

FAMILY RESEMBLANCES BETWEEN CONTEMPORARY POST-SUBJECTIVIST PHILOSOPHY AND ANIMISTIC RELIGIONS

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Abstract. *Criticism of the Cartesian subject and attempts at establishing a post-subjectivist philosophy are prevalent in contemporary continental philosophy. People living in modern Western cultures are frequently characterized as residing in a permanent state of identity crisis. The question “who comes after the subject?” is topical both in philosophy and in the daily life of Western people. In this interdisciplinary study, we argue that there are considerable family resemblances between the aims of post-subjectivist philosophy and animistic religions. We will first provide the requisite background for understanding the animistic treatment of subjectivity by describing three principles: the Principle of Unity, the Principle of Balance, and Complementary Polar Thinking. These principles further develop our treatment of the concept of network thinking, as outlined in our previous joint paper, “Networks and Hierarchies: Two Ways of Thinking”. We will then compare the animistic treatment of subjectivity with current critiques of the subject. Although we will not express a normative request for the resurrection of animism, we nonetheless cannot exclude the possibility that the study of animistic principles may provide local solutions to the postmodern crisis of the subject.*

Keywords: *20th century philosophy, history of religions, post-subjectivism, animism*

The present paper is a follow-up to our previous collaboration, “Networks and Hierarchies: Two Ways of Thinking” (Moor and Luks 2015). In that paper we provided a broad comparison between two ways of thinking: network and hierarchy. We drew a parallel between animistic religions and contemporary philosophy. Based on research conducted in the history of religions, we arrived at the conclusion that animism represents an ontological understanding of the world as a network of shared souls. Although Western philosophy is broadly hierarchical, in that paper we neverthe-

less found certain features it shares with network thinking that is characteristic of animism; these are especially abundant in today’s philosophies of post-metaphysical bent. These common features spurred us to further research.

The central issue of the present paper is the problem of the subject. Today, this problem is acute in both philosophy and everyday practice. In Western culture, the crumbling of hierarchical value systems and the rise of individualism has engendered a permanent state of identity crisis, which numerous post-subjectivist philosophical projects are attempting to tackle. In the

present paper, we will once again approach this issue in an interdisciplinary manner, by examining the possible similarities between the treatment of the subject in contemporary post-subjectivism and animistic religions.

In the context of our current study, the principle of the network of shared souls, which we formulated in our previous paper, must be further specified. The first three sections of this paper are dedicated to this specification, in which we will formulate three additional principles characteristic of the network of shared souls: the principle of unity, the principle of balance, and complementary polar thinking. These three principles provide the necessary background for understanding the animistic treatment of the subject. We will then consider the central question of our study, and inquire whether this conception has relevant similarities with the critique of the subject found in contemporary philosophy.

The Principle of Unity

In our previous paper “Networks and Hierarchies: Two Ways of Thinking” (Moor and Luks 2015) we claimed that one of the core principles of animist thought is the Network of Shared Souls. In this network or maze, all that exists is *united into one big whole* through highly divergent associations. For example, a snake bites a child gathering berries in the forest. What is snake poison in this worldview and how can the bite be cured? Estonian primary school textbooks dating a couple of decades back tell the following folk-religious story. A snake bit a child, the crying child was approached by a snake wearing a crown, the Snake King. Since the child was bitten without reason, the

Snake King ordered all snakes to crawl up to and past the child. The last snake to appear was the small wriggling offender who was then commanded to lick the wound. Having done so, it writhed into the bushes and died. In practical terms, this means that snakebite is to be cured with a snake. It is unlikely that the snake was in reality allowed to lick the wound – the snake was simply pressed against the wound in belief that the part of the soul causing swelling would return into the snake. If there was no snake at hand, a frog would do, for “the snake takes the Earth’s spite, the frog the water’s”. This saying means that it is permissible to sit on the ground only after snakes are on the move and to swim after the frogs have come out. The curing of snakebite usually takes three frogs. The frogs became motionless on the wound, swelled up and died. The third curing method entailed burying an arm in the ground. What is snake poison, or more accurately, the soul causing the illness? It is the Earth’s spite. And the Earth’s spite is considered to be the power of the dead. It is permitted to sit on the ground only after the first thunder. Yet, it is said that with the first thunder the souls of the dead are taken up to heaven. In Estonian, the stem of “lightning” (*äike*) is *äi* (father-in-law) – an old man, a dead ancestor or *Kõu* (thunder) (*kouku* – Finnish for ghost, a dead person). Following this train of thought, we could presume that snakebite can also be cured with a dead person, although we have not come across any such motifs in Estonian folklore.

