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NARRATIVE IDENTITY AND THE METAMORPHOSES OF THE SUBJECT: IS THERE A WAY TO SALVATION?

Abstract: The idea of salvation is inseparable from the meaning and value of praxis of the subject. The Self, the Other,... - are, therefore, emerging as regions of redemption of the subject or the being that cares for its existence. On this basis, this paper tends to challenge an ontological intervention which overcomes the position of the subject or tends to neutralize Da-sein. Instead to emphasize a discontinuity, an understanding of the history of Being should highlight a continuity of the metamorphosis of the subject and so, it should re-discover a lost meaning of dualism. This reversal of metaphysics will ask for a re-affirmation of a difference and co-presence of the subject and the world, as well as for recognition of a different subject which dwells within the narrative structure of identity.

Key words: subject, object, storytelling, metamorphosis, salvation, identity

In reference to an attempt of preserving the world that has been metaphysically established within the subject-object dualism, it seems to be even harder to affirm the world in which the subject is neutralized to an ontological, moralistically motivated, purity, to promote the world in which the trace of dualism is erased forever. Metaphysical idealism, actually, optimistically leads toward the unity of opposites which, contrary to the intended effect, prevents human existence to remain within the possibility of living differences, even to reveal its capacity to vitally experience misunderstanding as an existential benefit... Or, as Baudrillard interpreted it in his writing *On Seduction*, dualism, beyond the usual perception, revitalizes the game of seduction, a game that is not to be understood just as a reversed polarity or as a destabilized primacy of the subject over the object.

“There is no active or passive in seduction, no subject or object, or even interior or exterior: it plays on both sides of the border with no border sepa-

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rating the sides. No one can seduce another if they have not been seduced themselves” (Baudrillard 1988: 160).

The consequence and, lately, the ideal of modern metaphysics is the subject. The object is, implicitly, perceived simply as a challenge on the way to the ultimate reification of the subject. The object is not only re-presented here from the perspective of the subject, but it becomes the region of the subject that should be negated, denied, overcome. Namely, the object is transformed into an incarnation of pure alienation of the subject. An eventual promotion of the object is only conducted through the subordination by which begins a metamorphosis of an object into a subject. The fate of the object is taken for granted, as it is something that is of minor importance. Behind the objectivity of the phenomenon, obviously, consistently stands a hidden, occult subjectivity. For the subject, which tends toward the object, a real dedication to the relation itself requires to put into play its own fragility, finally, its own death. “Seduction, however, makes use of weakness, makes a game of it, with its own rules” (Baudrillard 1988: 162). Sooner or later, the object rejects any metaphor, because the relation itself indicates that the subject is, intending to preserve itself, involved in the endless production of transferred meanings. Thus, rejecting a metaphor, an object, becomes fatal.

“Seduction is fatal. It is the effect of a sovereign object which recreates within us the original disturbance and seeks to surprise us. Fatality in turn is seductive, like the discovery of an unknown rule of the game. Discovering a rule of the game is wonderful and it compensates in advance for the most bitter losses” (Baudrillard 1988: 204).

The new foundation of the world becomes an infinite objectivity: the subject is willing to become an object of desire. However, an active position of the subject becomes untenable because the subject cannot stand any more drama of freedom and history (of birth and death). Dictate of will and desire thus disappears. As it is denied now, subjectivity drowns into indifference. The lost object is desired for one reason only: to remind the subject of its position as the subject... This is it what breaks the sovereignty of the subject being caught in its own trap. In the midst of (eventually) preserved entity of the subject, the object shines from its absence and its silence. Actually, a deception of what we presume as “essential” emphasizes the importance of an active principle, of what is stated and written in history... Reality of allegedly “irrelevant” is announced in the form of an undeniable strength of unspoken and officially unrecorded... Therefore:

“There is no need to explicate things, there is no need to make them clear in objective determinations in any system of endless references, but contrary, the whole world needs to be included in only one detail, the whole event into

one feature, all the energy of nature into one object, dead or alive – one needs to find an esoteric ellipsis, the shortest possible path to a clear object, the one who doesn't have any share in the divvy of meaning, and who doesn't share his power nor his secret with no one else" (Baudrillard 1991: 100).

