The Passions of Modernity. Between the Tribulations of Anxiety and Despair

Ștefan Bârzu

ANNALS of the University of Bucharest
Philosophy Series

Vol. LXV, no. 2, 2016
pp. 71 – 90.
THE PASSIONS OF MODERNITY.
BETWEEN THE TRIBULATIONS OF ANXIETY AND DESPAIR

ȘTEFAN BÂRZU

Abstract

This paper focuses on highlighting the way in which the spirit of Protestantism, ultimately expressed through the conceptual spectrum of anxiety and despair is the essence of modernity. Within this line of thought there will be explored and challenged the very tension that the Protestant discourse has brought into the public life and the new dynamics of faith. Finally, the goal of this paper is to resuscitate this paradigmatic shift and its effects on post-modernism by immersing into the orbit of death (and resurrection). This line of thought is based on the works of Kierkegaard, in which the Protestant is found at paroxysm intuimg the Postmodern nuances of anxiety and rethinking a Christian discourse within the coordinates of the Absurd.

Keywords: modernity, Protestantism, anxiety, despair, faith, postmodernity, death of Christ.

Modernity, as a transgressive philosophical event within the paradigm of the history of human thought is, in essence, a Protestant liberation – the incipit of modernity is not the Enlightenment (with its sheer optimism based on the ultimate power of reason as implied in Kantian thought), but the Protestant Reformation (in its “dissatisfaction” with the corrupt human reason as Jean Calvin emphasized). The impetus of Protestantism, which propels the human subject into a discourse that is in its nature alienated from the pillars of classical humanism, provided the conceptual framework for a perpetual reformation of the possibility (and of the necessity) of a “God – human” subject and dialogue. The modern subject, whether it assumes this

1 B.A. Student, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest.
position or not, is, at least in a purely structural way, Protestant – being the radical effect of a both theological and philosophical convolution which pulsates to this day. The Protestant Reformation has its genesis in an apparent conceptual contradiction – the emmancipation of the individual through its return within the depths of “total depravation” – that catastrophic condition which places the “self” in the anxious tension between finite and infinite, the conditioned and the unconditioned, between the “damned” and the “chosen” ones.

I. The spirit of Protestantism

The central divorce between the Catholic Church and Protestantism resides within the differences of understanding the human nature in relation to the divine (prolonged in the problem of scriptural revelation of the divine) and the urgent implications of this problem. Catholicism presupposed the dogmas and the nature of the Church itself as being infallible. In other words, the insitutional representation of the Christian body, the Church, claimed total possesion of the the unaltered divine truth. The ecclesial class had upon itself the power, invested directly from God, to decide upon the “souls” of the individuals. The Church (precisely the institutionalized ecclesial form represented through priests and finally by the Pope, which is supposed to be *Vicarius Filii Dei*) was the embodiment of God’s will on earth. The subordination of the individual in the face of the Church had to be absolute, because this form of relation was basically a direct relation to God:

The pope holds the same authority that was originally given to Peter, and in the present bishops the same subsidiary overseership that the other apostles exercised. (Burtt 1939, 131)
I.1. The pre-modern preamble and the problem of complacency

The formal organization of the Catholic Church, and consequently the access to God’s *logos*, were entirely aristocratic, fact which indicates towards an absorption of a “pagan” religious practices. The very structure of the Catholic Church carries with it a ritualistic system which reflects with precision the old pre-Christian method of religious exercises. The paganization of Christianity (or, to be more specific, the *paganization of the “unbelieving” Christendom*) perpetuated the need for sophisticated ceremonial gestures and elaborated dogmatic traditions that eluded the simple truths of the Gospel.