In transition from animism to monotheism, pluralism in soul perceptions is replaced by monism. There is no real need for pluralism in the postulated religious

“logic”¹ of monotheism. In animism various skills, abilities, illnesses, etc., come from different beings, which requires staying in touch with these beings, whereas in monotheism, all causality is attributed to God alone (or to God and devil, but one must choose one of them). In animism all beings are united in the maze of shared souls through many soul particles; such unity is concrete and operationally imaginable through these soul particles. Monotheistic unity is unity through the transcendent God; it is abstract and becomes alive only in rare religious-mystical experiences. In materialism, however, the soul represents the inner emotional processes and could be defined as the sum of the body’s biochemical reactions. The unity principle, which in animism is represented by the network of shared souls and in monotheism by God, recedes. For human beings this means random existence devoid of meaning – conceptual loneliness and conceptual freedom.

The Principle of Balance

In the network of shared souls the universal principle could be *the principle of balance*. Primarily it is a belief that the world created at the beginning of time is perfect, balanced and harmonious. There is nothing false, sinful or unclean in it. The role of the human being is to preserve that world, to re-create it as it was. On the one hand, this re-creation takes place during holy times when people perform rites through which the events of the time of creation are re-actualized. It is usually performed

as drama. The Estonian custom of building a midsummer night’s bonfire is probably a rudiment of such a festivity: from this day on the sun’s power starts to decrease, but building the fire signifies an attempt to give it more power.

On the other hand, the world is re-created through behaving according to originally established rules. One could also behave otherwise, but in that case the action has its price – a consequence. The so-called trading rites of shamanistic cultures are vivid examples of the principle of balance. If a tribe needs to hunt fifteen elk for its survival, the shaman has to enter into a covenant with the Spirit of the Great Elk. With this covenant the shaman promises the Spirit, say, three humans in exchange. In most cases they are the old and sick members of the tribe who often die the same year. Also, when the game is abundant and tribe members are healthy while neighbouring tribes are suffering from an epidemic, the shaman is considered especially good – he has entered into a profitable covenant promising the souls of the neighbours as a reward. Thus, the principle of balance is not ethical but energetic. In Livonian folklore, too, punishment is brought upon the naïve person who carries out the act rather than the person who planned the act. A witch wants to destroy neighbor’s good fortune with cattle and gives a child bewitched meat to be taken into neighbor’s barn. The naïve child gets punished for the act rather than the witch behind the act (Loorits 1998: 37).

Animistic religions usually do not depict suffering and evil as existing objectively in the world – rather, they are the result of unbalancing. When balance is disturbed, it has to be re-established. The

¹ By religious “logic” we mean the internal ordering of thinking in a broad sense, and not formal logic; in order to avoid confusion, we use quotation marks.

most important rites here are sacrificial rites. Unexpected deaths at sea or in the woods (through drowning or animal attacks) are often interpreted as the local spirit's demand for sacrifice.

It is remarkable that the sacrifices offered have a clear tendency to become increasingly symbolized, to diminish. In "olden times", a horse was a common sacrifice at *Mustjala* cliff, but it was subsequently replaced by a bull, then a pig, a goose, a hen, until eventually a shot of vodka thrown into the sea would do. The principle of balance also presumes causal thinking and perception: that *nothing is random* – the current events are caused by some event (events) of earlier times and will become the cause (causes) of what goes on in the future. There is action and there is consequence; nothing stands apart from everything else. This way of thinking also emphasizes what at first seem to be insignificant "trivialities". By this we mean so-called "superstition", an extremely diversified concretization of actions; it is not inconsequential at what time, during which phase of the moon, in which direction, etc., some action is carried out. "Trivialities" do matter.

In the metaphysical approach to the world, which also brings about the teleological approach to history, trivialities have no significance whatsoever. Every event can be interpreted as the effect of some unique principle (e.g. Hegel's formation of the world-spirit). Giving up metaphysics and religion has not changed such broad simplifying and generalizing much. The contribution of Michel Foucault is priceless in rendering such an approach questionable. In his studies, which he terms archaeology, Foucault returns to the micro-

level of events while studying the repressive functions of institutions and practices that we habitually consider neutral.