This is why a desire of the subject to become objectively fatal prevails proportionally to its intention to become an object of desire. Subjectivity, in fact, persists only within the passion that cannot be denied anymore, a passion which is objective to the extent that it has to be recognized by an appropriate form of culture: art, literature... At the same time, gnoseological passion of the spirit obductively demands the reality of the body to be restored and confirmed; ultimately, as a medical event par excellence: the corpse... – a radical object, an object unmasked by death. The reality today is stripped to banality and brutality which diminishes a seductive odium of the truth. Reductive perception of the truth is the origin of the dominance of explicitness and pragmatic aesthetics in contemporary culture. Radical materialism postulates today an economic principle of freedom which, in the same capacity as metaphysical idealism it opposes, defeats will, and so it leads to pessimism and nihilism. Spiritualism and materialism are, finally, united by an unexpected consequence experienced at the end of the 19th century, a consequence which completed the history of Western metaphysics. From this historical point and on, Western metaphysics searches for its salvation through the essence of art, promoting its physiological capacity and polemically perverting dialectical relation toward Being instructed from Socrates to Hegel. Discovering a willing – never indifferent subjectivity, Nietzsche's voluntarism, beyond a naive naturalism, provided an opportunity for man to realise and release his neglected humanity, to cherish mortality rather than immortality, to recognize a vital force of the object without which the subject denies an existential value of life on behalf of the Idea. In other words:

"Reducing all to a one and only principle, in order for at least partially taking over reality by force, is only one of the ways by which Metaphysics offers a satisfactory need for certainty" (Vattimo 2011: 120).

History of Western metaphysics is realized, therefore, as a kind of dialectics of metamorphosis which spins toward the redemption of the subject, toward its salvation within the being as a whole. Salvation has become, on the basis of the factual existential interest of the subject, a core of the philosophical practice and philosophical life. This, in other words, means that the idea of salvation is inseparable from the meaning and value of an activity of the subject. The Other, the Self ... – are, therefore, emerging as regions of the salvation of the subject or as regions of the being which cares for its existence. *Dasein*, implicitly, even this tendency is ethically justified, cannot be ontologically neutralised or purified.

This is a limit of contemporary ontology which should not be understood here as a handicap, but as an opportunity for us to recognize the presence of a different subject in the narrative structure of identity.

Michel Foucault, in the lectures held by 1981–82. and published under the title *The Hermeneutics of the subject*, interprets the form of life lived by Socrates as the one that originally has a function to encourage others to engage themselves to take care about the soul. This care requires a skill, a cathartic skill which demonstrates the unity of knowledge and action. In fact, this skill, by itself, reveals what is the soul and what it means. An authentic nature of knowledge is also manifested here: the capacity of a soul to reverse in time and, reflecting on experience, it enables a reconstitution of community on the basis of life that is, through time, comprehended as right or just (see, Foucault 2003: 227). In this sense, Plato's dialogues are defined by their heuristic, but also a cathartic function. Correspondingly, Gadamer, for instance, notes that Plato's *Phaedo*

“is not a treatise but a work of high literature. There are true-to-life portrayals in this piece, and it accomplishes a complete fusion of theoretical argumentation and dramatic action. Thus in the *Phaedo*, the strongest argument put forward for the soul's immortality is really not an argument at all but the fact that Socrates holds onto his convictions right up to the end and corroborates them through his living and dying. Here, the course of the action itself plays the role of an argument” (Gadamer 1998: 47).

Implicitly, it can be pointed out now that

“the person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her ‘experiences’. Quite the opposite: The person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character” (Ricoeur 1992: 147).

