



The Wager of Lucien Goldmann: Tragedy, Dialectics, and a Hidden God (Princeton Legacy Library)

Mitchell Cohen

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In *The Wager of Lucien Goldmann*, Mitchell Cohen provides the first full-length study of this major figure of postwar French intellectual life and champion of socialist humanism. While many Parisian leftists staunchly upheld Marxism's "scientificity" in the 1950s and 1960s, Lucien Goldmann insisted that Marxism was by then in severe crisis and had to reinvent itself radically if it were to survive. He rejected the traditional Marxist view of the proletariat and contested the structuralist and antihumanist theorizing that infected French left-wing circles in the tumultuous 1960s.

Highly regarded by thinkers as diverse as Jean Piaget and Alasdair MacIntyre, Goldmann is shown here as a socialist who, unlike many others of his time, refused to portray his aspirations for humanity's future as an inexorable unfolding of history's laws. He saw these aspirations instead as a wager akin to Pascal's in the existence of God. "Risk," Goldmann wrote in his classic study of Pascal and Racine, *The Hidden God*, "possibility of failure, hope of success, and the synthesis of the three in a faith which is a wager are the essential constituent elements of the human condition." In *The Wager of Lucien Goldmann*, Cohen retrieves Goldmann's achievement—his "genetic structuralist" method, his sociology of literature, his libertarian socialist politics.

Originally published in 1994.

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