Nevertheless, the aspect of randomness is already detectable in monotheistic, postulated thinking. It is primarily expressed in the understanding that God may abolish the criminality of a crime if the deed increases his authority (killing is a sin; in crusades, however, a heroic deed), but also in the motif that although each crime is punished, each good deed is not automatically rewarded (Raud 1989: 940–944). Both animistic/causal and monotheistic/postulated reasoning desire to control not only one's external behaviour, but also their inner world ("thou shalt not covet!"). Since no one is free from error, the question of rewarding good deeds is again reviewed by God or his substitute. Naturally, this kind of "logic" further increases God's authority, which is the basis of this entire worldview (Ibid.).

Complementary Polar Thinking

Complementary polarities are a vital part of the principle of balance; to maintain balance, both 'this' and 'that' must be present. The idea of complementary polarities is perhaps better known to most from Oriental philosophy. There are two principles – *yin* and *yang*. Both strive for domination, but when they reach balance, a new quality is born. A typical motif in animistic religions is that creators are twins (Puhvel 1987: 284–290). For example, in an Estonian-Izhorian creation narrative, the world was created by both God and devil. The devil in the narrative may also appear as a diver. One is not good and the other is not evil: they are just two polarities, powers that complement each other.

The principle of complementary polarities works in numerous healing rites. Besides healing springs, so-called curse springs are also known. However, neither of them can be classified as “good” or “bad”. It would be more appropriate to speak of places that fulfil wishes and places that fulfil wishes in reverse. A healing spring is a spring that fulfils wishes. If an illness is wished for, it fulfils that wish, too. The curse spring may also be used for healing, but the wish must be worded reversely.

Among the Canadian Indians, there is a highly edifying tale of the “evil spirit” *Witiko*. European researchers believe *Witiko* to be a malevolent cannibalistic spirit. *Witiko* psychosis was a specific illness. Enduring snowstorm forced people to stay in their tents for days; immobility and lack of food became torturous. In this neurotic situation some Indians felt that others wanted to eat them; but they also felt the desire to eat the others. Usually the dilemma found its solution through suicide – the one suffering from psychosis rushed out of the tepee and perished in the snowstorm. It is remarkable that researchers with European education have clearly seen *Witiko* as the equivalent of Satan in Christianity – an evil spirit. A completely different description of the spirit is given by the Indians. The spirit is not evil, it is just the other side of this world. What this “other side” stands for is not philosophically explained, yet it is known that the existence of that other side is crucial for the world’s balance. For the balance to last, the other side, too, has to be expressed. For example, on the last day of the Plain Indians’ holiest ceremony, the sun dance, *Witiko* clowns (resembling slightly the Estonian *mardisant*: people

who go from door to door trick-or-treating on St. Martin’s eve) – with potato sacks pulled over their heads, holes for the eyes and some long, strange object tied on as a nose – enter the ceremonial tent. They are not people randomly picked by a shaman; they are the ones that carry that other side in themselves. These clowns are the representatives of the dark side of the world, the guardians of balance and order. They are no longer friends or family members for the others (unlike Estonian *mardisant* and *kadrisant*, who are our acquaintances or neighboring children, not the souls of ancestors bringing blessings), but representatives of the other side who are worthy of respect. In the ceremonial tent they move in the opposite direction to the others – counter-clockwise around the holy tree. It is notable that during many ceremonies, upon the arrival of the *Witiko* clowns, everyone present must also act contrary to normal. During the sun dance ceremony, prayers and dances are usually directed to the holy tree standing in the centre of the ceremonial tent; but in the presence of the clowns everyone dances with their backs to the holy tree. Upon the *Witiko* spirit’s arrival at the black lodge during the ceremony, prayers, too, must be worded to mean the opposite of the prayer’s wish.