Foucault's interpretation, actually, gives us an opportunity to recognize the origin of the position of the subject which is, through its metamorphosis, established in modernity. The subject is an epochal invention of the modern metaphysics which is, according to Heidegger, a foundation of “the age of the world picture”. This era is characterized by five phenomena:

“One of the essential phenomena of modernity is its science. Of equal importance is machine technology. One should not, however, misconstrue this as the mere application of modern mathematical science to praxis. Machine tech-

nology is itself an autonomous transformation of praxis, a transformation which first demands the employment of mathematical science. Machine technology still remains the most visible outgrowth of the essence of modern technology, an essence which is identical with the essence of modern metaphysics. A third, equally essential phenomenon of modernity lies in the process of art's moving into the purview of aesthetics. This means the artwork becomes an object of experience (*Erlebens*) and consequently is considered to be an expression of human life. A fourth modern phenomenon announces itself in the fact that human action is understood and practiced as culture. Culture then becomes the realization of the highest values through the care and cultivation of man's highest goods. It belongs to the essence of culture, as such care, that it, in turn, takes itself into care and then becomes the politics of culture. A fifth phenomenon of modernity is the loss of the gods (*Entgötterung*). This expression does not mean the mere elimination of the gods, crude atheism. The loss of the gods is a twofold process. On the one hand, the world picture Christianizes itself inasmuch as the ground of the world is posited as infinite and unconditioned, as the absolute. On the other hand, Christendom reinterprets its Christianity as a world view (the Christian world view) and thus makes itself modern and up to date. The loss of the gods is the condition of indecision about God and the gods. Christianity is chiefly responsible for bringing it about. But loss of the gods is far from excluding religiosity. Rather, it is on its account that the relation to the gods is transformed into religious experience (*Erleben*). When this happens, the gods have fled. The resulting void is filled by the historical and psychological investigation of myth" (Heidegger 2002: 57, 58).

By postulating the subject as an active principle and the measure of all things, modern metaphysics promoted the truth as a statement that has to be objectively justified. Namely, the notion of the truth is, as Heidegger recognised it, transformed from un-hiddiness (*aletheia*) to placement (*Ge-stell*). The world, in general, as much as Being itself are transformed into objects. Cartesian rationalism reduces the human experience on what is real as it is or could be comprehended... The world, thus, loses its ontological basis and is transferred into an image of the subject. In this context it can be said that modern metaphysics transforms philosophy into a world view. In fact, modern metaphysics is a foundation of positive science which objectivism is grounded on observation and pragmatism. Art, and literature in particular, is, from this pragmatic perspective, questioned as fiction, as praxis which produces "something that is not real". As this – the Cartesian view of reality became unbearable, Western metaphysics seeks to complete itself by announcements of its own end. The background of this announcement is a desire for the salvation of the subject, a great expectation that the drama of existence will finally be resolved ... – in terms of, firstly, re-invented conflict between good and evil and its completion in the *apokalypsis*

(greek – an unveiling, uncovering, revealing, revelation), and, secondly, in terms of technological development of science which goal is to defeat finiteness of human existence as the way of being. An absence of the expected historical climax, the absence of ultimate scientific resolution reversed a dominant, positive metaphysical orientation to the condition of being which does not appeal to be solved but lived within a hermeneutic circle. Actually, this reversal of metaphysics teaches us the way of living without a solution. As this transition occurs, particularly through Heidegger's fundamental ontology, metaphysics shifts to a poetical way of thinking.

The emergence of pessimism at the end of the 19th century, concretely in the form of Schopenhauer's philosophy, demonstrated that an undisclosed essence of metaphysics is a suppressed will to live or an unrecognised subject that hides itself within an idea presented by and for itself. Emergence of pessimism indicates that the subject, failing its own ideals, starts to negate its will to life. A vitalistic response, precisely Nietzsche's reaction to pessimism, asks for an affirmative answer by which the subject, subordinated to the ideals, is to be challenged. To be or to become a man does not mean any more to *exist and operate as a function of the value (transcendental existence and action), but feel free to produce its own existence as a perfect coincidence of being and meaning...* (see: Vattimo 2011: 214) Here, by a creative act of a re-valuation of dominant values, the subject transforms itself an existence which is valuable (see: Vattimo 2011: 214).