Going even further with this form of pre-modern relation between the human being and divinity (which could just as truthfully be contextually formulated as the relation between the human being and the Church) I shall state that in a more or less authentic way – God was extremely present in the social ramifications – a presence which had with itself the image of a “guardian”. But this is a quite peculiar matter – is it not precisely this insistence of the Catholic Church, as being the bearer of the *logos* and the divine will, a signal that indicated the mere lack of authority of the Church? What authority that which vigorously insists that it has authority by negating (by elimination) all that denies this? The pseudo-authority brings with itself, against spontaneous intuition, not the freedom (eliberation) of the individual, but rather the continual immersion of the individual into captivity. The order without essence (the lack of authentic order) imposed by Catholicism was ultimately dictatorial, and dictatorship “knows itself so weak, that it can be overturned by the most trifling act of rebellion.” (Pleșu 2013, 43) (even by some thesis nailed to the doors of a church). I am insisting in

---

2 The issue of *complacency* in this framework functions as a label that the New Covenant Theology addresses as to be the pseudo-Christian hermeneutical artifice which absorbs Old Covenant “images” into New Covenant practices. In other words, the state of complacency indicates towards an attitude which brings about a self-sufficiency that diminishes the power of “grace” (as an act of divine benevolence towards humans) and foregrounds the power of “works” (as a means to win salvation).
going to the end and claiming that the pre-modern human subject was not at any point “blinded” by the specious yoke of faith nor distracted by the fantasies of the “opium of the masses”; I would even say that the so-called “authority” of the Catholic faith was never assumed in a personal and authentic way, but rather, in the face of a deadlock, the dichotomy that arose was between choosing the discomfort of a radical confrontation with eviscerating alienation and the complacency with a false idol. Ultimately, the pre-modern human subject was bounded by the sickness of self-satisfaction, sickness that, as I will later explore in this paper, Kierkegaard names it “The Sickness unto Death”.

**1.2. Peter’s denial – Vox populi**

An archetypal event in understanding the pre-modern situation and also a gesture of both theological and anthropological importance is the monumental Peter’s denial. René Girard claims that in the moment, in which Peter denies Christ, he became thoroughly “possessed” by the crowd – he is the voice of the people. When the individual finds himself in a crowd, he dissolves into becoming the crowd itself – which represents a real power that can be and was overcome only by Christ (Girard 1982, 177-189). “Peter’s denial” is the pre-modern moment itself, Peter being the Church, the cock’s crow – the Church’s reformers, and Peter’s weeping – ecclesia peccatorum which constantly repents. On this same line of thought, explains René Girard, Peter’s move is a prophetic symbol whose pattern solidifies in the mass manifestations that creep through all history – “I believe, not because I am convinced by experience, but because many « others » believe so.”

Peter’s archetypal act of mimesis has nothing to do with his volition, but rather appears as an natural response to the pressures of “otherness”. Therefore, in the very presence of alterity, as a socio-cultural temptation, “denial” is the only form of immediacy which is ultimately mediated by the “other” (Girard 1982, 187). My view is that the anthropological lenses of Girard’s analysis assures the possibility to assert that the pre-Modern “faith”, as a generic state, is an individual “denial” absorbed into the collective “otherness”. In this sense, as it will
be explored later, the so-called Postmodern “atheism”, or the pretense of “lacking of faith”, as a common state, is also the mass-embodiment of Peter’s Denial.

I.3. The protestant and the trembling of despair

After the dynamic reform that was (re)stimulated by Martin Luther’s thesis and later through the formulation of Calvin’s Institutes, the impulse of Protestantism crystallized in the drastic principle of Ecclesia reformata sed semper reformanda. This fundamental shift of paradigm brought again into the ecclesial dialogue and also in the public discomposure an interrogation of the “self” of which its salvation could no longer reside in the making of “new” dogmas, but in the return to the Scriptures. Implicitly it was a resuscitation of an acceptance of a human condition that is essentially imperfect and constantly has to reflect and doubt its finite and imperfect self. It is this exact movement that defines the very structure of modernity. Paul Tillich examines and names this return to the self as being the perpetual protest against any “absolute” claim about the relative reality (including the claims made by the protestant church):

(The Protestant principle) is the guardian against all the attempts of the finite and conditioned to usurp the place of the unconditional in thinking and acting. (Tillich 1948, 163)