Lakota Indians call a similar clown, who represents the polar side of the world, *Heyoka*. *Heyoka* gains its power from lightning. When one dreams of lightning or anything symbolizing lightning, one knows that one must become a *Heyoka*. This brings him both honor and shame. In such a dream he is instructed to do something unimaginable, something shameful. For example, it is inappropriate for a man to wear women’s clothes or run stark

naked in the sight of others, but having received such a task in a dream, one cannot ignore it. The task must be completed within one day or the dreamer knows he will be struck dead by lightning. After the dream is carried out, the dreamer becomes a *Heyoka* clown who represents the other side of this world. While all the ordinary people move clockwise in the ritual tent, the clowns move counter-clockwise. When it is freezing cold outside and people wear warm clothes, the clowns are barefoot, wearing just a shirt. In unbearable heat, the clowns hide under fur coats and shiver. Some of them ride horses backwards and wear moccasins incorrectly. People find it amusing, yet they know that these jokes are holy. They know the *Heyokas* protect them from all kinds of storms because they dream of lightning and get their power and abilities from thunderbirds, the spiritual beings with the greatest power (Lame Deer and Erdoes 1972)

The institution of a clown in a king's court was probably a remnant of complementary polar thinking.

It is possible that misinterpretation of the worldview of complementary polarities is the cause of a very common mistake in describing the world of the dead. Specifically, we can find two rivalling motifs here. On the one hand, life in the realm of the dead is thought to continue more or less as in the realm of the living. It might be a little darker, colder or mustier, but generally life is as it is in this world. On the other hand, there is a common motif that life on the other side is the opposite to ours: the sun rises from the West and sets in the East, men wear women's clothes and do women's chores, women wear men's clothes and do men's work, etc. In

other words, everything in the world of the dead is the opposite to the world of the living. A common interpretation is that since life and death are reverse ideas, the corresponding worlds must also be reverse worlds (Lintrop 1993: 18–20; 88). Where are these realms of the dead, then, where life carries on as it does in this world?

It is likely that originally there were separate realms of the dead for “common people” and for “the clowns”, and life in both of them was believed to continue generally the way it does in this world (unless, of course, one had committed murder). As time passed, various motifs of the world of the dead tended to blend and, of course, it was comfortable for some interpreters to forget some essential motifs (e.g. that life continues more or less in the usual manner). In complementary polar thinking, life and death are not reverse notions. Life is the synergy of birth and death. Death in this world means birth into another, and death means birth into this world – reincarnation.

Works concerning cell death that were awarded the Nobel Prize in 2002 serve as a remarkable example here. It was discovered that cells contain balanced birth and death programs, whereas the process of dying is not chaotic but controlled: so-called “death by design” (after a French-German documentary film of that name). The cause of several diseases is thought to be the shifted balance between birth and death – cancer is associated with blocked death programs, yet HIV is thought to cause their over-activation. Significantly, this phenomenon was discovered repeatedly during the twentieth century – researchers of cell death attributed great importance to the phenomenon, but it was not

acknowledged. The reasons were probably cultural – it was awkward for European culture to imagine a harmonious whole with death as one of its polarities.

Another expression of complementary polar thinking is dual or androgynous identity, as described mostly in the context of shamans. A shaman is simultaneously honourable and shameful, loved and hated, male and female. He is the one with the knowledge of the tribe's history; he is the living link with the past, but he is also foreseer of the future. He is alive, but since he is also killed in his calling vision (vision about a person's life mission), he also belongs to the world of the dead.

This and *that* as animistic complementary polarities become *good* and *evil* in transition to monotheism. Historically, such clear dualism is associated with the influence of Mazdaism on Judaism, although in Judaism, dualism was not as sharply evident as in its offspring, Christianity. Good and evil are seen as powers existing objectively in the world; the first is represented by God, the latter by the Devil. Thinking in the categories of good and evil is also a mental attempt to eliminate from the world the powers that do not yield to simple and linear interpretations. These powers are classified as evil and people are distanced from them. Figuratively speaking, while the use of "curse springs" for healing purposes is natural in animism, it is no longer so in monotheism.

The objective existence of good and evil also means that the world is not perfect, it is corrupt and sinful. Sin is a moral notion on the one hand, but existential, innate and independent of one's deeds on the other (Tillich 1953). God, of course, represents the good and the purpose of human

beings is to strive for the good, but also to fight against evil. In the self-centered and secularized world, everyone positions themselves naturally on the good side; the effect of such reasoning is an individual's justified fight against everyone else. Clearly, it is thinking in the criteria of 'good' and 'evil' that makes hierarchical thought an especially suitable means of conquering the world. Anything different, anything that is not "us", not "me", is to be placed on the side of evil (the underdeveloped, degenerate, unjustified, etc.) and through this the conqueror is freed from responsibility. The fact that Nils Bohr defined the idea of complementarity in physics has not had a notable influence on the contemporary worldview.

