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RE-APPRAISING THE SUBJECT AND THE SOCIAL IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY AND IN CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX THOUGHT

ABSTRACT. The notion of a constitutive lack, which formed the ambivalent initial framework of Western metaphysics, marks the contemporary attempt to think anew the social and the subject. While metaphysics had difficulties to justify ontologically the event of sociality and was tempted to construct a closed subjectivity, post-metaphysical thought by contrast justifies often the sociality of a non-identity. The presuppositions of Orthodox-Christian theology allow us to think of subjectivity and sociality in terms of a different ontology, elaborating a new synthesis between anthropology and eschatology, within which the subject can emerge as radical sociality and natal receptivity, as free and true in its very relationality. The most profound and acute intellectual demands of our present time could then meet central notions of the Orthodox-Christian heritage and point at the perspective of a new historical encounter, which enriches both traditions by mutually engaging to each others fundamental experiences.

KEY WORDS: apophatism, Christos Yannaras, eschatology, John Zizioulas, ontology, otherness, person, plenitude, political philosophy, subject

INTRODUCTION: SOME REMARKS ON TRADITION AND HISTORICAL PRESENT

In this essay, I will attempt to sketch some features of an anthropology of the 'person' [*prósôpon*], in terms of the specific Orthodox-Christian theological–philosophical sense of this concept, especially as it has been re-interpreted and re-defined, over the last three decades, by contemporary Greek theologians such as Christos Yannaras and John Zizioulas. The creative re-discovery of the Eastern patristic tradition, within which the

notion of the person, in its new perception, emerged as a culmination of that tradition, took place primarily in an ecclesiological context, although Yannaras' work as a whole can be read as a progressive attempt to inscribe Orthodox-Christian theology (and especially what could be called ecclesiological ontology) into the framework of modern anthropology. However, the so-called 'theology of the generation of the 60s',[1] notwithstanding the fact that it offered most decisive insights into the character of Orthodox-Christian spirituality and more or less shaped the general orientation of a whole generation of scholars, still referred to a cultural reality that has since undergone crucial transformations. What for those important theologians to a great extent still was a living tradition and a real possibility, has now the transformed meaning of an open, or rather an *opening question*. Their work, their way of perceiving, enabled the younger ones to distinguish and formulate, within a coherent and rich context, a radical need for a spiritual center (which presupposes the intellectual center, but is not exhausted by it), often absent in modern private and social life. It allowed precisely to acknowledge in a profound manner that individual existence could not be separated from a universal [*katholikós*] meaning, at least if it is to aim at the *truth* of itself and not at usefulness or at plain felicity.

The *initial sociality of being* was the main motive and the crucial heritage of that theology of the 60's. But the radical notion of sociality that it offered, the absolute link between being and relationality, was marked to such an extent by a theological priority, that it expressed less a lacking human reality than the self-interpretation of a tradition, which still hoped to regain its buried but not lost unity. This is why the notion of the person, present in this theology, referred primarily to the Persons of the Holy Trinity, and to the consequences that the notion and the reality of the Eucharist can have, at a secondary theoretical level, for a human identity initially structured by it, than to that existence *itself*, in a form that one would be tempted to describe as a naked existence (although such an existence does not really exist, since it can be described only through what it lacks, through an absent positive horizon,

through the radical character of such a horizon). Naked exis-
tence[2] I understand here as one, which cannot begin its spiritual
pursuit from within a given tradition, but from the very absence
of such a tradition, within the very breakdown of a tradition, or
in its fissure, left behind by the tradition as its only trace. In
other words, the primary level of reference remained, for the
theology of the 60s, a living tradition, not the void that shapes
today's initial cultural und individual self-consciousness –
which again is, paradoxically, a relation precisely to the tradi-
tion, the only one that somebody can possibly have to the
cultural past, and this is probably true not only for an Ortho-
dox-Christian, but for most people. It seems to me that we, all
of us,[3] are the children of a certain tradition in being its or-
phans: we have a relation to it as to a father whom we have
never met, whose presence teaches us within the form of his
very absence; this present absence is what bears us, what defines
our existence and our reality, the field and the direction of our
existential needs.

This new situation sets a complicated task for an Orthodox-
Christian today. First, by positing himself not primarily within
the tradition, but within an initial void, the notion of the tra-
dition appears no longer as a question of *continuing* something,
but rather as one of *discovering* something *ex nihilo*. A certain
notion or a certain dimension of the tradition is precisely the
unpredictable donation of that '*nihil*', of that lack of ground.
But this new condition obviously displaces the meaning of
the central notions, since it is a different scope or approach, the
steps of a different kind of way that discloses them. Thus, the
theological concepts are mediated though the individualization
of existence as radical discontinuity, notwithstanding the fact
that this very discontinuity may perhaps reveal its true char-
acter only in so far as it leads to a regain of theological or, more
accurately, religious insights, to new forms or new versions of
the ontological equation between being and relationality as a
culmination of the Orthodox-Christian tradition. This at least
is the way, which I propose in the present paper.

Second, this leads directly to a new interrelation between
contemporary Western thought and the Orthodox-Christian

heritage. Is it not the absence of any positive grounds that shapes today's pursuit of a new thinking, a post-metaphysical or post-foundational one? Does the reality of contemporary thought consist in anything but the 'hatching' [*éclosion*], as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it,[4] of a new meaning, indicating the radical character of a paradigmatic turn in thought, i.e. most of all, a new meaning of the singular existence and of its deepest bonds with social reality? In a paradox way, the contemporary assertion of a new thinking of the human identity and of the social encounters certain aspects of a tradition like Orthodoxy, which at first sight seems very strange to Modernity and to what is at stake in it. But one only needs to recall the case of Emmanuel Lévinas, a thinker with a growing influence during the last decades, whose thought was inspired to a great extent by the Jewish tradition, in order to realize that we have arrived at a point where the very ending of Modernity leads *from within* to *constitutive encounters* with other traditions, with traditions which, though remaining different, simultaneously come to belong to the very definition of one's own identity. At the same time, these other traditions also open themselves to creative transformations of their pre-modern character within the main modern culture and the fundamental questions that it posits. Which ultimately means that to become an Orthodox-Christian (or Jew, or any other cultural identity growing within modern conditions) today would simultaneously mean to adopt the most crucial Western cultural issues *as one's own*, to acknowledge their constitutive role for one's self. This is the structure of an otherness that is outside and beyond myself, but at the same time, and *because* it is beyond myself is also at the kernel that constitutes me.[5]

As I will argue, the end of Modernity, and with it the end of the perspective of an autonomous, self-centered subjectivity, which has been one of Modernity's central claims, led to a decomposition of any notion of closed entity and of its social manifestations, a decomposition which, at the same time, outlines a traumatic, unbearable *initial event* that echoes the inaugural moment of Christian experience. In this view, Modernity has consisted of the formation of a series of

attempts to internalize that event, to integrate it under the control of an identity, which exists *by virtue of this very gesture of imaginary internalization* – but it has also consisted of the repeated acknowledgement of the escape of such an event from every effort to internalize it. Thus, the extensive decomposition of this closure that took place in Western thought throughout the 20th century reveals again the initial event, a form of which designated the specific Christian view of the world in the first place, but designated also the most central and most persistent insight of Modernity itself. Let me now try to specify in greater detail this condition that constitutes the initial point of our theoretical interrogations.