The emancipation of the protestant individual resides therefore in his repositioning from the “infallible Church” in the imperfect community (the true church) – from centrus mundi back in pulverem. This shift of paradigm takes later philosophical formulation in the works of

---

3 The reformed church but constantly reforming – a banner for the reformation that was initially formulated by Saint Augustin and later retaken into consideration by Karl Barth (1947). Jodocus van Lodenstein also claimed in the Contemplation of Zion (1678) that the Church should not bear the name of “Reformata” (reformed) but “Reformanda” (reforming).
Immanuel Kant. Awaken from the “dogmatic slumbers” by the Humean empiricist project and also constrained by the direction of Newtonian physics, which placed the structural fiber of the universe under a purely mechanical paradigm, Kant developed a theoretical metaphysics whose exigencies sought a configuration of scientifical rigors (with unique relation to mathematics and physics as \textit{synthetic apriori judgements}). Formally, it can be stated that the new Kantian metaphysical direction was the effect of an urgency in the \textit{recentralization of the human subject} in the Universe – as a subject that only through his epistemological finitudes can he approach and comprehend reality. Therefore, removed from the pseudo-centrality of knowing things as \textit{they are} (\textit{noumenon}), the human subject is to be recentralized through Kant’s philosophical “reformation” by knowing things only as \textit{they reveal to our empirically-structured minds} (\textit{as phenomenon}). In “Protestant” terms, Kant seems to have returned to emphasize the relation of the conditioned subject to the unconditional, balancing the position of the conditioned (as the empirical subject) with the heights of the unconditional (as “pure reason”).

This destabilization of the pre-modern centrality outlines something ultimately paradoxical both in the human subject and also at the universal level – a paradox that suspends itself in modernity into a \textit{despair} of incertitude and self-doubt. And who else can see more clearly the depths of despair than the “Protestant at paroxysm” – that Kant woken up from the dogmatic slumbers and pulled from the ethical stage into the religious –, other than Kierkegaard.

Despair (\textit{The sickness unto Death}) has no mere psychological platitudes and does not resonate with Romantic obscurities, but it could much rather be traced back to a Socratic imperative (How should one live?):

\begin{itemize}
\item Overstepping David Hume’s empiricism (which brought with itself skepticism and therefore sanctioned the groundwork of any metaphysical enquiry), Kant traced the immediacy of a new metaphysics which went beyond Hume’s stress on \textit{principium causaltatis}.
\item This is in a formal sense the very essence of the Kantian instantiation of the \textit{Copernican Revolution}.
\end{itemize}
(It is in this last sense that) despair is the sickness unto death, this agonizing contradiction, this sickness in the self, everlastingly to die, to die and yet not to die, to die the death. For dying means that it is all over, but dying the death means to live to experience death; and if for a single instant this experience is possible, it is tantamount to experiencing it forever. (...) the dying of despair transforms itself constantly into a living. The despairing man cannot die. (Kierkegaard 1941b, 15)

Awakened in this new metaphysical condition, alienated from the common tranquility and impeded from the possibility of absolute claims, the human subject finds itself in utter despair – not the same pre-modern type of despair, but a despair that is perceived and assumed to the end. The authentic life resides exactly in the embracing of the actuality of this “depraved” state that the self finds itself in and the personal relating to the only element that is possible, existent and necessary for resolving this “sickness” – God:

The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude which relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, a task which can be performed only by means of a relationship to God. (15)

1.4. The anxiety of faith

This “assumed” despair that envelopes the Protestant way of living is based on an act that is essentially paradoxical – faith – that crucial “changing of ones mind” (metanoia) in which “the self in being itself and in willing to be itself is grounded transparently in God”. The

