



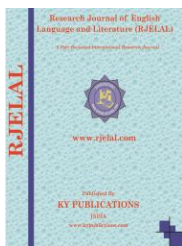
THEORY OF SUBJECTIVITY AND SOCIETY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO EUROPE

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Abstract

One feature of consciousness that many find mystifying is subjectivity that feature whereby there is something it is like for a subject to undergo a conscious experience. A lot of philosophers say that subjectivity is mystifying because of its relation to the physical—because it's hard to see how it could arise from the physical going on in the brain.¹ but subjectivity itself can also be mystifying. For it's not clear how to understand the nature of subjectivity or its place in the overall structure of consciousness. These two points are distinct, but connected. In order to address the question of how subjectivity relates to the physical, we must first have a clear sense of what subjectivity is. I won't address how subjectivity relates to the physical in this paper. Instead I will address subjectivity itself. I will do this by introducing and defending a new model of subjectivity based on self-acquaintance. No such model currently exists. But some philosophers have nibbled at the idea.

Keywords: Subjectivity, Psychoanalysis, History, Individuation, Explicitly

INTRODUCTION

The main scope of this paper is to challenge the mainstream interpretation of Nietzsche as the philosopher, whose essential contribution has been the deconstruction, and thereby the refusal, of all the fundamental concepts of modern philosophy: from the will to the subject, and from causation to Christian morality. Hence, the suggestion is to address the question of "Nietzsche and Humanity" tackling it from the problem of subjectivity, i.e. human psycho-social subjectivity in its individual and collective forms. The intention is thus to demonstrate that Nietzsche offers a theory of subjectivity, his critique of the soul, subject and ego notwithstanding. Indeed, we find an extremely interesting passage in *Beyond Good and Evil*, where Nietzsche explicitly claims: "But the path towards new conceptions and refinements of the soul hypothesis remain open: and concepts such as

'mortal soul' and 'soul as subjective-multiplicity' and 'soul as social construction of drives and affects' will have from now on citizenship in the realm of science".¹

The attempt of this presentation will be then to reconstruct Nietzsche's theory of subjectivity, i.e. of the soul, "as social construction of drives and affects", from crucial passages disseminated in all his works in dialogue with French theory, anthropology and psychoanalysis. As a social construction of subjectivity, Nietzsche's theory of subjectivity will be inevitably historical and thereby intertwined with his history of civilization, derived by Jacob Burckhardt's lessons on universal history², which Nietzsche followed attentively in Basel while writing his *Birth of Tragedy*. The thesis is that the question of humanity in Nietzsche emerges through the figure of the good European that haunts great part of Nietzsche's mature and late work. The provocation

will be to look at Nietzsche's idea of Europe – as Georg Simmel³ puts it – in order to dismiss the great number of misunderstandings around the notion of Europe which infest the public debate of our political conjuncture. I.

Anthropological Analysis of Subjectivity

Even though we will later concentrate on the relation between the construction of subjectivity and the theory of civilizations to stress the crucial role played by Europe in Nietzsche's philosophy, it is necessary to give the anthropological background of the emergence of consciousness according to Nietzsche, which provides us with the conditions of psycho-genesis, i.e., the very same construction of subjectivity, which may be defined as a process of individuation, that is a metastable transductive relation between the individual and its milieu, as described by Gilbert Simondon⁴.

The conditions for the emergence of psycho-genesis is the very same onto-genesis, that is, the constitution of the organism as that biological being which triggers the psychic and collective underpinning we may claim that Nietzsche's theory of subjectivity (psychic individuation) is intertwined with its theory of civilization (collective individuation).individuation. As Simondon underlines, psychogenesis is always already part of a larger process of individuation, i.e., the collective individuation⁵, from this theoretical.

As Barbara Stiegler puts it, Nietzsche's philosophical endeavor is a constant attempt to find a possible synthesis to the Kantian opposition between the passivity of sensation and the informing activity of the intellect, which are symbolized respectively by the famous couple Dionysus and Apollo.⁶ Therefore, the dynamic of individuation, which constructs the historical structures (or types to speak with Nietzsche) of subjectivity, is the very same process of the interaction of the Apollo-Dionysus Duplizität with itself in constant search of an equilibrium, which rests always meta-stable, as hinted by Simondon's process of individuation. The young Nietzsche will identify this synthetic equilibrium in the Greek tragedy.⁷