Even though the historic ascent of idealism paradoxically led the subject to an impossibility to persist in itself, it does not mean that, despite the ontological self-denial, the subject can neutralize itself. As much as the world of life can never be purified to a pure concept, redemption of the subject is not possible until the subject, in its will, remains unrecognized, unspoken, ignored. Avoiding this historical condition of the subject, a new ontological puritanism announces itself through a neutral tone which tends to recover a different mode of universalisation (see: Derrida 1984: 10–16) The drama of the subject, as a general consensus was achieved on this issue, must be rejected. The truth, however, is not only open to contemplation, it is to be comprehended, but also to be heard. Therefore, it is important to realize the manner by which the truth is established by means of words or is announced in the world. The purpose of the neutral tone is to ensure universality, to deny subjectivity. The first person's perspective is lost, the truth is implicitly promoted on behalf of the Other. This manner of exposition is, in fact, the basic principle of the general validity of truth, of its objectivity... The subject, in its effort to deny itself, insists on the objectivity of its perception, and so it incarnates into the Other. However, as an historical drama of the subject is absent, it had to be re-invented in contemporary western culture by a psychoanalytic discourse. The psychoanalytic method is, actually, a response to the will of the subject to be reconstituted by a narrative. For a story, to be told, the subject is an imperative. Story-telling is a practice of the subject: the subject which is,

in reverse, constituted by the story. Therefore, a discontinuity itself does not signify the history of interpretation of being, but the continuity of the metamorphosis of the subject. Work of art originates from this metamorphosis. In other words, the way (skill and style) by which a work of art happens inventively projects otherness on behalf of a poetic salvation of the subject within an experience of truth and morality. Consequently, the narrative structure of the identity is not to be reduced to a literary event, but it leads us to a possible understanding of a linguistic meaning of culture which illuminates the wisdom of living or the secret of existing. The manner of story-telling and a capacity to tell the story is a way to be the subject, not only in terms of style by which it is defined, but also in terms of an effect in which it personifies the spiritual law or the voice it incarnates. As Ricoeur emphasized in the sixth study of his book *Oneself as Another*, story-telling is a praxis. Story-telling is an activity with an ethical function included, it is a mediation within an internal contradiction of the self. It tends to restore the self within the unity of life as such.

“As for the notion of the narrative unity of a life, it must be seen as an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience. It is precisely because of the elusive character of real life that we need the help of the fiction to organize life retrospectively, after the fact, prepared to take as provisional and open to revision any figure of emplotment borrowed from fiction or from history” (Ricoeur 1992: 162).

As much as Ricoeur recognizes an importance of the narrative as an action, Heidegger insists on the reality of art, and thus opens the horizon of a practical philosophy beyond an intention to reconstitute ethics as an independent philosophical discipline. From this point of view it can be pointed out that storytelling is not just an exposition of the story for the story itself. The story, initiated from the essence of truth, indicates an ability of the subject to fable its existence. At the same time, the narrative essentially preserves the subject within an unhideness of its truth. In contrast to an everyday use of language, as well as to a categorical scientific language, story-telling revitalizes a metaphorical capacity of the language, its poet(h)ical substance which enables the subject to survive the fatal consequence of truth. Story-telling recalls a good will of understanding prior to an objective definiteness of judgment. This claim for understanding brings us back to a poetical way of thinking, to an experience that Heidegger looked for in restoring the (forgotten) ontological meaning of *aletheia*. The metaphor, for instance, transfers to a symbol when it expresses humanity in its nature or when it exposes that what is not usually spoken of. What is happening here is an inner dialectic of the subject which tends to experience the unity of life. The praxis of the subject is, in fact, always composed by this experience. The subject, structured by its narrative, is dwelling within the language, within a dialogue, so it can never be com-

pleted within itself. The subject is asking for the Other, for the one who listens and has a willingness to hear. Good will is the basis of a discursive hermeneutics of the subject that leads human existence to possible forgiveness but not to the final judgment. Rage (in the history of humanity) is just a consequence of the absence of love discovered through the grace of healing. Thus, a poetical way of thinking and story-telling are indicating the way of salvation and they are orientating the being in reference to a forgotten strength of language (as dialogue) and love. For this reason it can be said that the human being does not possess the language, but the language determines man in his/her humanity. Story-telling receives its meaning through its capacity to restore the Self within the unity of life. This restoration asks the subject to recognize but not to deny itself. The story, in other words, has meaning because (t)here is someone who is concerned, who cares for its being and the being of the world. Without the Other, evidently, the subject cannot be reconstituted or, in other words, the story can be completed only by the Other, by the one who witnesses the birth and death of the subject.