---

6 In Sickness Unto Death, Kierkegaard names this form of despair – the despair of the finite: “By seeing the multitude of men about it, by getting engaged in all sorts of worldly affairs, by becoming wise about how things go in this world, such a man forgets himself, forgets what his name is (in the divine understanding of it), does not dare to believe in himself, finds it too venturesome a thing to be himself, far easier and safer to be like the others, to become an imitation, a number, a cipher in the crowd. (...) Here there is no hindrance, no difficulty, occasioned by his self and his infinitization, he is ground smooth as a pebble, courant as a well-used coin” (Kierkegaard 1941b, 34).
paradox resides in the fact that even though this “faith” is a saving faith – “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9) – it must be constantly lived and exercised through good deeds – “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10). Although it is through faith that the individual is “saved”, he does not live inactively but all the more he must do good works to affirm his salvation. This “scandalous” dimension of Protestantism turned out to be the key element in understanding the tenacious and dynamic attitude of the protestant individual – both in his personal labour and in his relation to others.

So Protestants will have a “style of life” that is not easy to describe but nevertheless has upon it the stamp of authenticity and integrity. It involves an assurance about God combined with modesty concerning the reports we make about God. It means trusting him utterly and at the same time never trusting any human account of him utterly. It means being committed and recognizing that statements about our commitment must always be tentative. It means assurance of an ultimate security and the likelihood of an immediate insecurity. It means a risk, but a risk in the context of a promise. (Brown 1961, 49)

This way of life is necessary dialectical, perpetually pleading within a “saving despair” that takes contour from the intensification of the terror of sin (the feeling of distantiation from the absolute). This route though, reaching the point zero resolves through the “reversed dialectic” of Christianity which converts the difficulty into prosperity, the lack of hope into hope, suffering into joy and the sin into atonement (Walsh 2009).

An important aspect in the life of the modern individual is that he is confronting directly with the new coordinates of the Protestant paradigm in his relation to the “other”. The tension of the dialogue between the “authentic self” and the community suffers new interpretations and gestures – the walls of the Church dissolve into a regeneration of the universal corpus Christi (overcoming ethnical, racial and cultural pressures). Kierkegaard sees this new Christian understanding (or to be precise with its essential intention – this authentic Christian
understanding) as being one that brings with itself a task – a task that relates to the “other”. The radical movement resides in the special disintegration of the conceptual position of the term “other”, which finds its coordinates in Christ’s law of love – “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:31). This “law of love” refers to an incredibly radical type of “love” – one that does not destroy the physical embodiment of alterity, but the conceptual implications of alterity. The “I” manages to migrate into the “other” through the very act of love.

The fact is that at every moment the individual is himself and the (human) race. This is a man’s perfection, regarded as a state. At the same time it is a contradiction; but a contradiction is always the expression for a task; but a task is movement; but a movement towards that same thing as a task which first was given up as an enigma is a historical movement. (…) Perfection in oneself means therefore the perfect participation in the whole. (Kierkegaard 1957, 26)

The authentic Protestant living is one that is fundamentally contradictory, but all the more Kierkegaard claims that contradiction is actually essential to faith. This is explored in depth in Fear and Trembling where he highlights the trenchant leap of Abraham (“the knight of faith”) from the ethical stage to the religious stage. The ethical stage was governed by the moral constraints (formalized into the interior laws) which compelled Abraham not to kill his son Isaac, no matter what “divine voices” he has heard, while the religious stage plunged him into total trust in the divine omniscient will that subordinates the moral law, “as a teleological suspension of the ethical” (Williams 2004, 85). This total trust (the authentic faith) of Abraham in God, counterintuitively,

---

7 I would stress that Calvinism is formally (not essentially) Christianity at its purest, not only because of its philosophical sophistication of the conceptual nuances of the “free-will – predestination” paradox, but much more because of its constant and radical insistence that all (and by “all” I mean all claims about reality as it is given to the human mind and as it is not accessible to the human mind) should ultimately trace its validity from the Logos (as God’s revealed word through the Scriptures).

8 In opposition to what Kant formulated as “rational faith” – a faith that is stripped from any kind of possible contradiction that would suspend human reason. That being said, a rational faith would always subordinate itself to the pure reason.
did not gave him a blinding tranquility, neither did it produced a fanatically impulsive reaction, but quite the opposite – it burdened him with total anxiety. Anxiety was the foundation of Abraham’s faith – the “possibility of freedom” that devours all finitudes.

