

# Post-Subjectivity

Edited by

Christoph Schmidt  
with Merav Mack and Andy R. German

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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Edited by Christoph Schmidt with Merav Mack and Andy R. German  
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**מכון ון ליר בירושלים**

**THE VAN LEER JERUSALEM INSTITUTE**

**معهد فان لير في القدس**

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# INTRODUCTION: SUBJECTIVITIES AFTER THE DEATH OF THE SUBJECT

CHRISTOPH SCHMIDT

Against the more apocalyptic visions of an emerging world order with clashes of civilizations and violent renaissances of religion, the 2004 Munich debate between Cardinal Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas offered a quite different vision, which Habermas vaguely defined as the “postsecular.” This postsecular mode was meant not only as a definition of a new relation between secular enlightenment and religion, beyond their classical mutual delegitimizations, but also as an indication of the emergence of a new paradigm for global culture. The concept of a postsecular culture on the global level seemed to presuppose new versions of subjectivity that would be able to inherit the tradition of modern subjectivity and carry its burdens, on the one hand, while redefining its ways of “being in the world,” on the other. A new *world ethos*, with some serious political, social, and existential implications and corresponding effects on the classical understanding of “subjectivity,” is emerging out of the demise of classical, secular enlightenment.

Postsecularity does not only presuppose the overcoming of exclusive secularism, aiming at the elimination of all religion and of antimodernist orthodoxies resisting modernity, democracy, and secularity. It presupposes the end of all utopian versions of a radically new subjectivity, the new man, and the new humanity, which have overloaded the legitimate political aims of the socialist, sexual, and feminist revolutions with protoreligious messianic expectations. Only through the liberation from the compulsion to liberation have these legitimate aims had a chance to become realized. The end of messianic eschatologies not only opens the space for a postsecular relation between religion, politics, and society, it also seems to be another aspect of the emergence of multiple forms and versions of subjectivity, which found a first voice in these ideologies. With their return to history and the reality principle, they managed to survive utopia and the disappointment over its

impossibilities. Instead, in the realm of a messianic time, they arrange themselves in the new open space of the global world.

When the early postmodernists translated Martin Heidegger's Delphic oracle "Der Mensch ist ein Versprechen der Sprache" as "man is a slip of the tongue" in order to adopt it as their slogan and the point of departure for their deconstructions of the concepts of subject and subjectivity, they had in fact overheard the semantic ambiguity of the German verb "versprechen," which means both "slip of the tongue" and "promise." Man was, according to Heidegger, always already both a failure and a promise. The project of overcoming humanism in language, discourse, and the cultural sciences was not only a misunderstanding. Very early on it led to new strategies of "saving the subject" in various forms of a posthumanism, a humanism of the other, that would cure the congenital defects of the Cartesian cogito, the Kantian transcendental ego, or the Nietzschean will to power that were held captive in the metaphysical framework of the classical concept of the substance as *subiectum*. Instead of eliminating the subject, it was to take up its responsibilities for its past, present, and future. "Otherness" and "Alterity" became fashionable signs for an awareness of all kinds of neglected and suppressed aspects of subjectivity, from the artist and genius to gender politics and the various forms of the outsider such as Jew, Black, Woman, or Homosexual. Postcolonialism was another aspect of this new consciousness of the different colors of subjectivity and the power relations defining it. After all, the concept of the subject meant both "vassal" and "sovereign": it always already included the dialectics of master and slave.

The prefix "post-" in "post-subjectivity" does not indicate much more than the fact that there is something to this classical concept of modernity that somehow is still "there," and in spite of the declarations of the end of man, it has not lost its validity while, undoubtedly, undergoing serious changes and transformations. After the breakdown of all secular eschatologies and political theologies, after the declarations of a possible end of history and its unexpected continuation, after the exhaustion of all utopias and counterutopias, and after the renaissance of religion, subjectivity obviously is still around and does not seem to need any justification for its pluralization, individualization, and alterity. There are, of course, enough signs of the emergence of a functionalized "one-dimensional man" conquering the global realms of economy, technology, politics, and culture, but the enormous plurality of lifestyles and versions of subjectivities seem to counterbalance this uniformed persona, the anonymous mask of subjectivity of power.

The philosophical discourse can be but one aspect of this new global scene, even if it tries to present an encompassing concept of this continuity or "resurrection" of man after the declarations of its end. It is part of the same

process of pluralization, individualization, and privatization that characterizes the age of post-subjectivity and cannot escape its hidden logic or destiny. The new lifeworlds and lifestyles do not depend on philosophical, theological, cultural, or sociological definitions; they develop alongside the turbulences of these theoretical discourses as effects of global capitalism, media technology, and communication systems. But still they are interrelated and seem to nourish each other's imagination. In this sense it is difficult, for instance, not to see the strange affinity between the self-representations of everybody on Facebook and in Leibniz's monadology. Organized by a divine mathematical order, God as a computer, which harmonizes the infinite forms of monadic self-representations, the individual monads are screens of self-consciousness representing the world without any need of windows!

Phenomenology with or without the theological turn, critical theory, the renaissance of St. Paul in present political theologies, the philosophical discourse on love, and the "therapeutic turn" seem to be reactions to the new world order as they influence its languages and representations. While the phenomenology of Emanuel Levinas has rediscovered the philosophical fundament of ethics in the concept of the other who, while turning his face to us, breaks up the limits of our selfhood, Jean-Luc Marion has taken phenomenology to the new horizons of "the given" and the "gift" as saturated phenomena, thus opening it for genuine religious experience as well.

