul can become spontaneous and productive again. The unproductive balance of vital force finds its only possible occasion of vivification in encounters with dead matter or in intervention from the outside. The creation of concepts, spontaneity, is made possible through the mediation of some dull *materia*. This is the conclusion that drives Kant to his paradoxical assertion in *Anthropology* that "the inclination to freedom is the most vehement of all inclinations."⁴³ Freedom, i.e. spontaneity, is designated as a natural inclination of human beings. How can freedom possibly be an inclination? How can freedom, in its ideal and anti-natural consistency, be mistaken for an entity depending on nature? Spontaneity and freedom are both paradoxically designated by Kant as *Neigung*, or, inclination: "a sensuous appetite that serves the subject as a rule (habit) is called an *inclination*."⁴⁴ The paradox is that freedom is designated as an inclination, therefore having a sensuous derivation: the centripetal movement of self-constitution, to gain consciousness of oneself, autonomy, seems to overlap with a movement toward the outside, dependency. "Although animals don't share the idea of freedom, Kant still calls this a natural inclination to freedom because it occurs as soon as a baby is born. Culture, or socialization, has no chance to have an input before the inclination to freedom arises."⁴⁵ And this is correct. But the fact that freedom for Kant is not a product of culture or history doesn't mean it is therefore an *Anlage*, anything innate or something like a specific 'human instinct'. *Neigung* doesn't mean 'instinct' or 'predisposition', but inclination, eccentric movement, radical heteronomy, sensitivity: "every inclination turns outward, it leans out of the self in the direction of whatever may affect me from the outside world. It is precisely through inclination, through leaning out of myself as I may lean out of the window to look into the street, that I establish contact with the world. Under no circumstances can my inclination be determined by my intercourse with myself."⁴⁶ Therefore, even more remark-

43 Kant, 1974: 135.

44 Kant, 1974: 133.

45 Wilson, 2006: 63.

46 Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken, 2003), 81. I thank for this reference Prof. Adriana Cavarero.

able is the paradox if freedom itself, autonomy, intercourse with oneself, is designated as inclination and heteronomy. But, even if it might sound surprising for a traditional interpretation of Kant's philosophy, such statement is very coherent with the specific figure of freedom regarded in its genealogical features. Freedom is designated by Kant as the specific answer to the blows of nature. It co-exists and co-forms itself with the first assault of reality as its inner fold. Intercourse with oneself, autonomy, independence, is the *verso* of a *recto*, which is the experience of inclination, heteronomy, dependence. Neither the one, nor the other, taken alone, are original experiences. Original, rather, is their reciprocal parting. Such parting destroys the mythological unity of freedom and sensitivity, the fantasy of nature being rational in and of itself and allowing freedom. A newborn's tears are the most reliable witness of the nonexistence of such nature.

7. Crying as Immediate Affect

We have considered until now the affect of crying as mediative-communicative sign. Nevertheless, as we already saw, Kant also assigns to crying with tears an immediate affect on the vital force. Tears are not just a sign addressed to others. They also communicate an effect to the mind without any mediation. Tears share this immediate effect with laughter. What crying shares with laughter is that "both [...] cheer us up, for they release [*sind Befreiungen*] us from hindrance to the vital force by the effusions they involve."⁴⁷ Also, in this case, as having an immediate effect on the mind, tears are directly connected with the concept of freedom. Tears in themselves work as *Befreiungen*, they set us free from cramplike constitution of our mind. The capability of shedding tears represents in itself, irrespective of the effect it might have on other human beings, a kind of regained freedom from previous hindrance. Let's read again the second part of the first Kantian quote of this essay, taken from *Anthropology*:

Weeping—inhalings with sobs (convulsively) [*convulsivisches Einathmen*], when it is combined with a gush of tears—is likewise one of nature's provisions for health, because of the soothing effect it has; and a widow who, as we say, refuses to be comforted—that is, will not hear of stopping the flow of tears—is taking care of her health without knowing it or really wanting it.

47 Kant, 1974: 123.

Tears allow a blocked vital force to flow into the paths of health again. The convulsions of crying, *convulsivisches Einathmen*, shake the cramped balance of a mind and put it in motion again, set it free from the cramps that block it. Weeping and laughter both have to do with breath, as each of them emphasizes one phase of the rhythm: inhalation/exhalation. Laughter (like sneezing) is associated by Kant mostly with exhalation,⁴⁸ while weeping—as we can see from last quote—is linked to inhalation.⁴⁹ Such difference in the phases of breathing is emphasized by their gender connotation, as we find again in the pages of *Anthropology*:

Laughter is *masculine*; weeping, on the other hand is *feminine* [weiblich] (in men it is *effeminate* [weibisch]). And when tears glisten in a man's eyes [*die Thräne im Auge glänzt*], it is only if it comes from generous but helpless [*ohnmächtiger*] sympathy with another's suffering—but not if he lets tear-drops fall, and still less if he sobs along with them and so makes disgusting music.⁵⁰