It was also anxiety (“the anxiety of death”) that weighted on Christ before His death, in the garden, an anxiety that laid the foundation for the ultimate faith that led him to pronounce the radically meaningful words: “nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will” (Matthew 26:39). This visceral anxiety is truly uplifting, claims Kierkegaard, for it brings with itself sheer faith – uniting in its shuddered experience the incapacity of human finitude with the divine immediacy.

Kierkegaard raises a crucial problem here:

If then we ask further what is the object of anxiety, the answer as usual must be that it is nothing. Anxiety and nothing regularly correspond to one another. So soon as the actuality of freedom and the spirit is posited, anxiety is annulled (aufgehoben). (Kierkegaard 1957, 86)

From this statement, it can be traced the subtle way that Kierkegaard defines freedom not as a form of an absolute autonomy – because “the possibility of freedom does not consist in being able to choose the good or the evil” (Kierkegaard 1957, 44), but rather a perspective of an authentic life which subordinates itself to an “absolute relation to the Absolute”. If freedom and the presence of the spirit are the opposite of anxiety (its negation) then how can a discourse which affirms that anxiety is the “dizziness of freedom” still be held?

One may liken anxiety to dizziness. Down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But the reason for it is just as much his eye as it is the precipice. For suppose he had not looked down. Thus anxiety is the dizziness of freedom which occurs when the spirit would posit the synthesis, and freedom then gazes into its own possibility, grasping at finiteness to sustain itself. In this dizziness freedom succumbs. (Kierkegaard 1957, 54)

This “dizziness of freedom” as anxiety is the freedom without the spirit (meaning a freedom without the absolute relation to the Absolute). When the spirit is founded in the Absolute (though a relation to God), then freedom does not “get dizzy” in the face of possibility, but rather
finds courage and acts in the basis of the immediacy of faith. Therefore, from a Kierkegaardian perspective, authentic freedom is not the relation of the spirit to an infinity of choices (or possibilities), because the freedom of choosing “everything” from “all” it in its essence a logical error – for you cannot be “free” to choose that which suspends freedom (or does not preserve your position as being free) and enslaves you. To be free means to always move within the possibilities which make you free – and this spectrum of movement is only founded in the relation of the self to God.

The paradox of faith is this, that the individual is higher than the universal, that the individual determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute, not his relation to the absolute by his relation to the universal. The paradox can also be expressed by saying that there is an absolute duty toward God; for in this relationship of duty the individual as an individual stands related absolutely to the absolute. (Kierkegaard 1941a, 61)

This is a paradox, but it is only this paradox that can justify the real possibility of a truly authentic freedom. This freedom, which Kierkegaard explores, is not a state, but rather a continuous predisposition to be freed (or liberated). Otherwise, the self cannot be free to do falsity – freedom relates itself only to truth. This is the main break which all the more is explored by Kierkegaard in Abraham’s act of faith when “he left one thing behind, took one thing with him: he left his earthly understanding behind and took faith with him – otherwise he would not have wandered forth but would have thought this unreasonable.” (Kierkegaard 1941a, 44).

I.5. The absence of God

“Why do You hide Your face?” (Job 12:24) – this is the unrest of modernity; suddenly all is deprived of any (possible or necessary) meaning. The human subject finds itself abruptly alienated in the face of a God that does not answer. Nonetheless, in this continuous tension between human responsibility and the hidden predestination of a divinity was found the fecund anxiety of Protestantism about which Max Weber...
addressed in his work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. What stimulent is then more motivating than being fully aware of your total responsibility towards yourself whilst embraced by the promise of a wise divine predestination? It is exactly in the space where God was “absent”, in the midst of that anxiety – it is that very place where God was most present. A very well-rounded example to illustrate this peculiar phenomenon is the one of the Puritan colonies from North America. Persecuted by the Church of England for their rigorous persistence to reform the Church from all unbiblical deviations and thus disfavored from ecclesial safety, the Puritans “focused on the preoccupation of the authentic living of life (...) a conception that is destined to dynamics.” (Marga 1998, 107). It is then, when the idea of church (as *ekklesia* in a literal and fully assumed sense) went back to its primary state of a fellowship of believers that is preoccupied with its “neighbor” and with the individual’s following of the word of God as unique and ultimate certitude?