The critical theory of Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth has translated the project of enlightenment following Theodor Adorno's neo-Hegelianism into a theory of communicative action and an ethics of recognition and memory that corresponds with an engagement for human rights on a global level. The trauma of Auschwitz initiating Critical Theory in postwar Germany in fact became part of a world ethos when the UN introduced a global remembrance day for the victims of the Holocaust.

The remarkable renaissance of the (political) theology of the apostle St. Paul in phenomenology (Jean-Luc Marion, Alain Badiou), in critical theory (Jacob Taubes, Giorgio Agamben), and in present existential and psychoanalytical discourse (Michel Serres, Slavoj Žižek) follows the steps of Karl Barth's famous reading of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Barth's reading seems to be the reflex of the correlation between the cosmopolitan horizon of a new form of "being in the world" and the radical individualization demanded of us with the breakdown of the traditional social frameworks of family, society, nation-state, and so on. In light of the demand for a new global law beyond the local forms of constitution and legal organization, it is no surprise that love has become a point of departure for the overcoming of localities and fixed identities. Paul's famous words—that

there is no Jew and Greek, no master and slave, no man and woman—echo the spirit of the global space in search of a new Nomos of the earth.

It is no wonder, then, that philosophy has been engaged for some time in new thought regarding love. Since Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, the concepts describing love as Eros, Agape, Sex, and Charity have become the objects of numerous investigations questioning the psychoanalytical reductions of love to sexuality as they rediscover the ethical and religious layers of the concept of love (Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Marion, William Desmond) trying to redefine the very fundament of thought and being in love.

If one can speak today of a “therapeutic turn” in philosophy initiated by Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault, it seems to be no accident that this turn, influenced by modern psychoanalysis, focuses on the various philosophical schools of antiquity—the Stoa, the school of Epicurus, the Cynics, and the Platonic academy—which have understood the interrelation between truth and therapy of the self. These schools developed in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the emerging Roman Empire as they tried to give answers to the meaning of life and existence while the individual was left to him/herself.

The pluralization and individualization of these philosophical styles seem to correspond all too well with the global scene in at least one perspective—namely, the interrelation between the cosmopolitan horizon and the radical privatization of existential experience. While the global horizon widens, it seems that local cultures are flourishing and deteriorating rapidly at the same time, thus becoming a destination for tribal fundamentalism and tourism in search of the exotic. Subjectivity seems to find itself in a constant process of evacuation and displacement from its original locality, its homeland with its histories, arts, and moralities. Subjectivity moves, then, between the poles of a cosmopolitan openness and the insistence on rather local “patriotic” traditions and habits, between a flexible, mobile transformation of the self and a kind of fundamentalist resistance and insistence on the immediate lifeworld. The new existentialist with laptop is thrown into a “being in the world” that constantly expands or closes itself in the familiar lifeworld, or it moves between these modes while trying to create a practicable bridge between them. In fact the new global “being in the world” splits into multiple parallel cultural worlds with quite different temporalities and tempos demanding complicated synchronizations of these simultaneities and hopelessly anachronisms.

Subjectivity thus sometimes appears in its pure arbitrariness and contingency, without place and time, and hopelessly lonely. The hero of revolution—once a revolutionary like Che Guevara who was, according to Jean-Paul Sartre, the incarnation of the existentialist—has been replaced by more lonely forms of partisanship, if he has not become a fundamentalist



fighter of al-Qaeda. Like Rambo in the Vietnamese jungle, this partisan is sent on a mission to nowhere land and is perfectly on his/her own, and unknown to all. Like the soldier in Southeast Asia after World War II, this lonely fighter might not have heard that the war is over. The present existentialist, if he is not just a tourist in search of paradise lost, appears often rather like the Don Quixote whom Georg Lukács has described as the metonymy of a new transcendental homelessness and loneliness.

But can we think of the global sphere without its persistent political and natural catastrophes? Here the real refugees of the global scene are evacuated from their hometowns, looking for shelter and exile. These catastrophes suggest apocalyptic visions and the need for new communications systems and technologies. In light of the endless suffering of these victims, a new hero of subjectivity has emerged here as well—the anonymous NGO volunteers, the Doctors Without Borders, the human rights activists—sacrificing their lives on the fronts of these global catastrophes.

The essays in the present volume are only a very first reflex and attempt at an articulation of some of the new meanings of subjectivity, or rather, a first attempt to give expression to some of those processes of evolving subjectivities in the wake of our transitory world. Are we in the process of a new Hegelian “formation of the spirit” working itself through new negotiations without finalities and teleologies? Are there new possible post-Foucauldian archaeologies and post-Nietzschean genealogies of modern subjectivity waiting to be written? Which *Hermeneutics of the Subject* is on its way? What role does religion actually play in these new forms and formations of subjectivity? What are the ends and beginnings of post-subjectivity, that is, the aims and means of its constitution? Which new modes of a legitimacy of the modern age are on their global way?

The essays in the present volume begin by reconsidering the demands that phenomenology has made on our understanding of subjectivity. The problem engaged by both Gabriel Motzkin and John Panteleimon Manoussakis is that of the unity of consciousness or, perhaps better put, the unity of the various consciousnesses. It is assumed that for phenomenology consciousness does not need a unifying principle such as the transcendental I was for Kant and German Idealism, for it draws its unity by its intending “object.” The paradox here seems to be that what unifies consciousness is not “in” it, or “inside” it, but “outside” it—for it unifies itself by escaping itself through the bridges that intentionality continuously builds. Yet, the question remains, in what sense can the various consciousnesses be said to be *mine*? Can we still retain the possibility of unity and identity in the absence of the Ego and the Subject? The following two essays by Michael Roubach and Klaus Held intensify these opening questions by taking into consideration the always already

present element of community, being-with, and intersubjectivity, as well as the role that the Other might play in the constitution of a self without subjectivity. By taking psychoanalysis as the leading paradigm of his discussion, Joel Pearl's essay draws attention to time as the factor that unifies one's experience of the world and of others without thus necessitating the appeal to a subject that would remain transcendent of time and its vicissitudes.