Secondariness of Human Subjectivity

For the principle of balance to work, all beings have to be reasonably equal. The human being as a subject cannot be anything higher or superior to anything else in existence. Weakness of the human being as a subject is evident through the analysis of everyday practices, but also in various linguistic and religious motifs.

- a) Structural analysis of "the new" and "the old" texts. Expressions such as "I had a good catch of fish today", "I grew huge potatoes", "I got lost in the forest" were rather unimaginable and rare in texts as recent as a hundred years old. The respective experiences would have been worded quite differently: "the sea blessed me with a good catch", "the field gave a great number of potatoes", and "the forest lead me astray". The 1st person position in

these sentences is entirely different. Conceivably, the different location of the 1st person position in the sentences also reflects the different use of psychic energy. Through the 1st person position, one tries to change the environment he lives in to his liking. Texts where the 1st person is in the background, however, reflect acclimation – the use of one’s psychic energy in a way that the mental, emotional and physical state is changed so that no change in the environment is annoying.

- b) Weakness of the subject is expressed by the aforementioned beliefs that one’s abilities, but also various illnesses – “disorders” – are primarily associated with other beings. Likewise, this is evident in soul beliefs: people must maintain relations with the unhuman world. Rites of searching for the power animal are essentially rites of coming of age among many primitive peoples. In this context, to know somebody essentially means to know who his spirit-helper is. Respect towards other beings is also crucial. Figuratively speaking, magic snake spells (to obtain healing skills from snakes) can only be used by those who have never harmed snakes.
- c) Weakness of the subject is evident in beliefs in reincarnation – the soul reincarnates and it can do so in different forms. A person can be reborn as a human being, but also as a bird, an animal or a spirit.
- d) A similar motif is expressed in numerous shape-shifting beliefs. Human beings can shape-shift (just

as a witch can transform someone else) to the form of a wolf, a dog, a crow, or any other being or phenomenon. Tales of humans’ shape-shifting to trees are known in Estonia. Likewise, it is believed that the soul of a witch can move about in the shape of wind, an insect, etc.

- e) In the daily life of primitive peoples, techniques of weakening so-called common orientation, which Shor (1959: 585) names rather generally the orientation of reality, are widely practiced.

Techniques of weakening the common orientation (psychotropic substances, manipulation of breathing and posture, fasting, monotonous stimuli or movements, etc.) are essentially the building blocks of personal nature rites (a general term for nature-related personal dances, songs, etc.). Mikita classifies prayers, spells, humming, rites, ritual games, visualization techniques, meditative games, visions, dreams, personal dances, searches for the places of power, imitations, deception (manipulations with certain beliefs and rites), and other seemingly odd activities as personal nature rites (Mikita 2000: 146–148). According to Mikita, such activities also incorporate those human experiences which are difficult to interpret through semiotics as part of the cultural sphere. Obviously, the techniques of weakening the common orientation are also “opponents of subjectivity”. This is probably why the use of such techniques in contemporary culture is mostly disapproved of.

It is thus almost impossible to speak of human beings as subjects in the animistic worldview. Human being is changeable – through acquiring new additional souls, a

person turns into one being after another; each time an initiation rite is passed, he becomes someone entirely different.

Relying on personality psychology, we could argue that all there is to human evolution is the alternating phases of symbiosis and individualization (Kast 1982). We form a symbiosis with something different from us; in this process we find in ourselves these different traits; and in the following individualization phase we perceive them as our own attributes – attributes that no one can take away from us. One of the major problems of contemporary individualizing society is (and will be) probably excessive subjectivity – we think we “become ready” and as “mature persons” know what is right and wrong in the world. Social equals real, and we seek less and less contact with something different from us. At times the fundamentals of personality psychology seem to be the underlying ideology of our individualistic, urban and modern culture.

Many streams of modern philosophy are critical towards the subject (Cadava, Connor, Nancy 1991; Žižek 1998) without being aware that the animistic worldview is characteristically subject-free. By now, numerous writings have displayed how the philosophical tradition originating from Descartes influences the entirety of modern Western culture; this is a tradition that positions the subject who reaches steadfastness through self-reflection as the starting point of the system of knowledge. As a very broad generalization, we can say that from this turn on, the centre of structure of hierarchical thought tilts from transcendence towards subjectivity; it becomes the intellectual foundation for the natural scientific method and, as shown by Heidegger

(1962), for the technique that encompasses the surrounding as an absolute system. To take it to the extreme, it seems that the purpose of reason must be the ruthless demolition of subjectivity, absorption in pure becoming. Such a mystical-extreme aim is characteristic of modern art. Whether this aim is realistic or not, it is inevitable that in this case the structured discourse, the voice of the researcher, disappears. Philosophical subject-criticism cannot be so radical, and if we approach the problem less aggressively, without the *all-or-nothing* dilemma, then there is no reason for radicalness after all.