THE INAUGURAL FIELD OF EXPERIENCE

It seems indeed that at the beginning of the 21st century the Western world is about to complete a remarkable movement at the level of intellectual development, by which it would accomplish an unforeseen full circle, a certain kind of closure, and turn back to its roots. These roots can be traced back to the first Christian era and, more specifically, to the particular *field of experience* described initially by Augustine, the great thinker of the 4th and 5th century, whom one might call, with good reasons, the first Western thinker, a symbolic initiator of the Western onto-theological tradition.

Like any closure, this one also can be seen in two opposite, though not independent, perspectives: in relation to what was brought to an end and to the hopes that proved to be illusionary, false projections of a dreaming will; but also in relation to what this end and this disillusionment, this *awakening*, to use a metaphor dear to the Nietzschean prophet of the closure, opens up to.[6] The 'end of philosophy', frequently referred to in our times, requires to rethink the past in view of a deepening repetition of the very questions that have designated Western philosophy and, consequently, of an opening of the tradition to new directions, which, though coming from within, surpass it, surpass its limits and its closure. Let me, therefore, begin by

saying something about the character and the history of this closure.

At the level of a general cultural history, the similarities of our, so-called post-modern, 'globalized' age, to late Antiquity are striking. Among those similarities, the one that interests us here the most refers to the character of multicultural societies, which have lost their common spiritual center, and have caused an existential void, a deep, ontological insecurity, at the level of the individual psyche. It is not the individual psychology or the social facts themselves that interest us here, but rather the conditions of what could be called *experience as such*. In these terms, man came to experience his very singularity in an extreme form, that can be compared only to that of the ancient tragic heroes, who claimed a distinct, personal freedom beyond any established general order, a claim that always had to end up in an aporia.[7] Exposed beyond any traditional meaning of the social and the political, central to the Athenian *polis* as well to the Roman *civitas* as images of an all-encompassing harmony, this singularity has designated the figure of a new experience of the world and, therefore, of human existence.[8] This world is no longer a coherent unity, a totality, and the singularized being experiences itself as thrown into a disturbing multiplicity that leads it to a crucial question: "Who am I?" – a question never heard before with the same dramatic intensity. One needs only to recall the well-known story of the fourth book of the *Confessions* (about 397–401), where the young Augustine experiences the loss of a very dear friend, an event which had such a great impact on him that Augustine described it with the following words: "I became a hard riddle to myself."[9] This event and this formulation are of emblematic importance, because *the self as a problem* is perhaps the most central motive of the whole *Confessions* and one of the main motivations for Augustine's thought in general.[10]

If one tries to formulate more exactly the fundamental experience of Augustine and, therefore, the experience that, in a way, initiates the Western philosophical tradition, then that experience might well be called *the birth and the simultaneous loss of the self in the world*. The fundamental paradox that runs

through the *Confessions* consists in the fact that the event that gives birth to the self is the same event that prevents the self from attaining ontological significance. It seems that the subject is being born as a plain question, i.e. that the ontological abandonment, which is indicated in this question as a prototype of every possible question (one might say: of questioning as a field of existence), singularizes and identifies man in the first place. The question can be seen as a rupture of a totality, which would be the world as cosmological order, where everything finds its pre-established place and defines itself only from within a unity, which ignores the ontological quality of concrete singularities. Exposed and abandoned beyond the familiarity of indissoluble interdependence, beyond the order of totality, delivered at a sudden void, the subject is at the same time born as an ontological mystery.

But who is the bearer of this abandonment, who posits the question, where does experience spring from, if this cannot be me, since I am precisely the 'result' of such an event, of such a birth? We have to conclude that it springs from the rupture, the separation itself, separation from the world as continuity, as unity, as One. At the beginning of his *Confessions*, Augustine describes his profound experience of the world as incoherence, multiplicity, movement, change, and transience – everything that defines the field of material reality. But all this occurs from a still deeper dimension, which is *exteriority as such*. The experience of the world is, for Augustine, traumatic because the world as such is traumatic: it is traumatic, it exists against the horizon of death, exactly because *it comes from outside*, from that which I am not and with which I am not united in a way that would absorb me and deprive me of the possibility to say 'I', *Ego*, or, equally (though this equality is still strange to us), in a way that I would be in control of it and dominate it. The world is exterior to me, given to me from beyond and as a 'beyond', and thus bears me and negates me at the same time: it defines me in its distance, which is also its presence. This presence as such is, at the same time, not only my external limit, but a relativity that defines me, an initial absence of any ontological autarky – I exist *in relation* to it. I am thus

confronted with the world in its otherness and, consequently, with my own being as inaugural relation to that otherness. The traumatic experience at the roots of the Western tradition, the experience which can be said to have initiated and designated the modus of Western spirituality in general and its cultural field, is precisely an encounter with the presence of the otherness as such, the exteriority that gives birth to 'me' – as a question, abandonment and mystery.

In this way, this experience makes 'me' possible, but at the same time it is in a sense impossible as an experience, because the ontological foundation of ancient Greek ontology, which Augustine inherited in spite of his great anthropological innovations, consists in nothing but the concept of essence [*ousía*]. According to this concept, only a pure cause can be true in a metaphysical sense, a *hypokeímenon* [subject], a moving immobility [*kinoún akínêton*], underlying every otherness.[11] The idea of *causa sui*, of a self-creation and, consequently, of an ontological self-sufficiency, so crucial for Western metaphysics in general, has its origins in the Aristotelian metaphysics and in the notion of separate being [*chôristón, kath' ékaston*] as perfection-in-itself [*kath' eautó áriston*] and as self-relation [*eautón noeí o nous*],[12] which he elaborated in terms of cosmological order. But what does that exactly mean for concrete human existence, as Augustine described it? What happens when we transpose Greek cosmological categories to the field of an initially unconditioned anthropology? If the encounter with otherness is at the core of existence as such, if the existent is *ab initio* social, if sociality *is* its very initiation, then, in order to be true, i.e. perfect and self-sufficient, it has to deny at an ontological level its very existence and, along with it, its sociality. There was for Augustine no way of verifying ontologically the experience of the world and the birth of the singular existence, without delivering himself to an ontological and epistemological non-sense, which is nothing other than the site of *nothingness*. The 'co-' of the co-existence, which proved to be the very mode of being of the singular being, could be, at the same time, nothing else than its nothingness, its traumatic negation: "wherever the soul of man attaches itself, wherever it turns

itself, unless toward thee [i.e. also towards interiority], it is enmeshed in sorrows."[13] Thus, relationality, the initial *ec-stasis* in the world as an essentially common place, as a field of openness, the very event that would deserve the word of sociality, came to be identified with death.