The themes of time and intersubjectivity, already announced in the first five essays, are more closely examined in the following articles that explore the themes of Eros, Love, and Subjectivity. The authors' insights focus on the erotic as the means to a transcendence that completes itself in self-transcendence. William Desmond's essay looks at "selving" in the light of recent concerns about modern subjectivity. Selving is shown to be not merely a lack trying to complete itself but a process understood in terms of what might be called its agapeic promise: its giving of itself beyond its own being-for-self. Drawing from a variety of classical sources, ranging from Barth's epoch-making reading of Paul's Epistle to the Romans to Max Scheler's *Phenomenology of Love*, Christoph Schmidt's essay reconstructs a modern history of the secularization of love. He describes a dialectic between the religious and the secular meanings of love that culminates in the radical rejection of its religious and ethical dimensions. Schmidt's historical analysis leads to the redefinition of subjectivity on the basis of Eros and temporality. Shem Shemy continues the engagement with Scheler by considering whether it might be possible to ascribe to love the role of a primordial intentional act of consciousness, which explains the essence of morality. Since no examination of the erotic would be complete without an appraisal of sex and sexuality in present culture and society, Volkmar Sigusch's essay takes the reader through just such a reevaluation of the construction of sexualities in the closing decades of the past century.

Turning a self-reflective as well as critical eye toward the philosophical tradition out of which the foregoing discussion has been operating, the following contributions trace the development of subjectivity throughout the history of philosophy from Plato to Heidegger while engaging the unreflective subject of philosophy itself. In Andy German's essay we find a critique of Hegelian modernity grounded on a distinction, retrieved from Plato, between freedom and randomness. In the same spirit Eli Schonfeld argues that Heidegger's critical identification of subjectivity with substantiality does not apply to Plato, who provides a different way of thinking about the soul that might escape some of the pitfalls of a philosophy of the subject. As opposed to the view that we have moved beyond such a "philosophy of the subject," Emily Hartz and Carsten Fogh Nielsen argue that

Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* remains relevant in contemporary discussions about a possible post-subjectivity. Hegel reveals the inherent contradictions and inadequacies of traditional conceptions of freedom and subjectivity while also showing how modern, individualistic conceptions of freedom can only be realized through the gradual development of socially and historically embedded conditions of agency.

The volume ends with a theological coda: Hillel Ben-Sasson reflects how, based on an ontological reading of Exodus, human subjectivity was historically grounded on the corresponding subjectivity of God as *Esse Ipsum*. The deconstruction of that reading, resulting in a God “without Being” (to invoke Marion’s title), finds its correspondence in a Man without Being, or a subject without subjectivity.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our thanks to the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and particularly to the director of the Institute, Prof. Gabriel Motzkin, for the ongoing support of the research group on Christian Subjectivity. Many of the papers in this volume were first presented at the conference on “The ‘Resurrection’ of the Subject: Subjectivity and Post-Subjectivity in the Age of the Post-Secular,” held December 22–23, 2009, which received additional generous support from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

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# POST-SUBJECTIVITY AND HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

GABRIEL MOTZKIN

I believe we need to begin by defining the relation between subjectivity and resurrection. But which of these terms should be defined first? The older term is resurrection, but from a philosophical standpoint subjectivity seems to come prior to resurrection, since you cannot resurrect something that does not exist. The issue here is whether there is any weight to the historical development of concepts or whether what appears to be *a priori* should be the basis for what appears to be derived. But is there any weight to the historical development of a concept? Does its historical development shed light on its meaning? That question is a messy one. Does the illusion of a flat earth, which may have existed historically earlier than the perception of a round one, shed light on the significance for us that the earth is round? Well, it does. As human beings, we could not induce that the earth is round except in terms of our idea of flatness. The meaning of this roundness for us is strictly tied to the fact that we as human beings have to think that the earth is flat in order to move around. Thus in opposition to what might be an order of derivation for which our sense of flatness is derived from the roundness of the earth, historically our consciousness of the earth's roundness is related to the flatness of our feet. It is counterintuitive to think that the earth is round. In the same way, while subjectivity may come logically prior to resurrection, for you need to be somebody in order to be resurrected, historically the concept of resurrection antedates the modern concept of subjectivity. I will argue that the modern concept of subjectivity makes no sense without the assumption of a prior conception of resurrection. Moreover, just because we no longer believe in resurrection does not mean that we do not need it, just as we need the illusory flatness of the earth in order to apprehend its roundness. Unlike certain kinds of knowledge acquisition, in which we throw away the way we have acquired that knowledge after we have acquired it, historical concepts are not erased by subsequent contradictions and falsifications.

So, we need to understand that there could be no secular concept of subjectivity without the previous Christian conception of subjectivity—that

is, the specifically Christian conception of the self. That previous Christian conception anchors the reborn subjectivity of the believer firmly in the resurrected Christ. It is a question whether the nonbeliever can be said to have a subjectivity. He has a soul, but that soul is a kind of pre-soul. The basic idea is that a true subjectivity is not one we have from birth, except potentially. It is one we acquire through an act, here the act of belief. This act of belief signifies that the noncorporeal spiritual salvation of the soul is made possible by the material resurrection of the body of Christ. What makes this reborn subject unique is the uniqueness of its act of belief; that is, the uniqueness of the subject is a consequence of Christ's resurrection, which thus guarantees the possibility of salvation for the individual soul. In other words, subjectivity has to be *recreated* so that salvation becomes possible. Now we understand why this kind of reborn subjectivity requires a hiatus, a gap between the old person and the new one, in order to take effect. In a parallel fashion, Christ's resurrection is possible after a hiatus or gap. The old order had to die in order for the new one to emerge. That death of the old order happened with Christ's crucifixion, which effectively ended the old rule of law. For three days, the fate of the world was unclear, as it is for the believing soul before its reconstitution; then, with resurrection, the order of faith replaces the order of law. The world has been transformed, just as the believer apprehends the world in a totally new way.