This notion not only relates to the problem of the subject, but also to the general transition from hierarchical thinking into networks. Any network description is a *compromise with structure*. Any term is a structural element. The opposite of the absolute and of hierarchy would be pure becoming; this, however, is inexpressible. According to the theory known as the Sapir-Whorff hypothesis, the structure of different languages may provide different approaches. In the opinion of Uku Masing, Finno-Ugric languages are more processual than Indo-European languages (Masing 2004). There have been attempts to surpass the prevailing philosophy, but they have all lead to new structures. In earnest, every language is a structure, a hierarchy comprised of more general and concrete notions, stronger and more passive ways of saying things. The language of pure becoming could be silence or perhaps inarticulate babble which forms no structure and thus has no meaning whatsoever.

Is freedom possible at all under the dictation of language, or are we all but prisoners of structure? It is possible to reposition

hierarchies, to open them to play. Jacques Derrida states: “The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely” (Derrida 2002: 354). Reflection distinguishes such an aim from the subcultural (where everyone has their own little absolute) – to develop reasoning *that is aware of its randomness*. This could be the advantage of the Western cultural heritage: we have wandered along the path of fanaticism and its turn into aimlessness, so now there is a chance to accept moderate nihilism without violent excesses. Gianni Vattimo thinks that this is the proper chance for Western thought (Vattimo 1994: 20). The most suitable philosophical program for such a change could be hermeneutics, which as the teaching of interpretation has from the start given up the quest for the ultimate truth: the horizon of truth is always historically open. According to Vattimo, the self-reflection of hermeneutics must always lead to the acceptance of nihilism, to recognition that even this particular theory, in the language of which we speak at any given time, is only conditionally true. Hermeneutics may be facing the past, e.g. the interpretational connection with old beliefs, but also the future, while taking advantage of the technologically-shaped reality. What might the hermeneutical criticism of subjectivity look like? By no means can it set as its aim the surpassing of the notion of subjectivity. Highlighting the boundaries of Cartesian subjectivity and the steadfastness produced by it would be a more suitable task. Although such criticism opens up opportunities for formulating new theoretical structures (Freud’s psychoanalysis, Heidegger’s *Dasein* analysis), it would be naïve to hope after a cen-

tury of reformulations that some other descriptive language could provide adequate means for going beyond the metaphysical description. One has to agree with Derrida: “There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest” (Derrida 2002: 354). Derrida proposes a solution for breaking the vicious circle of metaphysics: we must remain on the edge of metaphysical discourse while using its concepts in the renewed context. Vattimo calls this disposition towards metaphysics *recollective thinking* (*An-denken*), a name borrowed from Heidegger. It involves interested and respectful observance of metaphysics (onto-theology, hierarchical thinking) without scorning it, but without the temptation to continue the fanatical quest for the ultimate truth. Likewise, the authors of this article by no means consider hierarchical thinking to be a fallacy or a vice.

What does remaining on the edges of (the structure of) metaphysics mean in the context of the subject? Figuratively speaking, it points to a weakened, fading subject. It is reasonable to speak of the ego, the self, but not as a timeless substance in the midst of the stream of becoming – rather as a becoming phenomenon, a process. Let us recall the subheading of Nietzsche’s *Ecce homo*: “How One Becomes What One Is”. This should not be interpreted as a task that ought to be completed, but as a continuous transformation; and this transformation is not self-abundant but occurs

only through connecting into different networks, as displayed in the preceding observations on animism.

Nietzsche called this branch metaphorically “overman” (*Übermensch*) – a concept which was paradoxically given a racist meaning in the Nazi ideology. Gilles Deleuze describes it as follows: “Who speaks and acts? It is always a multiplicity, even within the person who speaks and acts. All of us are ‘groupuscules’” (Foucault and Deleuze 1977: 206). Deleuze has not in mind the networks formed by individuals but the network tissue of identity, which he calls the schizoid subject. Derrida, too, promotes the interpretation of interpretation, which is “no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics of onto-theology – in other words, throughout his entire history – has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play” (Derrida 2002: 369-370).