This *double-bind* at the very foundations of being led Augustine, and with him the entire onto-theological tradition that followed him at this crucial point, to the gesture of an *internalization of experience* and, therefore, of otherness as the spring of experience. With him started the motif of interiority and the interpretation of freedom as autonomy, as a negation of the negation (in a sense, of course, very different from the Hegelian one, which, nevertheless, would have been impossible without Augustine's decisive first step), eventually as closure. The ontological division of soul and body, the order of reason as epistemologically superior to the order of the senses, the peace and the unity inside, as a site of morality, against the chaos and the dangers of the evil outside, all these were dimensions of a whole series of subtle philosophical systems according to which the world can only be truly seen through the eyes of a self-referential will and, more precisely, as its inner elucidations. What makes everything, i.e. experience, exteriority, and, ultimately, myself, possible and real, is not to be found anywhere else than in the principles of my own individuality – as this, of course, emerges (and immediately shapes itself normatively) through the idea of God (which, again, is to be found internally, leading us almost to a tautology between my own self-constituting will and God). In that sense, metaphysics can be described as a way of *constant withdrawal from the inaugural event of encounter or ec-stasis that gives birth to a human identity as being-with* [*mit-sein*], – withdrawal to an inner place, which ontologically precedes the very birth of subjectivity in the world (and, consequently, also precedes sociality) by annihilating the gap from which this birth emerges. It is precisely this withdrawal in which Nietzsche saw the quintessence of nihilism.[14] Nevertheless, under the secondary gesture of withdrawal, ec-statical encounter itself, the aforementioned gap, received through Augustine the importance of a primordial event, which

opened a new existential perspective and became the main anthropological and metaphysical problem.

METAPHYSICS AS WITHDRAWAL FROM OPENNESS

In fact, one can follow without great difficulties the strains of Augustine's metaphysics deep into the history of Western thought. Let us briefly recall two major examples. The first famous transcription of the Augustinian experience in Modernity is no other than the Cartesian doubt. At the beginning of the second of his *Meditations* (1641), we read: "... just as if I had fallen all of a sudden into very deep water, I am so greatly disconcerted as to be unable either to plant my feet firmly on the bottom or sustain myself by swimming on the surface."[15] But soon after, Descartes, in a way analogous to Augustine's, will deny his immersion into the "deep water" and the new life that this immersion bears, and will *use* (*who* will use it?) this doubt in order to justify a progressive detachment from the exteriority as the only possible verification of truth:

> I will now close my eyes, I will stop my ears, I will turn away my senses from their objects, I will even efface from my consciousness all the images of corporeal things; or at least, because this can hardly be accomplished, I will consider them as empty and false; and thus, holding converse only with myself, and closely examining my nature, I will endeavor to obtain by degrees a more intimate and familiar knowledge of myself ... although the things which I perceive or imagine are perhaps Nothing at all apart from me [and in themselves], I am nevertheless assured that those modes of consciousness which I call perceptions and imaginations, in as far only as they are modes of consciousness, exist in me.[16]

For the self-founding Cartesian subject, otherness can have no epistemological and, in particular, no ontological relevance; on the contrary, it is exactly what has to be decomposed in order for true subjectivity to appear. Truth coincides with the autonomy of reason, it is the perfection of a solitude which is but a representation of the will-to-self, the idea itself of a "thinking thing"[17] in the terrain of a self-positing cogito. Even the idea of infinity, on which Lévinas so much insisted in his

interpretation of Descartes, may initially seem to transcend closure, but it rather completes the paradox character of closure, by actually extending it beyond any limits. Because 'beyond any limits' is not only the face of the other, what I call *the eschatological*, but also *the fictitious*: an entity free not by means of a radical change of identity, bursting from the *annihilating and resurrecting* presence of the other, but by means of an untouchable, infinite interiority. This is precisely the reason for which we hold, against Lévinas, ontology for indispensable.[18]

In my eyes, Modernity began, quite symbolically, not only with the establishment of human existence as such in the center of philosophical interest, but, quite as much, with a desired image of this existence, a construction of an ideal self who reverses the experience of radical doubt – which, nevertheless, is always lying at the very roots of this reversion and, hence, of this self. In this reversion, it transforms itself from an asked, and thus initially passive, receiving, entity, into an asking, thus ex nihilo active one. The crucial point here is that this excess of will, this excess that the will is, negates the very being of existence by negating the inaugural presence of the other. If it is otherness indeed that creates ex nihilo the space of my existence by calling me to being in the sense of being-with, then the denial of that being-with is connected to the denial of my very existence. And existence *should* be denied in these terms, as far as the first mode, or the first shape, of the being-with (with which it coincides), is an ontological hovering, a suspension of being, a lack, absence of ground or nothingness itself, which appears not as '0', but, fundamentally, as '1–1', everything minus everything, as a present absence against the horizon of pure presence, which suddenly emerges. Naught is but the site of the primordial emergence of beings outside myself, a site of openness in which everything appears in its difference, i.e. in its truth[19] – an openness which marks also the existential mode of movement towards exteriority, the mode of *being-called ex nihilo*.[20] "Naught" is a name for the place where a *call towards being* can be heard, that is, where being emerges as an exclusively eschatological reality. The denial of this birth-into-death, which is simultaneously a death-into-being, leads the subject to

a denial of both birth and death, i.e. to a lifeless ontological autarky. Thus, the question of a perspective beyond this denial seems to be the question of the possibility (or not) of verifying existentially death and, simultaneously, of passing through to a notion of being other than autonomy and closure, i.e. of an identity not preceding the horizon of birth (which is idealism in its various forms, as the site of an a-temporal, *ab initio* and hence in itself fulfilled entity), but transcending the horizon of death and of the threat that it posits – which indicates, as we will see further on, an eschatological anthropology and, simultaneously, an ontological affirmation of sociality. Can we perceive our own existence not by virtue of an opposition to nothingness, i.e. not as self-referential independency, but as free receptivity, as the step towards a donated relation to otherness, which would emerge *within nothingness*, though transcending it at the same time? This is precisely what is at stake here phenomenologically.