The consequence of this notion of re-creation is that greater emphasis is placed on resurrection than on Christ's incarnation. The paradox is that there has always existed a tension with Christian culture between resurrection and incarnation. Christian art and philosophy, as Louis Marin has shown, often paid more attention to incarnation than to resurrection, until the beginnings of modernity.<sup>1</sup> The reason is a consequence of the particular influence of Hellenistic philosophy on Christian sensibility. From Neoplatonism stemmed the idea that participation in divinity is what guarantees the soul's potential salvation.<sup>2</sup> If participation is the key metaphor for the relation between God and the world, then that participation precedes the possibility of the re-creation of the subject. Indeed, participation is grounded in the procession of being from the One through the intelligible world into the material world, and it means that the participation in divinity has to take place before the soul can, through *epistrophe* (that is, return) reascend to whence it came. That Neoplatonic conception of a possible subjectivity is then grounded in creation and not in salvation. Indeed, the tension between pagan Neoplatonism and Christianity is that pagan Neoplatonism envisages the ultimate annihilation of the individuality of the subject.

What happens when the transition to whatever we term as "modern thought" occurs? The nominalist moderns abandon the Greek-influenced idea

of incarnation, just as they abandon the logic of participation. The question then arises as to whether the alternative is the Christian idea of the resurrected subject: in a way, yes, and in a way, no. The moderns believe in neither the incarnation nor the re-creation of the subject. However, they do believe in a duplication of the subject—that is, in the subject’s adopting a point of view that is not its natural point of view. One debate within modernity revolves around the question of the natural attitude: is the subjective perspective the same as the natural attitude, or does the subject adopt a perspective that is, as it were, outside itself, or constructed? In any case, this debate requires a subject that can re-present, or represent, itself, for which it must be able as its basic cognitive activity to represent the world. Marin argues that modernity has replaced the basic metaphor of incarnation with a metaphor of representation. What motivated this penchant for the metaphor of representation was a cultural drive to visualize everything.

It is plausible that modernity, from the Renaissance until the end of the nineteenth century, stimulated a drive to visualize all phenomena. Modernity’s philosophies stripped bodies of their essences and mixed up political representation and optical representation, power and vision. However, despite the ideal of self-representation, of the self-transparency of the self, one body remains invisible in this standard modern conception: the subject. The result is that modernity substitutes an ineffable subject for an ineffable God. If one were to apply the metaphor of participation, the question exists as to the degree to which the subject remains transcendent to the world or, conversely, the degree to which the subject has access to the external world. The metaphor of representation requires an observer, a subject who is outside the picture, so that everything else can be visualized and thus made graspable.

There was great resistance throughout this modern period to such a conception, in part because applying a metaphor of representation appeared to strip bodies of their unique meanings: representations are commensurable. The issue was how to make it possible for such a subject to seize the essence of things through the mechanism of representation: Can the essence of things be grasped through visual metaphors? Space can be perceived, but can light be seen? However, when in German Idealism the attempt was made to integrate the metaphors of incarnation and representation, this was rendered possible by the idea of a subject who ultimately makes himself effable through “subjecting” his representations—that is, through conquering his representations; it is the subject who infuses the objects and bodies of the world with the essences he attributes to them. Through representing the world, he is able to participate in it. In this way, that subject substitutes an essential representation instead of the originally nominalist idea that representations, in order to be representations, must be detached from their

essences; after this detachment, while essences are still possible, they become ineffable. The paradox thus achieved is that the attempt to visualize the object through representing it makes the object ineffable. The application of the metaphor of representation was then based on assuming both a transcendental subject and a transcendental object. However, the dual ineffability of subject and object did not provide sufficient support for such a conception of representation without essence, which proved historically unstable.

Ineffability appears to assume that what is ineffable is also uncreated, perhaps because of the Christian linkage of Logos to creation. Perhaps there is no good logical reason for such an assumption, but the possible uncreatedness of the world permeates Kant's philosophy. There the uncreatedness is not only true for the unseen dimensions of transcendental subjectivity and transcendental objectivity. It seems as if the very possibility of legitimating knowledge through the implementation of synthetic a priori procedures requires the assumption of uncreatedness. An a priori truth must be true both for a created world and for a creator. If it is true for the creator, then his ineffability is not absolute, for his very nature then becomes knowable to some degree. Eventually this problem was resolved by taking logic to be a virtual procedure rather than one that characterizes or defines a physical reality. But then the issue emerged of how a physical entity can engage in nonphysical procedures that have no connection whatever with any physical reality, except insofar as they are instantiated in it. That problem is well known and banal, and I will not provide an answer, but it emerges that this issue is more difficult for a created entity than for an uncreated one, one that does not emerge from something else in space and time. The problem of the existence of the soul is not a biological problem. It is really a problem of the nature of being in time, but this problem cannot be resolved in such a way that our understanding of the nature of being in time is made to adjust to our understanding of the soul.