Such a line of reasoning does not propagate total loss of one’s self. We simply have to give up absolutising the “I” or “human” (in subjective idealism or, e.g. in the expansion of Western democracy) and accept that the “I” is the sum of randomly formed relations. Richard Rorty (1989) calls such experience of being in the world *contingency*; Vattimo (1994) calls it *weak thought*, i.e. Nihilism. The intention of both thinkers is to move towards the reduction of violence through such weakened subjectivity; without the dichotomy between the I and the absolute truth, on the one hand, and the they and fallacy, on the other, there is no need for

self-mobilization and fighting – we can set self-consciousness adrift. However, it should be mentioned that neither of these two thinkers proposes a naïve and unrealistic program, which according to their hopes shall soon become predominant, but only attempts to establish an intellectual tradition.

When our minds give up the idea of the autonomous subject that towers over the historical environment, the aforementioned “trivialities”, the entire context that creates the self, become important in describing human beings and the environment surrounding them. The thinker most radically persistent within the boundaries of historicism is Michel Foucault. In his later years, Foucault studied self-technologies. He viewed sciences through which one understands himself as truth games, and took an interest in how these truth games are linked with techniques through which people understand themselves (Foucault 2000: 224). Foucault distinguishes four kinds of technologies: technologies of production, semiotic technologies, technologies of power, and self-technologies (ibid.: 225). Western research has concentrated on the first two technologies; Foucault sees it as his duty to balance the general picture with an analysis of the latter two.

Foucault is best known as an analyst of power relations; he even wonders whether he has perhaps focused on them too much (ibid.: 225). Yet, such emphasis attempts to merely compensate for the prevalent excessive focus on the techniques of production and semiotics. Foucault is not against power; he does not believe that it is possible to do away with power relations (here he differs from the late Martin Heidegger,

who sees recollective thinking (*An-denken*) about the fallacies of onto-theology and powerless releasement (*Gelassenheit*) as options of reason). Power relations are essentially productive, they pervade the entirety of existence, but self-techniques should help balance them. Likewise, it is not possible to create a universal theory of power, for power is irreducible plurality (Erikson 2005: 602).

It is remarkable that in his text “Technologies of the Self”, Foucault defines neither the subject nor the “self”, but describes various technologies. This is an important observation. Using a mathematical metaphor we could state: the Cartesian subject is a point converging into self-awareness (*ego cogito ergo sum*); the subject of network thinkers is a divergent, undefinable set.

We have by now wandered too far into theory. It is time to ask how this divergence of the subject happens or could happen, for we cannot subscribe to one or the other animistic belief without having a grasp on the whole worldview. Previously we highlighted the developments and trends (in economy and science) that direct Western civilization from the generally hierarchical way of life and understanding towards networks. This evolution will certainly not bypass the issue of the subject. It is sufficient to recall only the set of theories and practices originating from Freud, which have strongly altered the Cartesian understanding of the subject.

The most appropriate concept for describing the contemporary situation, as opposed to the subject-object relationship that prevailed during modernity, is Heidegger’s term ‘enframing’ (*Ge-stell*). Enframing denotes the nature of modern technology, this

challenging situation in which contemporary human beings find themselves, challenged to participate in the mind-boggling machinery that encompasses all being. In his famous meditation on modern technology, Heidegger warns of a real danger of humans losing their position as subjects at the hands of modern technology and becoming merely a standing reserve (*Bestand*) in the total challenging machine of technology (Heidegger 1962). Heidegger sees modern technology as a total power system; metaphysics (the hidden agenda of which, according to Heidegger, has always been the triumph of the centre of structure) is accomplished through technology. This fear is illustrated by the global economic system which, as some critics say, is completely unmanageable and unstable, seizing manipulatively whole nations and economic systems during change (e.g. stock market meltdown in one region) (Soros 1998). We emphasize that Heidegger did not present this discourse in defence of the concept of the subject; according to Heidegger, the whole of metaphysics, which he perceives as the real history of the Western world and which entails both the subject-object relationship and the novel idea of the standing reserve, is the forgetting of being. Heidegger speaks instead for the remembrance of being. It would be intriguing to ask to what extent Heidegger’s thought of being corresponds with the network thinking in question in this article (associating Heidegger with Oriental schools of thought is not at all rare); but we shall not speculate on this topic here.