“[...] memory is lost in the hazes of early childhood; my birth [...] belongs more to the history of others - in this case, to my parents - than to me. As for my death, it will finally be recounted only in the stories of those who survive to me. I am always moving toward my death, and this prevents me from ever grasping it as a narrative end” (Ricoeur 1992: 160).

The Other, it should also be pointed out, as well as the subject, cannot be the Absolute *by* or *in* itself. Namely, the Other is a necessity because the subject, however, can neither absolutize nor deny itself. This means, the truth is not only subjective or objective. A truth of the being opens itself to mediation and it reveals itself not only by what has been said but also through what has been and what remains suppressed or untold. The experience of the subject, therefore, cannot be simply universalized, objectified or transcended – as it is an important problem of (self)understanding the (im)possibility of the subject to mediate its experience to another. In fact, the historical human existence continuously finds itself placed within a hermeneutical circle, and so, within an unresolved existential problem. This condition originates from the ontology of relationships, an experience of the difference, ...and the differend: “As distinguished from a litigation, a differend (*différend*) would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments” (Lyotard 1988: xi). In this case, “the subject is neither active nor passive, it is both; but it is only one or the other insofar as, caught in one regimen of phrases, it pits against itself a phrase from another regimen, and seeks, if not their reconciliation, then at least the rules for their conflict, namely, the subject’s forever threatened unity” (Lyotard 1988: 64, 65).

The differend becomes unbearable if and when it produces victims. The victim is silent or speaks through silence, the silence which witnesses a neglected nature of humanity. The silence of Auschwitz is, as Lyotard indicates, the result, the voice of the schism. This silence dwells in the essence of our historical being. It is in the essence of language. The question that remains is: how to find and post the voice to express the content of this silence? The task of philosophy is to enable us to hear, feel and think silence in the history, to illuminate experience of the victim, and to prevent an injury to turn itself into injustice. In this sense, story-telling is a way of re-thinking the history which, on the basis of our experience of humanity, restores a possibility and conditions for a real and just community. To resume, it reveals the purpose of history, it reveals the meaning of time. Oblivion of this purpose and meaning is marked by late pacifism, as well as by the subject that is transformed into a crisis of the community. Story-telling is exceeded by visual effects of mass culture, by social life designed in accordance to everyday needs of statistically overlooked world population. The crisis is, however, noted only by, so called, pessimism of critical thinking. Optimism of capitalistic ideology, glorifying individualism as a synthesis of the concept of free expression and economical rationalism, disintegrates everyday life into an abstract evaluation of the community on one hand, and personal interests, on the other. Common sense implodes into carnivalism. Cultural (post)industry, namely, provides a model of hyper-vitalism which re-presents an experience of passive nihilism to be consumed and enjoyed. The death of God is not disturbing anymore. It is a spectacle! The symbolic order is disturbed by the trans-political power of terrorism. So, poetry and story-telling are no longer here to mediate upon the world, but to engage, to find and produce the language which can act as a dialog again, in which language can regain the place of reality and rage can be healed by mercy and understanding. Finally, this could be an overturn in history as it is, a restoration of the poetical way of thinking, a discovery of the subject different to itself, a salvation within the narrative structure of identity: a never-ending story.

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IS THERE A WAY TO SALVATION?**

Summary

History of Western metaphysics, and, consequently, history of European literature is realized as a kind of dialectics of metamorphosis which spins toward the redemption of the subject, toward its salvation within the being as a whole. Salvation has become, on the basis of the factual existential interest of the subject, a core of the narrative practice and philosophical life. This, in other words, means that the idea of salvation is inseparable from the meaning and value of an activity of the subject. At the same time, the symbolic order is disturbed today by the trans-political power of terrorism. For this reason, poetry and story-telling are no longer here to mediate upon the world, but to engage, to find and produce the language which can act as a dialog again, in which language can regain the place of reality and rage can be healed by mercy and understanding. Finally, this could be an overturn in history as it is, a restoration of the poetical way of thinking, a discovery of the subject different to itself, a salvation within the narrative structure of identity.

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