A basic issue then is whether the subject is created or uncreated. Theories of knowledge seem to require an uncreated subject, both because they require a knowledge that is immanently certain and because they also require a point of view that is transcendent or external to the cognitive field. However, an uncreated subject is, as stated, problematic on two counts: first, the uncreated subject must possess attributes of divinity, while at the same time, second, an uncreated subject is the minimum subject required for certitude in cognition. If the secularized human subject is the uncreated subject in another guise, questions arise as to whether that subject can also be cognitively divine and whether such a cognitively divine subject is plausible as a minimum subject—that is, a subject that fulfills only the minimum conditions for the possibility of knowledge.



The critique of such a conception of an unlimited but human subject also divides along these lines: for all sorts of reasons, the idea that human cognition is potentially unlimited seems implausible (although this would have to be examined in terms of all conceptions of unlimitedness in knowledge). On the other hand, it makes no sense to assume a minimum subject. The reason is that the appropriate conception of knowledge also has to be stripped down and simplified: if a cognitive subject is a minimum subject, then that subject can have, at least at first, only the appropriate minimum knowledge—for example, simple logical or combinatorial rules and procedures. If cognition requires different kinds of additional tools, characterizing that cognition in terms of minimum boundary conditions neither explains how human beings acquire knowledge nor does it really explain the conditions of possibility for knowledge. Perhaps an abstract subject could acquire knowledge in terms of such minimum boundary conditions. But to acquire knowledge, a cognitive subject of the kind that we are uses all sorts of auxiliary tools that are not derived from original assumptions, despite the possibility that these auxiliary tools may be conceptually unnecessary once that knowledge has been acquired. For example, even if all knowledge could be acquired through mere acts of intellection, we would nonetheless also use perception to acquire knowledge. Therefore the major attack on subjectivity has been an attack that criticizes the conception of a minimum or simple subjectivity.

If we assume that subjectivity is multilayered or complex, we need to assess how that complexity affects our assumptions about the createdness or uncreatedness of human subjects. One could then infer that complexity is a possible characteristic of an uncreated world or that complexity is part of creation or that complexity somehow developed on the basis of an original simplicity. It should be noted that for Kant both God and man are simple: God does not require knowledge (because He can intuit everything immediately), and man requires minimum conditions for knowledge. Moreover, if complexity is a characteristic of an uncreated subject, then that means that the complexity in question is atemporal, since the subject is uncreated. While that may be imaginable, most thinkers have drawn the natural conclusion that uncreatedness implies simplicity, that an eternal being is a simple being with minimum conditions—in which case, if man is a complex being, he is not such an eternal being.

There is another way of seeing this problem. What are the requirements for setting man as divine if man cannot be set as a minimum subject? In other words, can man be both divine and temporal; if so, what kind of temporality would characterize a divine human being? Hegel drew close to this point of view, but he could not emancipate himself from a linear conception of time,

despite his preference for the whole over the infinite in his *Logic*. It should be evident that a divine human being would have to have some nonlinear type of temporality characterized by circularity, discontinuity, or some other model. Perhaps that is one reason why Heidegger posits a human subject who is both temporal and uncreated. An uncreated temporal subject is an infinity with a future limit, just as a created atemporal subject would be an infinity that has transcended its limit.

We have arrived now at the question of whether we can solve the dilemma of knowledge by distinguishing between temporality and createdness and then positing a subject who is either temporally infinite, like Eriugena's created God, or is uncreated (but not both).<sup>3</sup> This line of argument assumes that we can in fact distinguish between temporality and createdness, which is wildly different from the normal Judeo-Christian assumptions about the relation between time and creation.

In the late twentieth century, a common catchword was that of the dissolution of the subject: post-subjectivity. The subject was viewed as a cognitively unrewarding notion because it was correctly perceived as being too simple a notion, but it was never very clear which conception of complexity was supposed to replace the conception of the subject and in what way it was to be specified.

Here we can begin to specify what post-subjectivity might mean. It used to mean either the limitation of being created and therefore being in time or the lack of limitation of being uncreated and therefore being out of time. When the human subject was posed as being infinite and uncreated, it implied that God is finite and created—that is, God is a creature of my mind. However, the dissolution of this link between time and creation means that we can begin to think of a created being who is outside time as opposed to an uncreated being who is in time. That uncreated being in time is the biological human being for a postmodern philosophy, for whom no resurrection is possible because his being in time means that he must die. Let us now turn for a moment to the created being in time. That being is in time because he has been created. However that creation is no longer a limitation on his future. We know of one such kind of being, which we can term virtual being, as we are creating it, but it is not coterminous with us. Our knowledge may well also have this character. We also have the idea of another such kind of being, which is the soul, which is both created and infinite. Indeed, our culture is preoccupied with the question of how we can ensoul artificial beings.

But why do so? What is our interest in this infinity? Is it to become divine? Is it to live forever? I would suggest that a better way of understanding this drive would be the idea not of living in eternity but living

with eternity, of being at peace with infinity. I take that to be the meaning of the metaphor of resurrection, that metaphor that now replaces both incarnation and representation, that resurrection that is the metonymy for creation and that is only possible for a postmodern subject that is created and infinite. Such a created subject may well be the central agent of a new historical era, one for which resurrection will be the basic metaphor and for which the ensoulment or spiritualization of the world will be the basic task.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Louis Marin, *Food for Thought*, trans. Mette Hjort (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 3–25.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*.

# SELF AND TIME

JOHN PANTELEIMON MANOUSSAKIS

## Self

I have anticipated this trip to Jerusalem ever since the kind invitation arrived.<sup>1</sup> I have anticipated this talk, and one day I will remember it. I will remember these very words that I speak now, but then there will be no spoken words and no listening audience. How does one account for the perception, in memory or in anticipation, of a thing not yet present or not present anymore? When I recall this moment, this event will be absent, but its “effect” will be present “in me.” How can we account for the presence of an absence?