But where is God anymore, if he is to be experienced within the act of faith alone? All the demonstrations regarding the possibility/existence/necessity of a God lose their epistemological value after Kant, as he reasoned for the acceptance of the idea of a God (*in extremis*) from “practical reasons” alone and not from a specific knowledge of the idea or “person” of God *per se*. This conclusion traces its presuppositions in Kant’s theoretical scheme which places the human reason in its epistemological enquiries strictly constrained within the fields of mathematics and physics. Although the “necessity” of God, as Leibniz argues in his *Monadology*, is somehow assumed by Kant in his reasoning, we see that finally the only groundings to the existence of a God are purely “practical” and not cosmological. When we move our attention to Kierkegaard we can already experience how a “proof” for the existence of God is through its core an absurdity, because its very structure already presupposes the existence of God. It may seem that along with modernity (and as I argued, with Protestantism), God and the relation in

---

9 *Ekklesia* – congregation, the gathering of the chosen ones that goes beyond the local community of believers, and reaches the true meaning of a universal Body of Christ.
faith to Him completely lost its power as a formulated discourse that has something relevant to say about reality, and that Christianity violently restricted itself to a purely subjective expression. The dialogue, as a gesture of Christian love, could not make the leap from the personal experience to a universal language with real adhesion with the human subject. The one that is outside of “faith” (or to be more adequate to the Protestant insistence – “the one that has no personal faith”), the Christian message takes the form of pure fantasy or in technical formulations – an insufficient expression of an anthropologically-natured urge that has no adherence whatsoever with the “other”10. Nevertheless it is exactly this interpretation on the “scandal” of Protestant faith that could (or did) manage to give birth to an authentic democratic community. The Protestant does not try to convince the “unfaithful” through arguments and demonstrations, but accepts that the problem does not lie within the lack of understanding, but in the lack of faith. That is why the real purpose became to “live” the revealed truth, and not to strangle it through reasonable explanations, not because it is not a reasonable message, but because it appeals to a new reason (metanoia) – “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). This is the formula of “crucifying” the world, of losing your “self” to a reality that has no objective tangent to otherness:

As I stood alone and forsaken, and the power of the sea and the battle of the elements reminded me of my own nothingness, and on the other hand, the sure flight of the birds recalled the words spoken by Christ: Not a sparrow shall fall on the ground without your Father: then, all at once, I felt how great and how small I was; then did those two mighty forces, pride and humility, happily unite in friendship. (Kierkegaard 2008)

10 In the René Girard’s Mimetic Theory, he argues for the idea according to which the human self cannot exist without the “other” (the self depends on otherness). Therefore the “self” is not a separate entity. The alienation of the protestant “self” is to be found in the conceptual tension between the lack of adhesion with the “other” and the absence of God from the common discourse.
II. Post-modernity

II.1. The death of metaphysics

Alongside the deconstructionist impetus, some extremes of the liberal manifestations of Protestantism have had the tendency to completely eliminate any form of metaphysical assertions from the theological discourse. Therefore the post-modern human subject, following “Peter’s denial”, as Girard formulated it as a theoretical event, wakes up into an utterly nihilistic situation. In other words, that “onto-theological” metaphysical tradition (Crîșmăreanu 2010, 37) that goes back to an Aristotelian heritage and ends in the urgency of Nietzsche’s philosophical revolution was replaced by a profound vagueness that is dominated by doubt and purely therapeutical “communities” (and extremes such as ikons). But the post-modern nihilism is subtle, presenting a turn that is rather aesthetical than structural. Slavoj Žižek identifies this ideological artifice by declaring repeatedly – there was never more faith than what we have today, and the ultimate proof is Deconstructionism. Žižek’s insistence is tied to the post-modern pretense of “distantiation” and objectivity in discourse, which is purely rhetorical and finally lacking of meaning because, he says, it is the same discourse as the one that is “assumed”, but with a certain dose of fear.