While laughter is masculine-exhaling, weeping is feminine-inhaling. Another significant difference between the two related but opposite affects is that even if laughter is also characterized as a convulsive phenomenon, it is nevertheless regarded by Kant as “continuous [...] exhalation,”⁵¹ something like a calm, single, large convulsion. Its character of continuity lessens the syncopatic value. A properly convulsive, discontinuous character is specific to crying. Such connotation associates crying to the syncope of surprise, the suspension of the previously present state (that is not necessarily involved in the phenomenon of laughter). The syncopatic outburst of tears means that the subject is determined to break the inertial balance of forces that previously weakened its mind. And at the same time it makes us think of a kind of homeopathic cure, because crying is designated to cure the cramp of mind through convulsions. But the cramp of the mind we have to be cured of is a *state*, meaning an inertial balance of the forces, while the convulsions of sobbing aggress discontinuously this inertia in order to bring it to a healthy condition of imbalance. The affect of crying possesses the peculiarity of making the cramped balance of mind unstable and alive again through such discontinuous blows. The multiplicity of convulsions of sobbing is supposed to bring into

48 “In laughter, the exhaling of air by fits and starts [...] strenghtens our feeling of vital force by its salutary movement of the diaphragm.” Ibid. 129.

49 “Weinen ist ein Schluchzen und einathmen, Lachen Ausathmen.” Kant, 1928: 853.

50 Kant, 1974: 123.

51 Kant, 1979: 207.

healthy motion a vital force blocked in a singular cramp. Health obtained from tears is the mirror in which regained freedom, restored spontaneity, recognized itself: “health is the visible plane of an existence where the organic totality is dominated, without remainder and without opposition, by a form of rationality that, beyond any division, is at once ethical and organic; it is the playground of freedom – the space in which freedom can play.”⁵² The Kantian parallelism between mental and bodily inertia, as well as the occurrence able to overcome it, is emphasized by Foucault’s essay: “the master of his own thought process is also the master of this vital movement which is its organic and indispensable complement. If the mind were immobile, then life would go to sleep – which is to say that it would die [...]; and if the movement of life risks being thrown off balance, or getting jammed up in a spasm, then the mind must be able to restore its proper mobility.”⁵³ Through convulsive blows of sobbing the mind again becomes master of itself. The peculiar fact that such mastery is gained through pretense of receiving a stimulus from outside. Crying as *convulsivisches Einathmung*, inhalation and convulsion, being shaken from a state of previous unconsciousness and laziness, mimics the situation of being besieged by a world (the newborn’s body, the questions put to the man, etc.) against which the I is able to institute itself as (hindered) spontaneity.

Inhaling (the phase of breathing emphasized by weeping) means indeed an absorption from the world, openness to what comes across. Crying induces in the soul the same effect as hazardous blows from external matter: the vivification of unconscious spontaneity. The multiple convulsions of crying reproduce the blows with which external reality awakens the soul. There is nevertheless a significant distinction that makes the phenomenon of crying more problematic: in this case the convulsive blows are called from inside. In the act of crying and shedding tears there is a structural reference to the external world, inhaling as intention directed toward the outer world. But at the same time crying is an affect, therefore inner occurrence, motion of the mind.⁵⁴ The blows that tears turn against the unconscious soul in order to awake it come from the soul itself: by crying the soul solicits itself in order to produce an outer excitation. The soul is not just passively hit, but also behaves actively to-

52 Michel Foucault, *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, translated by Robert Nigro and Kate Briggs (Cambridge: MIT Press 2008), 46.

53 Foucault, 2008: 49.

54 “*Affekt ist Gemüthsbewegung*”, Kant, 1928: 736.

ward the blows. The activity of the soul consists in this particular case of provoking its own excitability. Therefore, there is something deeply autonomous in crying, which is not to be found in the simple solicitation Kant hypothesizes for the spiritual awakening through blows of reality. Such autonomy has the peculiarity of emphasizing the passivity of the mind: it solicits the blows of reality; it solicits the soul to be more excitable. The mind asks to be solicited in order to become spontaneous, asks actively to be hit by blows of reality.

We can portray the crying personality of someone as a movement in and out from himself: one violently inhales and at the same time tears gush out from the eyes, because of an “affect” that “works like water breaking through a dam.”⁵⁵ Crying is absorption and excretion at the same time. Tears of human free being flow from the inside on cheeks as an exhibited and desired evidence of dependency on the outer world (the blows) in order to gain independency. Tears are the phenomenal *analogon* of the pure self-affection of the first *Critique*, on which Heidegger built his interpretation of Kantian criticism. But crying and its convulsive breathing represent the phenomenon of self-affection upside down. In pure self-affection of time mind affects itself as another, *je est un autre*. On the contrary, in the affect of crying, an effect that has the physiognomy of the external world is provoked spontaneously from inside, *un autre est moi*. I don’t encounter myself as a part of reality; rather blows of reality are provoked by me. Such occurrence, doesn’t mean that provoked otherness is assimilated and digested by the mind: convulsions stay external convulsions, and the blows of tears solicit the mind without becoming a part of mind, they are just *Anlaß* to the health of *Lebenskraft*. But the solicitation of tears and sobs is solicited by the mind. The affect of crying represents in itself—so to speak—the inner solicitation of outer solicitation, the autonomy of heteronomy. Through violent inhaling of crying the soul provides itself the necessary shocks that sometimes outer world is ungenerous with, but the human beings that we are need in order to be free and spontaneous. Men and women know too well the instants of dead calm, in which the world doesn’t solicit them anymore, and they are urged to escape such dead calm through lighting up a cigarette, just for the sake of feeling the stinging of tobacco, taking toxic substances (affect is in itself a “drunken fit”⁵⁶), or cutting one’s own arms with a blade. They aggress themselves to put their vital force in motion again.