It is rather embarrassing that both the simple man in the street and the educated man in the lab agree on this answer: my remembering of this talk will be facilitated and carried on by a process that involves my brain’s neurons. We should not concern ourselves with terminology at this point—synapses and all that—what matters is that either way (the way of science or the way of everyday naïveté) everything takes place “up here”: in the brain.

This illusion of consciousness’s immanentism—the belief, in other words, that every act of cognition takes place within the confines of the brain—arises precisely from the difficulty we have just named—the presence of an absence. Immanentism fakes what it cannot account for: absence. Since one cannot explain how consciousness does not need its objects to be present-at-hand in order to be consciousness *of* them, the only other possible alternative, *in the absence of absence*, seems to be the presence of the world with its objects *in* consciousness. A whole philosophical difference is played out in these grammatical propositions: where the “of” seems inexplicable, the “in” must supplant it.

The problem with the mind’s immanence is that it creates a dualism (with which philosophy is familiar since Descartes) between an outside—the things out there, and an inside—the world of thought in my head. Dualism not only leaves its own workings shrouded in mystery, it creates additional problems, three of which can be summarized as follows:

1. If mind and body are two distinct realities, I am immediately presented with the problem of their correspondence: Is there any relation between my perception of the things and the things-themselves? The nightmare of a Matrix is only possible from within a dualistic point of view.
2. Given the at best ambiguous correspondence between mind and world, truth itself becomes dubious or relative.
3. Finally, the possibility of a meaningful intersubjectivity, the possibility of my relation with the Other, is irremediably wounded.

It is indicative of the primitivism of our thought that we cannot think of consciousness but as a thing (a *concretum*)<sup>2</sup> or the property of a thing and, therefore, once unable to locate it or produce it, we feel forced to deny it.

To assume that memory remembers by means of images, so that every remembering becomes a form of re-presentation, will confront us with the very same problems St. Augustine was forced to face in Book 10 of the *Confessions*. These problems can be summarized as the conundrum of “imagining the unimaginable,” since one has to account for the difficulty of ascribing an image to memories that cannot, as we would say today, be “visualized”: that is, memories of emotions and feelings (10.14.21–22), or the memories of pieces of innate knowledge that presumably are not mediated by any image (10.11.18–12.19). When I think, for example, of free will, do I recall the concept of free will or free will’s image? And what would the image of a concept be like if not a concept itself? Is, then, the recollection of a concept mediated by the concept of a concept? And would not such mediation require always new and seemingly endless intermediaries? What about memory and forgetfulness? “Does this mean that memory is present to itself through its image, and not in itself?”<sup>3</sup> Here St. Augustine seems to come to the root of these paralogisms: forgetfulness is an absence—to say that I think of an absence by means of a presence (an image presented in memory) is to annul the very thing I am trying to think, and to explain it by means of representation is to do away with what stands in need of explanation.

Let us continue briefly along the same line of inquiry by rehearsing some of the fundamental positions of the phenomenological method—first, by asking the questions that seem to point to the root of our misunderstandings: Is consciousness the consciousness of someone? Is there, in other words, a *subject* of consciousness? And were we to say that, how would we be able to distinguish between the two (the subject and its consciousness) in however formal a way? Would such a subject perhaps predate or precede its own

consciousness with all the absurdities and difficulties that this might entail, such as of an unconscious subject that, in some inexplicable way, *becomes* conscious or obtains a consciousness as its *property*? Phenomenology has made clear that there is no room for such a subject in the life of consciousness,<sup>4</sup> that what one might continue calling a “subject” cannot be anything other than an embodied consciousness (and there can be no consciousness that is not embodied).<sup>5</sup>

The I does not *have* memories—that would still imply the mediation of the image—but the I *is* that memory when it remembers, the image when it imagines, the thought when it thinks. So St. Augustine correctly writes that “the person who remembers is myself; I am my mind.”<sup>6</sup> There can be no distinction, therefore, between the memory of this talk and I: while remembering myself presenting these thoughts, it is not I that am *having*, or the “I” that is having, that memory but rather that I *am*, or the “I” is at that moment, that memory. The crucial clarification here becomes whether I am *only* my memory “and nothing more.” We tend to assume that remembering is an act of being and not the whole of a being that remembers (that is, the remembering being). Such an assumption makes it necessary to search for a certain interiority into which the subject withdraws—itsself or its other activities—while given to that memory, without losing its whole. However, is the subject not that whole already given in the remembering of that specific memory? In other words, is it not the case that in every act of consciousness the *whole* consciousness is invested without reservation, since any reservation would have been part of the investment? And likewise, therefore, for perceptions, imaginations, judgments, anticipations, and all the other kinds of intentionality that make up the life of consciousness, our life. Yet we admit that this picture, in its bold vision and elegant economy, does not satisfy us entirely. We feel that something more should be assumed and presupposed if we are to speak precisely as we did a moment ago of “*our* life.” The question, then, becomes that of the principle that unifies the various intentionalities and guarantees the continuity of the self. The answer is again prefigured in St. Augustine’s treatment of time in Book 11 of the *Confessions*, and it is telling that it is precisely to that text that Husserl returns in search of an answer to the unity and continuity of consciousness.<sup>7</sup>

Unity and continuity: to bring under the one, to appeal to the one. Two competing metaphors present themselves as distinct paradigms for the understanding of consciousness. Is consciousness the operation of a transcendent ego that, like a spectator in a theater or at games, observes and, most important, by its observation unites what appears to it and what appeals to it for its coherence? Or is consciousness rather like the actor or the athlete of being, playing what it is and being what it plays?