The anxiety of assuming a subjective position and a personal faith is the post-modern sickness – the old paradigm, the pre-modern one, is resuscitated in post-modernity. The Catholic Church and its absolute authority is therefore spontaneously replaced with the State. The “I believe” dissolves and is taken over by a “I do not know” or “I do not believe”, which in this strict formal sense it quite literally means “we believe”.

11 The idea of “ikon”, instantiating in this particular conceptual framework represents an experimental community, self-entitled (through the works of Peter Rollins) to be iconic, apocalyptic, heretical, emerging and failing.
II.2. The death of Christ

The post-modern spectrum of thought sees a crucified Christ that eludes the urgency of resurrection and therefore eulogizes the aesthetical implications of an “ornamental” domination of the Absurd. In a Kierkegaardian sense, this is the midst of the aesthetic stage where the individual fundamentally remains a spectator through his attitude of escapism – from boredom towards “the interesting”, plunging into irony, egotism, perpetual contradiction and hedonism. William McDonald sees in Kierkegaard’s description of the aesthetical stage a need for radical introspection that necessitates the alienation of the self from itself. To realize this, there are three Kierkegaardian ways of detaching: the projection of the self in the “other”, the reflection of the self in someone’s work (of art) and the depiction of the self in its own work (of art) (McDonald 2013, 97). This Romantic attitude indicates towards a persistent want for externalization as the only therapeutic possibility of an adherence with an “authentic” self. In other words, the self then exists only through the approval of the “other” self – and on this foundation there are crass gestures such as – you suffer only if the other approves your suffering or you love only if the other approves your love.

This is the moment where death, contrary to common deduction and despite its centrality, loses its effect as making life a “meditation” or as an “exercise” (unto death), and somehow becomes a mere form of nihilist rhetorical elegance which eludes through idleness the responsibility of a life driven by the perspective of death.

When people imagine all kinds of deeper meanings because they “are frightened of four words: He was made Man,” what really frightens them is that they will lose the transcendent God guaranteeing the meaning of the universe, God as the hidden Master pulling the strings – instead of this, we get a God who abandons this transcendent position and throws himself into his own creation, fully engaging himself in it up to dying, so that we, humans, are left with no higher Power watching over us, just with the terrible burden of freedom and responsibility for the fate of divine creation, and thus of God himself. (Žižek 2009, 25)

This Hegelian view that Žižek proposes as a reality of the event of the cross can give us a deeper insight on the post-modern anxiety: the
resurrection of Christ and his later ascend to heaven is no longer relevant, and the Christian event ends with the Calvary. “And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.” (1 Corinthians 15:14). Without its metaphysical discourse, the act of faith can no longer take place.

II.3. The Holy Spirit and the emergency of metaphysics

“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.” (John 14:18-19) The Feuerbachian and the later Marxist interpretation capture the idea of “Holy Spirit” within the boundaries of a merely anthropological spectrum – The Holy Spirit is no entity (person of the trinity) per se, but the Christian community as a whole. Going beyond the theological violations and Marx’s ontological shift from the “abstract” to the real (material) life process, there is a more fundamental break. If Marxism bares with itself the crucial assertion of the possibility and the historical urgency of a perfect communist society, (biblical) Christianity always points out towards the Kingdom to come (The Second Coming of Christ), only then it can reach the status of perfect (communist) society (Petulla 1972, 247). Ultimately, the conflict lies within the dichotomy of presuppositions on which these two world-views or systems (if I may say that Christianity is a world-view or system) are built on – Marxism views (total) justice as a real possibility and necessity, whereas Christianity always turns towards the promise of a Judgement Day in which there will be absolute justice12.