The refusal to change, to open itself up to a terrifying otherness, invents the space of the will and of power. But these should not appear as such, because this would reveal the source out of which they spring. If otherness has to be as such denied, then it should ideally not even appear as an existing problem, but rather as the reality of my own true nature, as an ingredient of my structure. Kant's moral philosophy is illuminating at this point. Starting, once again, from the same experience of the exposure to an inaugural being-with, which Kant calls "heteronomy" and which he acknowledges, in his *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785), as a source of painful passivity [*Leiden*],[21] he defines morality in relation to the idea of a free subject – free, of course, as autonomous, as "a priori efficient cause",[22] i.e. as a kind of human *actus purus*:

As a rational being, and consequently belonging to the intelligible world, man can never conceive the causality of his own will otherwise than on condition of the idea of freedom, for independence of the determinate causes of the sensible world (an independence which reason must always ascribe to itself) is freedom. Now the idea of freedom is inseparably connected with the conception of autonomy, and this again with the universal principle of morality, which is ideally the foundation of all actions of rational beings, just as the law of nature is of all phenomena.[23]

Though heteronomy primarily means being-ruled by something or someone else and not directly being-with, the problem consists in the fact that Kant does not make a distinction between those two, i.e. that the external origin of things (and, therefore, being-with them) is a priori understood as being-ruled by them. Being-with is accepted as such only where it is guided by the guidelines of the interior (transcendental and practical) moral law. This moral law is intrinsically bound up to the idea of freedom as causality and, thus, as autonomy. Morality here does not emerge from the presence of the other as such, on the contrary, it seems to emerge from a self-positing will, from a will that wills itself, from a law that posits itself, i.e. from a gesture of defining things according to the idea of an ideal self – an essentially closed self. Kant's morality emerges from within, from an independent interiority; it is a result of a self-limitation that serves indirectly a self-liberation ad infinitum. If in Kantian morality my limit is not you, your concrete presence in this world (a presence which emerges as the center of my being in the world) but, again, myself, then nothing else exists as my limit: I become the very otherness of myself and nothingness disappears as my very site. The moral law is the reversal of experience, thus Kant speaks of "laws which being independent of nature have their foundation not in experience but in reason alone" (A452, B82) – which seems to refer not only to the 'empirical' or 'scientific' notion of experience, but rather to experience as such in general, as openness to exteriority. Because this is so, morality serves finally nothing other that the project of an ideal self: "man really finds in himself a faculty by which he distinguishes himself from everything else, even from himself as affected by objects, and that is reason."[24] In order not to verify his separation from exteriority, i.e. in order not to let exteriority appear in its initially dangerous and threatening otherness, which would expose the singular being to an ontological hovering, Kant performs an *inner division*, according to which true nature of things rests in a self who is *distinguished from his own existence*, that is, in a totally independent mental, 'noumenal' self, from whose freedom the moral law emerges as such. Within that self-positing self, i.e.

within the self-positing moral law, the other is no more a menace, but the very vehicle by which his own absence is verified. Ultimately, at its deepest level, this morality serves such a purely closed self.

SOCIALITY, SUBJECTIVITY, TRUTH

One does not need to compare the self of Kantian ethics with some heroes from Dostojevskij's novels, such as Kyrillov (from *Demons*), or, especially, Goljadkin (from *The Double*), in order to be troubled about the underlying reality of the anthropological structure that these ethics express. The modern city as an image of the subject's socio-political structure has revealed to us an understanding of citizenship and of sociality that did not overcome the nostalgia, or the will of an essentially independent self, but rather pushed them further. The fatal displacement of the Greek cosmological ontology by the modern, more anthropological ontology has had as its most crucial consequence the *difficulty of confirming the social on an ontological level*. I am asking myself whether in Modernity the social *as such* did attain primal ontological significance, one that would elevate it to *truth itself*. Is not rather the contrary true, that exteriority always represented the field of a traumatic and impossible passivity, identified with an impossible death, which had to be somehow transcended in order for the individual to be 'true', i.e. self-sufficient? This would mean that the social mainly supported, in various forms, the desired closure: otherness appeared only in its denied form, *it appeared* only *in order to disappear*, i.e. in order to be proven as an internal ingredient of a detached individuality – otherness served an indirect detachment.

Indeed, it would be of secondary importance whether the aforementioned support was direct or indirect. In the opening sentences, for instance, of Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651), the State [*civitas*] is called immediately "an artificial man" that is a construction of the will. It is also clear that the Hobbesian civil state does not incarnate any other anthropological quality than the so-called natural state, in which the famous war of all

against all rules human lives. The struggle for self-preservation is as present in the civil state as it is in the natural one: the first is created precisely in order to organize and, thus, to secure, through rationality, the natural impetus and its inherent violence. As Giorgio Agamben has argued following Walter Benjamin, the natural state is rather a constant possibility *within* the civil state, one that appears in situations of crisis, when rationality loses its *raison d' être*.[25] On the other hand, Kant's formulation of an extremely severe ethical obligation seems to emerge from a different anthropological principle – but is this really the case? I question this, because 'natural' for Kant is, actually, the same as it is for Hobbes, namely, individual autonomy, notwithstanding the fact that it is assumed on a higher, metaphysical level. But one could argue that the metaphysical character of autonomy does not restrict, but rather intensifies its hidden negativity against otherness, even though (or precisely because) this height (and this negativity) is constituted through ethics.

The composition of an ethical system, even the most strict and idealistic, does not necessarily offer *a verification of the other in his otherness*. We have to pose the question how important the latter would be. Are a morality and a sociality, which emerge within a broader framework of ontological nihilism and of anthropological closure acceptable or even desired? What exactly are we in pursuit of: a functional social organization that serves best our private desires, or even our most sublime ideals about ourselves, or the *truth and freedom of existence*, independent of where these lead us? The crucial point here is that by identifying being as nature and nature as individuality, modern philosophy could perceive in sociality primarily the perspective of a restriction of freedom and of being, since otherness by definition lies beyond individuality. Would this 'beyond' mean a loss of every personal identity, of every perspective to be free, does it designate a field of a definite nonsense?

I have already argued that individuality exists in the first place only as self-transcendence, that is, only as ec-static singularity. 'Individuality' as an idea and as a concept of an

independent, self-existing identity indicates rather a withdrawal from that fundamental event of exposure to the call-to-presence, of the deliverance to the inaugural presence of the other, which designates the very birth of the existent to the horizon of his truth. Because individuality represents a denial of existence, it cannot escape the fundamental duality between an impulse not to be, to vanish into inexistence, and, on the other hand, an impulse to exist absolutely – a duality clearly formulated in the Freudian couples of sexual instincts and instincts of ego or self-preservation, in the early period, and between death- and life instincts, in the late period of his thought. Both categories of the two pairs of impulses (in which the anthropology of Modernity seems to be epitomized) represent, according to Freud, two forms of narcissism, that always exist in unity und that are unsurmountable within human beings: a biological narcissism, in the case of "ego-" and "life-instinct", and a darker narcissism, in the case of "death instinct", which reminds us of the structure of metaphysical subjectivity and its freedom (think again of Kyrillov, as well as of our previous analysis).[26]

In terms of these metaphysical notions, the other can be either threatening, or, at best, useful: he cannot be *true*, he cannot be the source of a personal freedom that is metaphysical and, at the same time, the very center of my corporeal existence – the other cannot be *condition* of my being present *and* a free person. Within those premises, if sociality and individual freedom are acknowledged as equally indispensable for us, we face a fatal dilemma: either we accept the social condition as a necessary vehicle in order to attain the broadest possible individual profit, or we seek freedom and, in that case, we turn to a fictional independence. But in both options, neither singular existence nor sociality is really present: rather their mere fictions are present. The central thesis of the present paper is that those two fundamental dimensions, sociality and freedom, arise *simultaneously* as the common meaning of existence, that they present two aspects of one and the same fundamental event, which takes place at the center of the world, and which is also the precise point where the world opens up to what transcends

it, or where the world *becomes openness*. If opening up means by definition an event which does not arise from within the properties of the self (in that case it would be no real opening), then it is always a relational opening, a communion with a transcendent otherness, which, moreover, defines me as an answering entity, an entity which finally does not belong to itself. This otherness is, of course, not a punctual something and it cannot be encountered as a reified entity – on the contrary, it is encountered and known within a site of existence beyond punctuality and objectifying representation, beyond closure. It is, thus, precisely what *can* be known – *if* by knowledge we understand not an intentionality which presupposes the subject, but rather the event which brings the subject to its *true being as being-known*. In that sense, "what" we open up to by becoming ourselves in transcending ourselves is the very event of the call to become ourselves in this open space (in terms of Orthodox-Christian theology: we open up to otherness' *energies*, not to its *substance*) – a space of an inaugural encounter which is not only created ex nihilo by a calling otherness, but it is the very appearance of otherness as such. Transcendent otherness is not the objective cause of the call, but its ontological modality. Without such otherness, everything (even our opening) would be but the echo of our own voice in an empty space (in fact, not even our voice could exist therein).