Perhaps what is at stake in our questioning will become clearer if we transpose the same inquiry into a higher key. Let us ask, then, what constitutes the continuity of history? Speaking of personal history, the history of a particular individual, one assumes the existence of an I that endures through time and is thus the guardian of one's memories and, by extension, the guardian of one's identity—the I as the archivist of one's past. If, however, the discussion is that of transindividual history, say the history of a nation or of a people or even the history of humanity as such, in the absence of such a universal I (besides, *who* or *what* could such an I have been or, indeed, how could it have been an I?) one substitutes a series of individual "I"s in succession. Our question is legitimized by establishing an analogical correspondence between the unity in past, present, and future of an individual act, such as the recitation of a poem; the unity in past, present, and future of a complete human life; and the unity in past, present, and future of human history itself. This parallelism was in fact suggested by St. Augustine when he wrote the following:

What is true of the poem as a whole is true equally of its individual stanzas and syllables. The same is true of the whole long performance, in which this poem may be a single item. The same thing happens in the entirety of a person's life, of which all his actions are parts; and the same in the entirety of human history, the parts of which are individual human lives.<sup>8</sup>

What the parts of a poem are to the poem as a whole is what the deeds and actions of a person's life are to his or her life as a whole; and what a person's deeds and actions are to that person's life as a whole is what the lives of all human beings are to the macroscopic span of human history—and this is a unity brought about by time and over time.

The juxtaposition of these two levels of history reveals a problem: in the case of world history one dispenses with the necessity of one, individual, permanent I without being bothered that the fragmentary plurality of individual "I"s—all of whom would be equal among themselves—could not in fact account for what we sought to establish in the first place, namely, continuity. Each individual I is born and dies like moments—preceded by nothing and followed by nothing. How could they establish continuity insofar as nothing from the one survives in the next? And yet there is history; there is the memory of a past that exceeds me and every synchronous I by far. The past of this town, thousands of years old, still shapes and informs my experience today. Thus, *we know* that continuity is not the byproduct of synchronicity; in fact, synchronicity, by its nature, knows nothing of continuity and the experience of history.

Why, then, do we still demand that the particular and individual I be such an allegedly synchronous entity? Because, as Kant rightly said, any experience must be accompanied by an I.<sup>9</sup> We begin to see now, however, that this I cannot be the selfsame, identical I throughout, unless we are prepared to admit that one has only one experience given in a *nunc stans*. In other words, it makes no sense to assume one single enduring I (synchronicity) in order to account for the unity of the multiplicity of one's experiences, for what one has to sacrifice then is nothing less than the same multiplicity of experience whose unity we seek to safeguard.<sup>10</sup> At the very minimum, we must admit that the I finds itself at different chronological moments, that this I has time and is in time. Admitting, however, the diachronicity of the I is to already admit too much. There cannot be only one I; rather, as in our example of world history, there must be one I after another that transmits to its next not only its own content but also that of all its predecessors.

The phenomenological analysis of internal time reveals time as the perichoretic intertwining of three ecstasies: impression, protention, and retention. It is important to note that in what we call the “now,” all three temporalities are to be found: there is a present-present, a present-past and a present-future.<sup>11</sup> And the present-present, in turn, springs its own branches of protention and retention. This seemingly endless process affords us with a much more nuanced conception of temporality than that of a linear succession of “nows.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the naïveté of immanentism is averted. The memories I have are not stored somewhere in my mind to be recalled or put aside at my will, as one picks photographs from a drawer. Neither the I nor its “contents” have an essential permanence: they are not solids but moments or, as Eli Schonfeld would say, “movements.”<sup>13</sup> Consciousness has no depth, no interiority to which it can withdraw. It can assume “weight” or “force”—that is, intensity—but, as Bergson has already shown, it has no extensity;<sup>14</sup> hence, the existentialist manifesto of the priority of existence over essence, with all that this axiom implies.

## Time

In previewing my day, as in those moments when I lie awake but am still in bed, my life takes the form of a series of “things to be done” (*agenda*). Some of these “things” are already there as part of my living existence (like lunch); I do not normally think of them (unless they rise to the level of an unusual event, for example, lunch *with* a friend) but they provide my schedule with its frame. Then, there are some tasks that need to be performed



as part of my professional life (for example, classes to be taught, meetings to be attended, and so on). Through them my life is carried on. They present themselves as stepping stones that can take me across—to the same point where, lying in bed and about to fall asleep, I might repeat the morning review of my day. What we call life is a series of intervals from sleep to sleep.

In the morning, when the hour strikes at which I am accustomed to rise, I might receive this impression  $\sigma\upsilon\nu\ \delta\lambda\eta\ \tau\eta\ \psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ , as Plato says; I might let it blend with the confused mass of impressions which fill my mind; perhaps in that case it would not determine me to act. But generally this impression, instead of disturbing my whole consciousness like a stone which falls into the water of a pond, merely stirs up an idea which is, so to speak, solidified on the surface, the idea of rising and attending to my usual occupations. This impression and this idea have in the end become tied up with one another, so that the act follows the impression without the self interfering with it. In this instance I am a conscious automaton, and I am so because I have everything to gain by being so. It will be found that the majority of our daily actions are performed in this way and that, owing to the solidification in memory of such and such sensations, feelings, or ideas, impressions from the outside call forth movements on our part which, though conscious and even intelligent, have many points of resemblance with reflex acts.<sup>15</sup>

In the meantime, one does things—so much so that in the event that one has nothing to do, one must find things to do.

“Nothing to do”: this phrase presents us with an important clue in our analysis. “Nothing to do” reveals that in between these “to dos” lies precisely nothing—that the stepping stones of daily tasks, goals, and events take us through the dark waters of nothing. Yes, in the unlikely eventuality that one is left with “nothing to do” one must find, invent, things to do lest one be swallowed up by nothing.