12 The implicit danger (which is often invoked) of this Christian attitude could be an apathy towards all sociopolitical affairs. If we were to be consistent with the biblical texts, there is no state of indifference, but rather a conciliation with both the flawed human understanding and God’s flawless authority: “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.” (Romans 13:1-2).
In lacking of an onto-theological discourse ("The God without being"), the Holy Spirit is in a purely material form the State itself (or politically structured as a party, as it took form within the communist ideological spasms):

God is no longer a being nor even the totality of being, since no such totality exists and being lies entirely open to the future which has to be created. (Garaudy 1970, 160)

The anxiety is therefore perpetually masked under the ideological dome of the creation of socio-political gestures, and the human subject is encapsulated as an object-part in a systematical entity. The uniformization and the lost of individuality of the post-modern subject makes him an orphan – desperately looking for the adoption of his disgraced self – for as we can see, the State has failed and Religion has ended along with Christianity.

II.4. The resurrection. Instead of conclusions

Weather we accept the Kantian presupposition regarding the a priori disposition of metaphysics, as approach of the problem from a psychoanalytical perspective and see it as an act of fantasizing towards that intangible "objet petit a" or we view metaphysics in an evolutionary light as being the result of a cognitive (in)adaptation that is still bond to such imaginary exercise, it is quite obvious that we are fundamentally

---

13 Christianity is the end of religion in the sense that along with Christ's ultimate sacrifice, the old architectural form of worship loses its meaning completely. In other words, the Calvary is the moment when the ceremonial and legal images from the Old Covenant are fulfilled in him. Religion as an institutional force ends in front of the act of Christ's death. This discourse is open to further research and conceptual investigation.

14 Term that is used within Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory that refers to that specific "something" and/or "someone" that the individual human subject believes it could complete the lack of meaning and totality within the self, and therefore desires it.
desperate and anxious beings (at least from a Kierkegaardian conceptual point of view). But the question still stands: What is the possible (or necessary) direction now? Or is the notion of “direction” even needed?

The decisive thing is, that for God all things are possible. This is eternally true, and true therefore in every instant. This is commonly enough recognized in a way, and in a way it is commonly affirmed; but the decisive affirmation comes only when a man is brought to the utmost extremity, so that humanly speaking no possibility exists. Then the question is whether he will believe that for God all things are possible – that is to say, whether he will believe. But this is completely the formula for losing one’s mind; to believe is precisely to lose one’s mind in order to win God. (Kierkegaard 1941b, 39)

Ultimately, the conceptual spectrum of death and the perspective of resurrection (weather it pursues a spiritual Kingdom or a material Kingdom) are the ones in which this discourse collapses. Through my analysis, I underlined the way Modernity and Postmodernism, and the transition itself from one to the other, raise the essential question of the place of faith within the grasp of anxiety and despair. The paroxysm of this tension is Protestantism, with its total emphasis on the limited human condition in the face of the unlimited unconditioned divinity. On this conceptual basis I stressed the Kierkegaardian solution which restored the “self” from the paradigm of the Absurd by placing it in an absolute relation to the Absolute. But how can there even be a discourse on the very notion of “self” in the shadow of the “Death of God”, the naturalization of freedom and the so-called demystification of eternity? Is it “practical” to forge a fantasy of this idea for the sake of meaning or is the “losing of one’s mind” in faith a saving act? A definite diagnosis would be too vague without the presence of the “self” within a domain that is epistemologically palpable, and the authenticity of a Saul-Paul metanoia would be too weak for objectifying “The Road to Damascus”. All the more, it is precisely because of this epistemological haze that we are fully responsible to engage with the tribulations of anxiety and despair because “the possibility of this sickness is man’s advantage over the beast, and this advantage distinguishes him far more essentially than the erect posture, for it implies the infinite erectness or loftiness of being spirit” (Kierkegaard 1941b, 11).
REFERENCES