At this point it also becomes visible why the idea of a unified community, in its various versions, cannot be a real alternative to individualism: it presupposes a community, i.e. it posits a sociality *before* the emergence of personal existence. Thus, it is not a sociality as the truth and the freedom of the human identity, but as an impersonal totality. If sociality is 'an experience that makes us be',[27] if 'being-in-common is contemporaneous with singular existence and coextensive with its spatiality',[28] then nothing true precedes personal existence for *the same reason* that nothing true precedes social existence: they both arise ex nihilo. Only the cognate fictions of individual freedom and of a pre-established, substantial community escape the acknowledgement of sociality as the meaning of

singularity itself: 'If being is sharing, *our* sharing, then "to be" (to exist) is to share'.[29] Which is personal freedom, freedom as relation: 'In relation, "human beings" are not given – but it is relation alone that can give them "humanity". It is freedom that gives relation by withdrawing being. It is freedom that gives humanity and not the inverse'.[30] And this comes close to central notions of Yannaras' thought: 'The event of relation "gives birth" to the subject [...] I am a subject because I constitute a hypostatic existential response to the other's call – a call to *relation* [*schésis*] in plenitude'.[31]

The equation of personal identity to true sociality begins with the deliverance to a void, and this void is in a sense the very first social event, the first mode or shape that sociality takes. It is precisely this void and this deliverance, which are impossible (or simply negative) in a closed community, which regards itself as 'natural'. However, it is equally important to acknowledge that the alternative of a fictitious naturalness does not lie in the plain affirmation of a construction. If natural vs. artificial designated the theoretical pendulum of modern political thought, then we should rather seek for that which escapes and surpasses that dilemma – which I regard to be *creativity*, as distinct not only from the naturally given, but also from the constructed. And the criterion for that distinction is that while construction serves an expansion of a fictitious individuality and, hence, negates the outburst of otherness within the self and, also, the birth of the singular self into the world, creation and creativity have rather to be understood as an ec-static attuning with otherness' calling mode. I.e. creativity is the involvement in a profound existential dialogue, which, as Hölderlin puts it, makes us be.[32]

But if creativity is such an ec-static involvement, it begins with a deliverance to a traumatic otherness – a deliverance beyond any 'natural' community. For Maximus Confessor, natural can only be this very deliverance, this movement of the singular being from inexistence towards true existence, this middle field where being is born into its eschatological perspective.

Everything that has been created endures movement as passion [*páschei to kineísthai*] because it does not constitute self-movement [*autokínêsis*] or self-enforcing [*autodýnamis*]. Therefore, if the logical beings [i.e. human beings, IP] are born ones, then they are anyhow in motion. Because, as is natural [*katá phýsin*], due to the fact that they exist, they move voluntary from a beginning to an end, with a view to achieving well-being [*eu eínai*]. Because the end of the motion of everything that moves is, precisely, to be always in well-being [*en to aeí eu eínai estín*], whereas the beginning of the motion is being itself [*autó to eínai*]. And this is God, the giver [*dotêr*] of being and donator [*charistikós*] of well-being, because God is the beginning and the end.[33]

Thus, neither individuality nor sociality is, in these terms, natural: natural is only the absence of sociality *and* of true subjectivity, i.e. the arrival at the 'consciousness' of the meta-physical deficit, which at the same time is a movement towards well-being [*eu eínai*], that in the Maximian context is under-stood as transcendence of deficit, i.e. as plenitude. Natural is, hence, only a receiving of a call to being-in-relation, i.e. to the end and the meaning of beings in general. In that sense, crea-tivity is but the *affirmation* of this very passion of existential movement, a natal receptivity, the human attuning to the metaphysical ends of nature itself. In that sense, to be created means in the end nothing else than to be creative.

It is important to see, that the event of emptiness *does not yet* designate the field of sociality, but rather indicates it as the end of the movement, the movement that the emptiness as such is. The end, the plenitude of being, a profoundly social reality, is the eschatological meaning of nature and of being-created. We will comprehend this crucial point through summarizing what we consider to be the present condition for political and theo-logical thought.

AN ESCHATOLOGY OF RELATIONALITY

Because the main notion of identity within the Western onto-theological tradition was attached to closure as the existential modus, which expresses essentialism, the decomposition of closure could not but simultaneously mean the decomposition

of identity in general. Thus, the post-foundational subject is often the site of a non-identity, which risks perceiving and experiencing its openness as mere fluidity or as a playfull multitude of identities.[34] To my mind, however, openness is the very opposite of fluidity: while the fluid being is in a fundamental sense absent from the world and, at the same time, from itself, the open being is present *par excellence*. Gilles Lipovetsky, in an insightfull exposition of the intersubjective structure of the late-modern condition, underlines the paradox coincidence of socialization and de-socialization – that, in other words, our very way of sociality forwards a 'de-localization' of the self. The fluid, post- or late-modern narcissistic self is the sole origin of (the multiple idols of) himself and, precisely for that reason, he is absent from himself and the world.[35]

While the fluid being is everywhere and nowhere, the open one is radically *here*, which is but the site of a response: "I am, I am here, I am here in hearing your voice."[36] 'Here' is the site of an event of absoluteness, of sociality as the event of truth. Openness and presence form a tautology: I am present only as openness, since I exist only as a response to the inaugural call, which exteriority as such is. There is not any otherness prior to this call, and, similarly, I do not exist prior to this call. The call does not come after being, it is not a gesture from a being, which is previously constituted as such and then calls, i.e. communicates. On the contrary, according to a paradoxical logic that lies at the very foundations of Christian experience, I am, everything is, even God is, in the very social event, in an event of absolute, natal relationality. For Orthodox-Christian theology, God is not primarily a substance, but a Person, the Father: an identity of initial, ec-static relationality (also the Son and the Holy Spirit indicate relational entities). What makes Divinity exist is the Father, not only in his Economic dimension, but also in the very reality of the Trinity. This means that relationality does not restrict being, on the contrary, it is the very site of being as being, i.e. as God's image, an image of absolute personal freedom, an incarnation of truth. The general insistence of Zizioulas, for example, on the difference between Divine Economy and Trinitarian reality has this crucial

consequence, namely that relation is ultimately not understood in terms of finitude, but, on the contrary, of infinity:

God's oneness is not safeguarded by the unity of substance (...) but by the *monarchía* of the Father. It is also expressed through the unbreakable *koinônía* (communion) that exists between the three Persons, which means that otherness is not a threat to unity but the *sine qua non* of unity.[37]

If one thinks of Schelling, one can perhaps estimate the importance of this point: it was precisely the difficulty of the Western metaphysical tradition, culminating in its two major paradigms of Kant's absolute gap between the finite and the ('spurious') infinite and Hegel's absolute (and, hence, atheistic or pantheistic) unification of them, it was this difficulty to comprehend relationality in terms of infinity that led to the idea of God's dependence and finitude, an idea which, through various paths, led to Hans Jonas' myth of an imperfect, becoming God, a God who is ontologically endangered and, thus, in my eyes at least, annihilated.[38] The understanding of relationality in terms of infinity avoids precisely this fatal dilemma, the one horn of which consists in God's essential closure (which, theologically, puts in question even Creation itself: why does God create if this creation has nothing to do with His very Being? – and, also, how can such a creation relate itself to God, in what sense can it be His image and become ontologically true?), and the other horn in His mere absorption into finitude.[39]

God in Orthodox-Christian theology is relational, 'loving' in the Christian metaphorical language, neither because He *must* relate in order to exist, nor because this is, in a secondary sense, derived from His independent Being, i.e. from a primordial essence, but because relation *is* His very Being. God is primarily the Father, even His divinity and His substance are constituted through this primordial loving gesture, a cosmogonic gesture, which posits beings from the very beginning in the perspective of relation to Him, in the perspective of truth as free relationality. Freedom, relationality, and God's image are thus synonymous terms.[40] It is important, however, to stress the word "perspective": relationality does not represent an initial state of

beings. Maximus Confessor, in a very important passage, considers the possibility of an interpretation according to which there was nothing prior to the Fall.[41] Though elements of a Neo-Platonic reading of *Genesis* of course survived through the entire patristic era (with Origen of Alexandria as a central figure in that point), nevertheless the main tendency was in general anti-idealistic, i.e. eschatological. The Paradise, as a metaphor of the very ontological reality of being-in-relation, was not 'lost' because it never existed as a completed reality: it is, on the contrary, that towards which man exists, it is the open horizon of truth, or openness as truth. What humans ontologically are, comes not from the past or from the beginning, but from that towards which they are moving. Adopting and radically transforming Aristotle's notion of entelechy, Maximus developed a notion of inverted cause, according to which the beginning was caused by the end, which ultimately means that creation exists not in itself, not as an already fulfilled reality, but only in the perspective of its freedom.[42] It is within freedom that creation takes place and attains its true ontological character, not the other way around. But 'within freedom' does not mean that we already and necessarily are free, it means that the site of our truth is not creation as an end in itself, as a binding fact, but it is rather, paradoxically, *the liberation from any factuality through creation*, as a work of our freedom. It is within that liberation, within that absolute freedom, that we are simultaneously in relation to God. Absolute freedom and relationality as such coincide.

This logic, however, is paradoxical. A first difficulty consists in the ontological importance of something, which, in a sense, has not yet 'happened', is not yet an objective fact. We habitually understand as ontologically true something already given and completed and perceive everything else as fictitious, in other words, we are used to thinking proto-logically. The notion of hope obtains here an ontological meaning, because, rather than being a mere psychological quality within an identity negating its rupture, its nothingness, i.e. negating otherness within an infinite interiority, or an infinite will against being as being-with (remember, among others, Nietzschean

resentment), hope here indicates rather what absolute experience, 'experience of experience' as Nancy puts it in a Heideggerian manner, amounts to.[43] An identity, which is absolutely delivered to its very 'beyond', is opened to its being as donation from outside, as an ex nihilo received call-to-being. ''I hope'' means: I exist in relation to that which I do not control and which I am not, but which is offered to me and in which 'I' (an ec-static self, a self as self-transcendence) truly exists. True hope emerges only within the very event of decomposition of the negative, imaginarily closed, subjectivity. The offer (the self as offered) reveals itself as such only within the very event of this inaugural loss. Hope indicates an eschatological ontology, one within which birth is paradoxically 'caused' by the resurrection, the given is 'caused' (i.e. ontologically located or specified) by the liberated, precisely in the perspective of its final, liberated truth. Located, and not determined, since we are dealing here with a notion of cause as the very liberation of the caused. Liberation from inexistence, liberation to otherness, liberation as relation, which is the exact opposite of liberation as *causa sui*.

That leads us to a second difficulty, or the second level of the same difficulty. Which is the coincidence of the work of freedom with the radical passivity that being created implies. I would, in particular, speak of a *creative passivity*, suggesting that these terms are tautological, since, for Maximus, man is co-creator of the world in his very relation to God, in his very being receptivity.[44] The Creation is not a granted reality, once and for all given, but a dynamic one, existing only through man's existential perspective to make out of a given materiality the novelty of an unpredicted, free life, to *create meaning by relating himself to otherness*. We, thus, have here *being-with as meaning*, as absolute receptivity and, at the very same time, as absolute creativity: sociality ex nihilo.

BEING-WITH: LACK OR PLENITUDE?

In a sense only freedom, only the Absolute, exists. But that does not mean that particularity, creation, finitude, are denied. The

understanding of relationality in terms of infinity does not exclude the meaning of corporeal existence. On the contrary, the importance of this tradition lies precisely in claiming that it is only through an ontology of freedom that finitude can be located. However, located does not mean founded in the usual, metaphysical sense, it rather means verified within the very event of lack of ground; it means being-called to an absolute presence coming from an exterior infinity.

These insufficient and awkward formulations try to indicate a subtle point, which constitutes a central thesis of this essay. It becomes clearer when one thinks of the notion of 'apophatism' that is fundamental to the Orthodox-Christian tradition in general. Apophatic theology, ever since its first formulation in the so-called Areopagetic Writings, means the inability of human individual properties (especially the rational ones are here in view), to comprehend the essence of God. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite (2000) shaped a language of negations, whereby God is always located in a beyond, at an infinite distance. But that does not make truth impossible for man, on the contrary, it is exactly what makes truth accessible, i.e. what makes *incarnation of truth* possible. A skeptical position, whether in its atheist or in its fideist version, is foreign to Orthodox-Christian spirituality and it was precisely this rejection of skepticism that gave Gregorios Palamas, in the 14th century, the chance to formulate once again from the beginning an ontology of the Person. Apophatism does not point at a lack of truth, but at a plenitude of truth. The notion of lack refers only to fictive truths in order to indicate truth itself as plenitude; it also refers to the protological, *relative truth* of being-created, which is nevertheless ontologically illuminated only through its eschatological framework, i.e. through being-free. From an eschatological perspective (i.e. from the perspective of *absolute truth*) there cannot be any lack or any negation, because God is pure affirmation. The lack refers to a fiction so far as the self within which the will to derive things from its own order, i.e. the closed self, is fictive – for such a self, truth is always infinitely distant. But for the self-annihilated self, who exists towards his own openness as being-in-relation (and it is at this

self that apophatism aims), truth is present in and as infinite proximity. In this sense, Palamas and others, insisted on a corporeal notion of truth, which indicates not an empiricist or scientific mode (which maintains an absolute metaphysical distance from otherness as such), but a mode of incarnation of relation, of incarnation *as* relation. This does not indicate a possibility of possessing truth (truth is nothing with which one can have a possessing relation), but it does indicate an existential possibility of being-true in the very mode of referring to an inconceivable otherness. The distance to this otherness generates truth and not the impossibility of truth: as difference [*diaphorá*], it generates communion, within the ontological frame of which this distance, this difference, can only take place, it does not generate division [*diaíresis*].