When is one left with nothing to do? Is it even possible that one can be left with nothing to do? It is not the possibilities one lacks, and perhaps not even the actual tasks—for I feel that I have nothing to do when I have a lot to do. It is rather the motivation that one finds lacking. I am stepping on stepping stone x (which in all likelihood I have done already countless times) and, suddenly, the next step to stone y seems impossible or, better yet, meaningless. Impossible, insofar as it involves an insurmountable effort; meaningless, for I cannot see any reason why I should carry on with this futile game. Yes, I can step on the next stone, which means I can keep my next appointment; I can perform my next task, but so what? What is the point? Sometimes, or for some people, this is the point: avoiding the pointless. Therefore, one throws oneself into the faithful execution of steps.

For one such as this, however, one who has already caught this vision of pointlessness, proceeding is indeed physically impossible. The futility of what we call “a game” is more than a thought. In fact, even before rising to mind as a thought, futility paralyzes one’s members with what Levinas has called the stiffness and the numbness of fatigue: “Fatigue—even, and above all, the fatigue that is unthinkingly termed physical—presents itself first as a stiffening, a numbness, a way of curling up into oneself.”<sup>16</sup>

But why should I lack the motivation, especially since we are speaking not of a motivation for this or that but ultimately motivation for life itself—that is, *connatus essendi*? Is the reason not that futile game described above, the masquerade of desire that knows no end? Is it not this continuous succession of goals and tasks, of things to do and to be done, propelled by an insatiable desire that desires only its own continuation, its empty desiring? How then can one lack motivation? How can one lack the lack that desire is? That would be a double lack.

Fatigue demonstrates not the lack of motivation but rather a suspension or, better yet, an *obsession*. Desire is not mitigated; rather, it is frustrated, and this frustration signals an intensification of desire. In fatigue, desire places itself on hold. It waits, and it is this waiting that explains what appeared earlier as a “lack of motivation,” a “refusal to go on.” While waiting there is nothing to do, perhaps because one is already consumed in doing something—namely, waiting. While I am waiting for my train to arrive, I cannot seriously engage with anything for two reasons. First, my primary engagement is precisely the waiting-for-the-train-to-arrive; therefore anything else (such as reading a book or smoking a cigarette) can only be a way of “measuring” the time of waiting—that is, a form of parergon to waiting itself. Second, the arrival of the train can interrupt these other activities, thus rendering them pointless. Therefore, as long as I wait I cannot do anything: there is nothing to be done.

The point that needs to be stressed in this rather commonplace analysis is the following: if there is nothing to be done while waiting, it is neither because I cannot find something to do, as if I were lacking the means or the ideas, nor because I do not want to do anything else, as if I were lacking the desire. I am neither imprisoned nor bored. In fact, there may be many things I would like to do. As long as I am waiting, however, there is nothing to be done.

To say, as we have just done, that “as long as I am waiting there is nothing to be done,” is to say precisely the opposite of what Samuel Beckett showed us on stage in his play *Waiting for Godot*. The opening words of that famous play are exactly these: “Nothing to be done.” But whereas Vladimir and Estragon wait because there is nothing to be done, we, on the contrary,

have nothing to do *because we wait*. The difference is decisive. One would be justified, I believe, in saying that what Beckett put on stage was a grotesque exaggeration of what Heidegger had predicted in one of his dark prophecies concerning our scientific age: that the “hidden goal toward which all of this and much more rushes, without having the slightest hint of it—and without being able in the slightest to have a hint—is *the state of total boredom*.”<sup>17</sup> Boredom, for Heidegger, is modernity’s destiny—as much as it was, ironically, for Greek antiquity the primordial origin of man. We remind the reader that for someone who, like Origen, thinks from within the paradigm, and indeed the culmination, of Greek metaphysics, history is the result of the boredom (κόρος) that the pre-existing souls experienced in a state where there is nothing to be done other than contemplating the Good.<sup>18</sup> Yet we overlook the possibility that Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* might *also* be a very ancient story: the story of an endless (and thus pointless) repetition, of the infinite return of the same, the same at the beginning as it is in the end. Heidegger’s analysis of boredom belongs to a conception of homogeneous time as cyclical *chronos*.<sup>19</sup> It is, however, quite a different conception of time that is operative in our analysis of waiting, insofar as waiting—even when one knows not what one waits for, or especially then—is open to what we can call an eschatological expectancy that is neither for “the beings as a whole” nor for Dasein’s “resolute self-disclosure.”<sup>20</sup>

Not everything, however, arrives with the precision of a train. Indeed, many events lack a schedule: one can anticipate them but not their arrival. Thus, one does not quite know what one waits for. There is an element of indeterminacy regarding the object of one’s expectation. One, of course, is free to give it different names and imagine it under different categories: it might be a better future, a phone call that would magically transform my dull life, the beloved that I have always dreamt of, or perhaps death or the Messiah. Insofar as one can have something to expect, there is waiting. As long as I wait, there is nothing to be done. Every action, as long as it can be seen on the horizon of a time suspended by waiting, is pointless. Perhaps this is what Prof. Schmidt meant when he said that “nonerotic time becomes potentially a ‘waste of time,’ a ‘nontime,’ . . . a time of nonbeing.”<sup>21</sup>

In another sense, waiting itself is an activity. “The existence of an existent,” Levinas writes, “is by essence an activity. An existent must be in act, even when it is inactive.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, the expression “nothing to do” implies that in waiting one indeed *does* nothing (where this “does” is understood in all its active sense). Think of the paradox of an “active inactivity” as the *tension*<sup>23</sup> expressed in the positioning of an athlete who is about to run (to return to one of our opening metaphors). The athlete has not yet begun running. In positioning, he assumes the immobility of a statue, frozen, as it