Hence, when in a mature work such as the Genealogy of Morals we read that "from now on they ought to go on their own feet and 'carry themselves', when previously they would have left themselves be carried by the water: a terrible weight was upon them".⁸ This is not only a very poetic and powerful image, but it also describes through the same active-passive polarity (to go on their own feet vs. to be carried by the water) the scientific fact of that structural transformation of the organism which permitted the emergence of complex life forms up to human beings with their complex psychic-collective individuation, which expresses itself in the constitution of civilizations. According to the French palaeontologist André Leroi-Gourhan, two fundamental body structures determine the future individuation or evolution of life-forms: the radial symmetry and the bilateral symmetry. In the radial symmetry, we have a body organization in which locomotion plays no role in the life-cycle of the organism; in the second case, we have an organism in which active locomotion plays the key role for its own survival.⁹ The condition for the evolution to more complex life forms lies precisely in this second body-structure.

Nietzsche continues his ontogenetic description by adding that the beings who now "go on their own feet" find themselves for the first time in front of a "new unknown World".¹⁰ From the passive interaction between a body with radial symmetry and its milieu, which echoes the self-forgetting pathos of the Babylonian orgies mentioned by Nietzsche in the *Geburt*, where individuality is lost, we enter in the world-of-representation – where consciousness is at first this simple being-in-front-of-a-world. It is the gradual individuation of beings by separation from the primordial unity of nature, which permits an accumulation of force or will-to-power, which condensates by converging into one point, thereby constituting the individual body and the organism proper.¹¹

This ontogenetic process is the condition for the psychogenetic process of *Verinnerlichung* (internalization), which will then permit asceticism. It is necessary to bear in mind that the *Verinnerlichung* takes place in a collective context.

The condition for Verinnerlichung is that the drives that are spontaneously directed outwards are inhibited and force to redirect themselves inwards. Nietzsche identifies the trigger of psychogenesis in the double movement of Hemmung-Verinnerlichung (inhibition-internalization), which structurally coincides with what later Freud will call the primordial Verdrängung (repression) and describes as the moment in which the unity of the pure Lust-Ich (I-pleasure) expels all pain from within, thereby producing the partition between inside-outside, I and not-I, which constitutes the being-infront-of-a-world, where the outside world is perceived as the source of the I's pain.¹² Indeed, Nietzsche identifies in those "terrible bulwarks with which the public organization protects itself against the old instincts of freedom", the source of the inhibition of the instincts of freedom.¹³ From the first steps of ontogenesis to the Verinnerlichung, we see the very same dynamic that Nietzsche will later define as asceticism, that is, a tendency to restrain, save or spare energy in order to accumulate it. The Verinnerlichung is a prefiguration of asceticism, and before it the contemplating tendency, as described in the Geburt, of the Apollonian drive is also a form of asceticism. Drawing from George Bataille's notion of "general economy"¹⁴, we may claim that Nietzsche's historical theory of subjectivity consists in a general economy of the interrelation between Apollo-Dionysus, which expresses itself in the different historical structures of subjectivity, which are part of the collective individuation. The latter is essentially the historical individuation of civilisations, which ought to be understood as a metastable dynamic between what the German language defines as Kultur and Zivilisation.

Society and its Dynamics

It has been clearly stated by Karl Jaspers¹⁵ to what extent Nietzsche remained within a Christian framework, which inevitably influences his own conception of History up to the late text of the Antichrist, where he fixes the "laws against Christianity" thereby proclaiming a new era.¹⁶ This very same gesture is indebted to the Christian framework. After all, it may be possible that Nietzsche falls under Oswald Spengler's critique of the "nonsensical" tripartite historical

schematisation in "Antiquity – Middle Ages – Modern Age" and furthermore Nietzsche defines the European as an historical type, which Spengler judges as foolish. Indeed, Nietzsche writes: "We Europeans of after tomorrow, we first-borns of the Twentieth century", as if the new era would be that of us, the Europeans.¹⁷ Therefore, Nietzsche endorses the fact that history or "Weltgeschichte" is always our history and not that of an abstract humanity.¹⁸

Nietzsche's understanding of history is strongly indebted to the categories developed by Jacob Burckhardt in his lessons on universal history, where State, Religion and Kultur¹⁹ are the historical potencies, whose interaction determines the historical process. In this perspective, it is interesting the status given by Nietzsche to Europe: its "sickness" lies precisely in the perpetual oscillation between Kultur and Zivilisation, where we find again, albeit transformed, the active-passive or Apollo-Dionysus polarity.