Vattimo, on the other hand, sees modern technology in a positive light. In the challenge-associations of technology the metaphysical definition of human being as

subject is lost; rigid identity is replaced by play. Vattimo believes that Heidegger regards technology as a model motor – there is a centre which generates a periphery. However, modern technology should be understood as a technique of communication, which is a unitary network without a centre or boundaries (compare: the Internet). According to Vattimo, it is positive that the as yet prevalent “strong” centres of identity such as occupation, homeland, reality and play (e.g. there exists a virtual world Second Life) disappear from the world. He believes that the ontological difference between reality and fiction disappears in a world with no absolute or strict hierarchies: we have no grounds to say that one’s daytime white-collar existence is “real” while one’s existence in the LARP environment as, say, a hobbit in the evening is “play”. An even more detailed analysis of the interrelation of reality and simulation can be found in the works of Jean Baudrillard, but here it is important to note that the fictional existence described by Vattimo resembles the multidimensionality of animism in many aspects. Animism is full of transformations from one being into another, while modern philosophy and science fiction have for some time been toying with the possibility of humans becoming cyborgs as technology develops (Haraway 1991).

Conclusion

This study led us to the conclusion that there is a considerable overlap between the critique of the subject prevalent in contemporary philosophy and animistic thinking. Philosophy (including a good deal of the philosophy of mind) is today attempting to rid itself of the conception of the au-

tonomous Cartesian subject. This, however, leads to the question as to how should the post-subjectivist selfhood function? It would be naive to suppose that such an experience could be built from the ground up — the desire to always begin anew is also part of the arsenal of hierarchical thinking. Indeed, many philosophers do attempt to relate to earlier, pre-philosophical ways of thinking (for example, Emmanuel Levinas (1998), Derrida and Vattimo (Derrida, Vattimo 1998) all enter into an idiosyncratic dialogue with monotheism).

Our research demonstrated that the weakness of the subject sought after by philosophers was already characteristic of the animistic world-view. However, from this similarity it should not be concluded that our call is to become animists – such a desire for rebirth, too, is more characteristic of hierarchical-monotheistic thinking; moreover, the animistic network thinking is multidimensional to the degree that it is impossible to enter and settle into it when prompted. On the other hand, we cannot exclude the possibility that the study of animistic principles can lead to certain significant practices, to technologies of the self in Foucault’s sense. Our optimism is based on the belief that even though animism has long been expelled from our conscious processes of self-creation, our beliefs and practices nevertheless contain traces of this way of understanding the world. It is not coincidental that the last few decades have seen the rise in popularity of searching for our roots in nature religions and of bringing them into relevance for the context of contemporary culture (Mikita 2013). The systematic description of the vestiges of animism would require a separate study, however.

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ŠIUOLAIKINĖS POST-SUBJEKTYVISTINĖS FILOSOFIJOS IR ANIMISTINIŲ RELIGIJŲ ŠEIMINIAI PANAŠUMAI

Leo Luks, Argo Moor

Santrauka. Šiuolaikinėje kontinentinėje filosofijoje dažna yra karteziškojo subjekto kritika ir bandymai sukurti post-subjektyvistinę filosofiją. Vakarų kultūros žmonės dažnai apibūdinami kaip gyvenantys nuolatinėje tapatybės krizėje. Klausimas „kas bus po subjekto?“ yra kertinis tiek filosofijoje, tiek vakariečių kasdienybėje. Šiame tarpdalykiniame tyrime mes teigiame, jog esama rimtų šeiminių panašumų tarp post-subjektyvistinės filosofijos ir animistinės religijos tikslų. Pirmiausia aprašomi trys principai, sudarantys kontekstą, be kurio neįmanoma suprasti animistinės subjektyvumo traktuotės: Vienybės principas, Pusiausvyros principas ir Poliarinių priešybių mąstymas. Šie principai toliau plėtoja tinklinio mąstymo idėją, aprašytą ankstesniame mūsų straipsnyje. Paskui palyginama animistinė subjektyvumo traktuotė su šiuolaikine subjekto kritika. Nors ir nekeliame normatyvaus reikalavimo prikelti animizmą, negalime atmesti galimybės, jog animistinių principų tyrimas sudarys prielaidas lokaliems postmodernios subjekto krizės sprendimams.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: XX a. filosofija, religijų istorija, post-subjektyvizmas, animizmas

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