Precisely here lies a crucial difference from today's discourse about the possibility of a post-foundational thought, a difference that also has crucial consequences at the level of ethics and of political thought. Following primarily Freud and Heidegger, the present post-foundational discourse usually identifies openness with a definitive deliverance to the lack. E.g. the psychoanalytic theory in the context of important contemporary thinkers, but also the multifaceted track of the deconstruction of metaphysics, elaborate (before or beyond every possible secondary differentiation between them) a concept of subjectivity as distance from an imagined harmonious unity, from an essence or a *Ding*.[45] Which means that the horizon remains indirectly, in that very negativity, the same as in metaphysics, and that thought remains proto-logically structured. The subject exists in constant reference to an unattainable perfection and, consequently, otherness has rather the status of an inner trauma, since it is what initiates 'me' as the site of a definitive lack, as relation to an empty place, to refer to Claude Lefort's interpretation of modern democracy.[46] A self of an initially broken will (which is but the essence of desire) is of course not the same as the self of pure will (of a perfect closure), but it still refers to the same ontological coordinates. Returning, precisely, to the roots of Augustinian experience, contemporary philosophy in general asserts an otherness which

coincides with my inner division, my non-identity, and points to an ontological horizon of absolute finitude which runs the risk of remaining the inversed form of metaphysical idealism.

According to contemporary critique, the concept of totality was a theological one; this is true, but I am asking myself whether the transgression of totality could, perhaps, emerge again only in a theological perspective rather than in an anti-theological one, as is typical of Modernity. It is also true that a series of important contemporary thinkers have already began to acknowledge this within the context of modern philosophy and have in the recent years proposed very interesting synthe-ses. From an Orthodox-Christian point of view, otherness, as that which ruptures totality, is not identified as the absence of being, but is only indicated in this absence (as its first form), in the same way that something is indicated within an arrow that points at it and thus reveals it. Absence is precisely that arrow, not truth itself; it refers, as a negation, to the false subjectivity that attempted to found itself as essential closure. It refers also to the *nihil*, which is the ontological origin of beings, the *beginning* of their truth, whereas the *end* of their truth is their purpose, their *Logos*: their being-free as self-transcendent communion. Thus truth itself, from within which absence emerges as a negation of fiction and, also, as the very unfolding of creation, is pure affirmation beyond every will towards self-sufficiency and every desire for an impossible perfection. Truth lies in the presence and the plenitude of being as generosity, as free, metaphysical, fertility: as donation of life, which, at the very same time, is also its ex nihilo reception – *creative passivity*.

Openness is, thus, not the opposite of plenitude, but its own modality. Here, openness is not a self-constructing will, which emerges as the self-negation of an absolute identity; on the contrary, it is the transcendence of such a will. If this will is actually the unwillingness to be and to die (though in that very unwillingness life and death appear for the first time), then true existence lies beyond them. In a certain sense, the difference could be said to be that modern thought remains often attached solely at the event of the Cross, that it sees in the self-inflicted passion already the birth of subjectivity, whereas in an

Orthodox-Christian perspective, the truth of the subject depends absolutely on the resurrection.

Subjectivity and sociality thus refer, ultimately, to that presence and to that plenitude, to an ontological and existential site beyond every lack, although it was precisely that lack in which the absent truth appeared as such, to begin with – that is also why my aim here has not been to negate the Augustinian heritage, but rather to deepen its initial perspectives. Lack epistemologically mediates plenitude, whereas plenitude ontologically mediates lack. In that sense, the contemporary philosophical insistence on lack provides Orthodox-Christian theology with a 'proto-logical' concern about the origins and about the complexity of the human existence that, in a profound manner, illuminates and opens that theology to new, unexpected perspectives, from within and from without. At the same time, an ontology of the subject and the social, enlightened in the perspective of Orthodox-Christian eschatology, can possibly provide to contemporary thought, also from within and from without, a new interpretation and a new truth of *its own being* and of its own profoundest, inaugural experiences.

NOTES

[1] The first major works of Zizioulas (a thesis on the importance of the bishop for the unity of the church during the first three Christian centuries) and Yannaras (a thesis on the ontology of the person in comparison with Heideggerian and Sartrean phenomenology) were published at the end of the 60s and at the beginning of the 70s, both thinkers remaining productive, with important texts, during the decades that followed.

[2] In recent years Giorgio Agamben has unfolded a subtle und multi-facetted thought around the central motif of naked existence. See the notion of *Limbo* in Agamben (1990), and, in a different perspective, of *Homo Sacer* in Agamben 1995.

[3] Although some parts of the world (and countries where Christian-Orthodox religion is strongly represented belong to those), which till recently lived more or less within a cultural continuity (despite of all multiplicity and of the historical changes), experienced the encounter with Modernity as much more abrupt as the main part of Europe did, because they only imported certain aspects of Modernity as abstract schemes, as final products, without having first adequately gone through the very process of

assimilating the inner motives of Modernity – which had the effect of a kind of individual and collective puzzlement and disorientation.

[4] Nancy (1988) [p. 15 of the English edition; all further references of this text will refer to the pages of the English edition].

[5] For centuries, that other within the same was the Jew. But since the extended globalization of our societies and the general presence of representatives of other cultures within the Western world, the other within is no more only the Jew, but, in a sense, the whole world. This creates a new situation for every culture, new horizons of acculturations and of the very meaning of the term of cultural tradition

[6] Nietzsche (1992), 'Das trunkne Lied', 12.

[7] Zizioulas has argued that the Christian notion of freedom was first indicated in the tragic *hybris*, in which the theatrical persona [*prosôpeíon*] tended to the person [*prósôpon*] as to its ontological fundament. *Prosôpeíon* and *prósôpon* descend etymologically from the verbal *pros ôpa*, 'towards the eyes/face' [*ôps*]: this could mean either the part of the head where the eyes are, in which case 'person' is linked with 'sight', or it means being directed to the eyes/face of someone else (see Babiniotis, 2002, p. 1501), i.e. it means being seen, exposed at a foreign presence – in any case, the etymology indicates a fundamental encounter. Without the notion of the person, however, which according to Zizioulas was the achievement of the Greek Fathers of the Church only, freedom as *hybris*, though rightfully sketched, could not but end up in ontological absurdity. See Zizioulas, 1993, pp. 27–49.