As Stiegler²⁰ highlighted, the notion of nihilism in Nietzsche coincides indeed with the absolute separation of Apollo and Dionysus, that is the unilateral crystallised affirmation of one of the two drives. On the other hand, decadence is the dynamic process of the unilateral affirmation of one of the two drives. Therefore, both Socrates (Apollonian) and Christ (Dionysian) are according to Nietzsche decadent types, for in them only one of the two drives prevails. Astonishing to this regard is the passage where Nietzsche describes Jesus, the type of the Saviour, as an anarchist, who is a "Weltverlorene" as the Dionysian metaphor of the Lion in Zarathustra, that is, without a world, who doesn't know and doesn't care of neither work, nor society, neither war, nor state – that is, Jesus is a figure of the absolute Dionysian drive, which has been transferred within the inner world of an individual through the various social ascetic practices.²¹

This being-without-a-world is an internalized Dionysian condition, where Jesus, as an Idiot, is not autistic, but on the contrary expels the symbolic world (Apollo) and plunges into the psychic unity of the affective continuity of empathy (Mit-leiden). A

conduct of life according to the motto *non resistere malo* implies the return of the absolute passivity of the pure Dionysian drive.²² Therefore, as the culminating result of the social ascetic practices we find what Nietzsche addresses as *tiefen Schlaf* – profound sleep – the *unio mystica* with God, or the famous Schopenhauerian *noluntas*.²³ This example tells us that at the extreme end of the unilateral affirmation of one drive, in this case the Apollonian one expressed as asceticism, we plunge in the opposite drive, i.e., the psychic unity of Dionysian empathy, transformed however by the interaction occurred during the affirmation of the opposite drive. Hence, the Dionysian drive once expressed through the excesses of carnal lust, luxury and paradoxical depravation of bodily promiscuity, transfigures itself into the “genius of the heart”²⁴, into an internalised and tamed purely psychic drive.

But the profound sleep is the symptom of a given collective individuation. As Georg Simmel puts it, the apathy of the Modern individual derives from the “atrophy of the individual culture through the hypertrophy of the objective culture”, which Nietzsche defined as the “cosmopolitanism of food, literature, newspapers, forms, tastes and even landscapes, and so forth”, that is, nothing other than what Marx-Engels termed as *Weltliteratur*, mere symptom triggered by the world-market established by the bourgeoisie.²⁵ Following Burckhardt’s definition of *Kultur*, it happens that there’s no essential difference between the latter and the world-market. Indeed, Burckhardt describes *Kultur* as a perpetual process of disruption and transformation, which embodies the constant critique of the “stable institutions of life”, i.e., State and Religion. *Kultur* is “a million-formed process”, which is nothing other than society itself as an “overall figure” in front of State and Religion.²⁶ So where lies all the fuss around the distinction between *Zivilisation* and *Kultur*? As Spengler has it, *Zivilisation* is the crystallisation of the disruptive energies of *Kultur*, which through Classicism and Romanticism attempts new transformations through the phantasm of the repetition of the old till it plunges itself into the “obscurity of the primordial mystic psyche, into the maternal womb, into the tomb”.²⁷ The profound sleep of the individual amidst

the collective activity expresses precisely this extreme state of *Zivilisation* in which collective activity has become an automatic repetition of crystallised forms, which level all cultural differences.

In Nietzsche, the question of humanity hides in the relation between the individual and the collective individuation, which is analysed from a sociological perspective as socioeconomic relations of power, as Runciman observed.²⁸ Hence, according to Nietzsche, there is no abstract “overall process” or evolution of humanity, there is no “work of humanity (*Arbeit der Menschheit*)”²⁹, for the only process there is, which historically constitutes human subjectivity, is a stratification of Apollonian and Dionysian dynamics, which express themselves in historical power relations between individual and collective processes of individuation. Nietzsche contests thence that there can be an abstract process of humanity, which bypasses all the singular potentialities of the individuals – such a process or social organisation is judged by Nietzsche as the most inhuman, as when he criticizes the economic optimism, for which “with the growing expenses of everyone, also the advantages of everyone ought to grow”. Such machinery of economic growth produces rather an “overall decrease, a decrease in the worth of the human type”.³⁰ Nietzsche describes the European as a “cosmopolitan chaos of affects and intelligence”, which is the outcome of the aforementioned hypertrophy of the “objective culture”, thanks to which the individual has become incapable of a singular expression, which wouldn’t resonate with some collective process of individuation amidst the cosmopolitan chaos. This is the Dionysian passivity, as pure capacity to receive impressions, of the individual in front of the collective activity of individuation, through which the individual individuates itself.