55 Kant, 1974: 120.

56 Kant, 1974: 120.

The affect of crying is the basic gesture of aggression called from inside, an inner surprise, a gift from ourselves to ourselves. The autonomy of crying sketches out a paradoxical autonomy of excitability and counts on the intimacy of hazard.

If we might be allowed to follow the theological metaphoric we have been using until now, we could say that if there is a God involved also in such seductive tears, it is neither the God of religion and prayer, nor the God of philosophy and knowledge. The God of self-provoked tears is rather an *evenemential* God, God as event and uninvited guest.⁵⁷ For the same reason such tears of self-solicitation introduce ambiguity in sex distinction. Tears are in themselves feminine. But a man who sheds tears is *weibisch*, says Kant, effeminate. Man is, as we know, the figure of autonomy, woman of heteronomy. The inclination the two sexes have for freedom is not strictly equivalent. Through the self-solicitation of tears man becomes ambiguously free. He becomes free while paying the price of involving mechanism and while tempting nature, nature as something that convulsively addresses the soul. He who sheds tears obtains a sexually ambiguous state. He is basically a man, because its aim is to restore health, that is vital force, freedom and spontaneity with it. But the way he strives for vital force is extremely doubtful: excreting convulsions will help him to restore vital force. It resembles too closely the

57 Tears having an immediate effect also evoke their own God, whose physiognomy does not overlap with the previous two. Beside the omnipotent God of miracle and the systematic God of knowledge, the will of solicitation is longing for a gift from the outside, but not in the recognizable shape of the Saviour or a metaphysical Idea. Rather, as a stranger met without any forewarn, yet still evoked. John Climacus, the Desert Father, abbot of Mount Sinai, who lived in the 7th century and whose meditations on tears are fundamental to Christian East and Orthodox faith, said: “when the soul grows tearful, weeps, and is filled with tenderness, and all this without having striven for it, then let us run, for the Lord has arrived uninvited and is holding out to us the sponge of loving sorrow and the cool waters of blessed sadness.” (John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, translated by Colm Luibheid and Norman Victor Russell [Mahwah: Paulis Press, 1982], 139). John Chrysostom commented: “as a gift, tears testify to a visitation [...] from the Holy Spirit. This is preceded by an earlier visitation from that ‘Uninvited Guest’ who arrives, but later leaves us to mourn [...] the divine absence.” (John Chrysostom, *John Climacus: From the Egyptian Desert to the Sinaite Mountain* [Burlington: Ashgate, 2004], 153). Inviting the uninvited God as a stranger is the temptation of tears, what ratifies “*le caractère prophétique de ces pleurs, provoqués par un événement à venir*” (Piroska Nagy, “Les larmes du Christ dans l’exégèse médiévale,” *Médiévales* 27 [Fall 1994]: 38), an event yet to come, and already present, different from us, but evoked by ourselves.

behavior of women, who call other human beings to their help. The difference is that by crying regarded as an immediate effect, no other free and independent being is properly called for help. I call for help blows of reality, as belonging to me. I solicit the otherness of convulsions as obeying my solicitation. And that's why a man who cries doesn't become a woman, he's just effeminate. Crying as immediate affect represents the femininity of masculinity. The distinction becomes less marked between honest, sincere tears as call for help, and theatrical tears sometimes women shed without any necessity. The effeminate character of blows of tears is a product of sincere distress and at the same time, a self-provoked gesture, exactly as theatrical female tears are. The blows of tears have the gratuity of a pathetic, unnecessary gesture, and—in spite of that—they arise from an authentic and inescapable sorrow.

Pure self-affection represents the being outward of the inside (the peculiar way of being outward, that belongs to inside). On the contrary, the awakening tears represent the inwardness of externality. As the title of the quoted *Anthropology* chapter says: through tears “nature mechanically promotes health”. Tears put bodily mechanisms in motion for the sake of the soul, they solicit the intelligent character of bodily mechanisms. Tears say that autonomy is rooted in heteronomy, freedom is a rebound from nature originating in inclination (tears of newborns). Tears also say that freedom is occasioned by encounters with external matter as an effort to negate this origin, and to extend its inner power over the outside with the help of others (tears of anger, female tears). Tears speak a resolution to bring together inner and outer freedom, the overcoming of difficulties of the external world (tears that glisten only, tearless crying, miraculous tears, tears of men). But, more radically, tears tell of the desire to tempt reality, the desire to become free and spontaneous by an assault from the world that we ourselves have provoked (tears of excitability, effeminate tears).