[8] See McClelland, 1996, pp. 91 ff., for an account on the political and cultural situation of late antiquity and for its importance for the thought of Augustine.

[9] Augustine, *Confessiones*, IV, 4.9.

[10] Taylor (1989, pp. 136–140), speaks of the dramatic opposition between inner–outer as central motif and of the ideas of self-presence and self-love (as images of God) as Augustine's answer to that problem (p. 136); Caputo (2001), underlines that 'Augustine's conversion involved a self-transformation of Augustine himself into a question unto himself (p. 30); Flasch (1994), also insists on the bonds between Augustine's theology and his experiences in a rapidly declining historical world, which themselves are linked with the very transformations of himself (see p. 8, 71, 108, 150, 403, 408, et al.).

[11] See Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, 1017b, 1073a, 3. It is important to see, as we will do later on, that Aristotelian metaphysics comprised also crucial elements, which pointed in a different direction, such as the concepts of motion, of the difference between primal and secondary substance, and of the soul's passivity. It is those aspects that led, in their adoption and radical transformation by Maximus Confessor, to a radically open ontology, i.e. an ontology of personal freedom.

[12] *Metaphysica*, 1028a, 1072b, 21–24.

[13] *Confessiones*, IV, 10.15.

[14] See the first treatise of 'Zur Genealogie der Moral', in Nietzsche (1984).

[15] Descartes, Meditationes de prima philosophia, II, 1.

[16] Meditationes, III, 1.

[17] Meditationes, VI, 19.

[18] In the recent years, Michel Henry and Jean-Luc Marion have elaborated a different interpretation of Descartes, especially through his late work *Les passions de l' âme* (1650), wherein the soul would be seen as receptive through itself, present in itself through a self-inflicted passion *before any mediating representation*, which, in Augustinian manner, would also be will's self-willing before the emergence of any objectivity – see Henry (1985) and Marion (1988). The problem with this phenomenological approach (as also with Lévinas', though due to different reasons) consists in that it seems to overlook the ontological and, at the same time, anthropological dimension of resurrection. If subjectivity is primarily receptivity by itself, i.e. if receptivity is not *itself* a donation from outside, if it is inscribed in the very structure of a subjectivity which still ignores every exteriority, then otherness seems to be ontologically rather of secondary importance and eschatology looses also its meaning.

[19] See 'Was ist Metaphysik?', in Heidegger (1976), esp. pp. 114–115.

[20] See the interpretation of Maximus Confessors' notion of existential motion further on.

[21] Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, (1999), p. 451 (A) and p. 80 (B); cf. also A452, B82.

[22] *Grundlegung*, A450, B80.

[23] *Grundlegung*, A452–453, B82–83.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] See Agamben (1995). In a recent book I have tried to develop some features of a political theology beginning precisely by the motive of collectivity in crisis, the sick city, as this emerges from the Sophoklean *Oedipus*: Papagiannopoulos (2005).

[26] See Freud 2000a, b, vol. V, pp. 43–145, and vol. III, pp. 217–272. For a brief account, see the corresponding entries in Laplanche and Pontalis (1981).

[27] Nancy, 1990, p. 26.

[28] Nancy, 1988 [1993, p. 66].

[29] Nancy, 1988 [1993, p. 72].

[30] Nancy, 1988 [1993, p. 73].

[31] Yannaras 1999, pp. 190–191; see also Yannaras (2004).

[32] 'Viel hat von Morgen an/Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander/Erfahren der Mensch; bald sind wir aber Gesang', from his poem 'Friedensfeier' – see Hölderlin, 1999, p. 341.

[33] ᾽Πάντα γάρ ὅσα γέγονε πάσχει τό κινείσθαι, ως μή όντα αυτοκίνησις ή αυτοδύναμις. Ει τοίνυν γενητά υπάρχει τα λογικά καί κινείται πάντως, ως εξ αρχής κατά φύσιν διά τό είναι, πρός τέλος κατά γνώμην διά τό ευ είναι κινούμενα. Τέλος γάρ τής τών κινουμένων κινήσεως αυτό τό εν τώ αεί ευ

είναί εστιν, ώσπερ καί αρχή αυτό τό είναι, όπερ εστίν ο Θεός, ο καί τού είναι δοτήρ καί τού ευ είναι χαριστικός, ως αρχή και τέλος.' Maximus Confessor, PG, vol. 91, 1073B–C. Unlike otherwise indicated, all translations are mine [IP].

[34] For the late-modern fluidity see Bauman (2000); for its paradoxical link to a self- and world-constructing, absolute subjectivity, see Kondylis (1991).

[35] Lipovetsky (1983) and (1992).

[36] *Gen.*, 22:1.

[37] Zizioulas (1994).

[38] Jonas (1996).

[39] I prefer here to use the terms infinite/finite and not transcendent/imma-nent, because 'transcendence' can be used also within the ontological limits of finitude – this, e.g. is Nancy's position and it is precisely the point where Orthodox-Christian theology departs from such an anthropology.

[40] Zizioulas (1993), pp. 67–122.

[41] PG 91, 1104B–C. For an attempt to exploit and extend this idea towards its anthropological implications, see Papagiannopoulos, 2005, pp. 43–135.

[42] Maximus Confessor, PG 90, 253B. Also Zizioulas, 'Towards an Escha-tological Ontology', unpublished paper.

[43] Nancy (1988) [1993, p. 86].

[44] Maximus speaks of an ec-static passivity towards the beloved, which leads to its own archetype within God, i.e. to Being as relation: 'Ει δέ κινείται αναλόγως εαυτώ νοερώς τό νοερόν, καί νοεί πάντως, ει δέ νοεί, καί ερά πάντως τού νοηθέντος, ει δ' ερά, καί πάσχει πάντως τήν πρός αυτό ως εραστόν έκστασιν, ει δε πάσχει, δηλονότι καί επείγεται, ει δέ επείγεται, και επιτείνει πάντως το σφοδρόν τής κινήσεως, ει δέ επιτείνει σφοδρώς τήν κίνησιν, ουχ ίσταται μέχρις άν γένοιτο όλον εν τώ εραστώ όλω και υφ' όλου περιληφθή, εκουσίως όλον κατά προαίρεσιν τήν σωτήριον περιγραφήν δεχόμενος, ίν' όλον όλω ποιωθή τώ περιγράφοντι, ως μηδ' όλως λοιπόν βούλεσθαι εξ εαυτού αυτό εκείνο όλον γνωρίζεσθαι δύνασθαι τό περιγραφόμενον, αλλ' εκ τού περιγράφοντος', (PG 91, 1073C–1076D). This spiritual movement turns man into a conjunction between Creator and Creation, thus responsible for the whole Creation's prospect to fully be – which leads directly to the notion of the Church that Maximus developed in his *Mystagôgía* (PG 91, 657-717).

[45] See žižek, 2004, esp. Ch. 1 and 3.

[46] Lefort (1981).

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