However, as hinted above, this process tends towards the leveling of the very same cultural multiplicity, of which Europe’s soul is constituted. According to Nietzsche, Europe want(s) to become a unity, that would be capable to make its internal differences flourish, or rather, the very same unity is constituted by the reciprocal encounter and commerce (both in the old sense of intellectual

dialogue or mundane seduction, and as economic exchange) among the European multiple cultural identities.³¹

Conclusion

Thereby, Nietzsche identifies Europe's sickness" in the "névrose nationale of the petty politics of nationalism. Europe's unity will emerge only through a thorough commerce between its national components, which from a historical perspective ought to be understood as the new individuals-singularities, giving birth to what Nietzsche calls a Geisterkrieg, a war of spirits, i.e., a cultural war, determined by the very same dynamic of Kultur as a million-formed process of transformation. Europe is not a simple topological notion, but it's a cultural one, for it includes all nations, who have the Greek, the Roman, Jewish and Christian traditions as a common past. It implies that Europe may virtually extend itself to the whole globe, including the Americas as daughter of the European cultures, as already Hegel hinted, before Nietzsche, by claiming that "America is thus the land of the future". Nietzsche's great politics consists hence in transforming the multifarious self-contradicting European traditions into a unity where the contradictions become productive, instead of self-annihilating, as in the petty politics of nationalism. After all, there's still the shadow of Burckhardt in Nietzsche's understanding of politics as an artistic activity that structures formless masses of populations, that is, that it structures human subjectivity itself.

Now, as I've said, a range of philosophers who work on subjectivity defend views that do not imply that subjects feature in consciousness itself. So these philosophers may (and often do) contend that their views are consistent with Hume's claim. But, as I've argued (3), that these views fail to explain how subjects feature in consciousness is among their shortcomings. So I say that insofar as these views stay true to Hume's claim, they forsake subjectivity. With that said, I'm not sure these views really do stay true to Hume's claim. For even if they agree with Hume that introspection does not reveal a substantial self, the idea that there is an experiential dimension of subjectivity—a "for-

meness"—runs afoul of Hume's claim that all there is to experience is a succession of mental states. Philosophers ought to own up to this. If you think there is genuine subjectivity, then you think there is something more to experience than a succession of anonymous mental states. So, again, anyone who buys into subjectivity should be receptive to parting ways with Hume. The second reason we should be receptive to rejecting Hume's claim is that recent research on mental disorder casts considerable doubt on it. In particular, certain disorders of consciousness appear to involve breakdowns in self-experience in a way that suggest that self-experiences are normally present (cf. Sass, 2000, p. 154; Frith, 1992, p. 80; Billon, 2014). Consider, for example, the phenomenon of thought insertion found among schizophrenics. People who suffer from thought insertion believe that some of the thoughts they experience come from external agents. It's not just that they believe that others are controlling or influencing their thoughts; they believe that others are actually thinking/bringing about those thoughts. On what's now the leading account of this phenomenon, thought insertion essentially involves a breakdown in the experience of oneself as the author/agent of one's thoughts.¹⁸ In other words, in these abnormal cases, the self fails to show up in experience in the role of author/agent of one's thoughts, resulting in a significant experiential deficit. This suggests that, in normal cases, the self does show up in experience in the role of author/agent of one's thoughts.¹⁹ Similar arguments can and have been made through appeal to other pathological phenomena.²⁰ And what these arguments suggest is that Hume is wrong—experience is not just a succession of mental states; it also includes a sense of self.

We still have a lot to learn about disorders of consciousness. And although I have described the currently dominant account of thought insertion, other accounts of this phenomenon are out there. That being said, the evidence from mental disorder is suggestive. It appears to support a plausible abductive argument against Hume's claim about experience. So it should at least make us receptive to rejecting Hume's claim.

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- Aller summieren sich zu einem Gesamt-Verlust: der Mensch wird geringer: - so dass man nicht mehr weiß, wozu überhaupt dieser ungeheure Prozess gedient hat. Ein wozu? ein neues „Wozu?“ – das ist es, was die Menschheit nöthig hat... ».
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