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Revisiting ‘the problem of the devil’...¹

Preamble

By ‘the problem of the devil’ I mean Flusser’s claim that *The History of the Devil* was his attempt at Ethics. In 2025, exactly 60 years after the book was first published, the *problem* is still relevant. The problem arises because, to many, now and then, the book sounds more like “a long and painful meditation on death than on ethics”². In what follows I try to come up with a few explanations why we ought to return to the book with a minimum of assiduity, and verify what we have taken for granted. – But we ought to take a step back here. Since this article is a ‘revisiting’ of the problem of the devil, as indicated in the title, some general considerations are necessary.

My first contact with – and reflective exercise of – Flusser’s writings occurred when I first read, while still in my undergraduate studies, *The History of the Devil*: a bizarre and yet fascinating book. Because of my interest in Hegel at the time, I eventually noticed³ some points of contact between Flusser’s interpretation of Genesis 1:1 (The Creation)⁴ and Hegel’s interpretation of Genesis 3 (The Fall)⁵. I also understood that, although in a very obscure manner, and submerged by metaphors, ‘Ethics’ was the philosophical backbone of the book of the devil. This was the thesis I tried to defend at the time (late 2000’s, early 2010’s) – a thesis somewhat unexplored then. In November 2011, FLUSSER STUDIES (FS) published some of the results of this investigation: my very first peer-reviewed article, “Flusser’s moral theory: philosophy as melancholy”. All this was the thoughts and intuitions of an undergraduate student... and the result that came out of it (the above-mentioned article) was, if I were to give it too much thought today, to put it plainly: *sensu lato*, monograph, and without a significant degree of complexity. Still, I am grateful to *Flusser Studies* for this opportunity.

That said, for this Special Twentieth Anniversary Issue, aptly titled “ Changing Perspectives”, I would like to revisit the problem of the devil. However, this time from a different more differentiated

¹ This work was supported by FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, I.P., by project reference and DOI identifier: <https://doi.org/10.54499/UI/BD/153493/2022>

² Krause, 1998: 16; Ismael 1965..

³ With a little help from my supervisor at the time, prof. William Desmond.

⁴ Flusser 2012^a: 29f.

⁵ Hegel 2001: 340f.

point of view, and from the perspective of Heidegger's notion of temporality – albeit with continuous references to Hegel and Levinas; for hermeneutic reasons that should become clear along the way. The task is still the same, though: to clarify and address Flusser's claim that the book of the devil was his attempt at Ethics.

Heidegger, Hegel and Flusser: on time and temporality

For Heidegger, the fundamental characteristic and mode of Da-sein's being-in-the-world is temporal: Da-sein⁶ is *Geworfenheit* – i.e., a being thrown into time. Thus, as Michael Inwood has it, *Geworfenheit* “is a central characteristic of Da-sein itself”⁷. The being of Da-sein is, from the very beginning, something thrown into the *Da*, the “there” of *Sein*. Da-sein knows no other mode of being prior to its *Geworfen*. This is what Flusser and Hegel mean by temporality and fallenness⁸: to be spirit is to be *Geworfenheit*... ‘I am already *there*, in the *Da* of *Sein*; I always discover myself in my temporality, my finitude: it is in my finitude that I discover my being-there. Even in its broadest sense – as Hegel uses the term *Dasein* (i.e., a being, any existing, concrete, ‘determined’ thing) –, being a *Dasein* invariably means being temporal. In this case, *Geworfenheit* indicates a past and a future of (a) being (a *Dasein*). And the present is the nodal moment that makes past and future intelligible. But – I mean ‘BUT’ – this ‘intelligibility’ is something that belongs exclusively to *Da-sein*. The central difference between *Da-sein* and any other *Dasein* is this: *Daseine*, determined things in general, human and non-human, are both, by the very definition of a *Dasein*, a thing ‘condemned to temporality’, to finitude. However, things (*Daseine*) in general do not reach the intelligibility of this temporality⁹. Only *Da-sein* knows this temporality. Because only a Da-sein knows it will die (and is, indeed, generally, concerned with death). Hence, as far as Flusser (and Hegel) goes, *Da-sein* is doubly condemned: like every *Dasein*: (1) it is condemned to temporality (and spatiality), and, as such, a Da-sein is not different from a tree, a house, a mountain, a protoplasm, a horse, and so on – all these things, once they come to be, are condemned to finitude, to *Geworfenheit*; that said, solely Da-sein is (2) condemned to the intelligibility of this temporality and,

⁶ I will use both spelling – *Dasein* and *Da-sein* – throughout this text. But here is the caveat: by *Dasein* I mean, following Hegel, any determined, existing thing (a tree, a house, a pebble, a bottle, a seahorse, Socrates, and so on); and by *Da-sein* I mean exclusively the human *Dasein*.

⁷ INWOOD, 1999, p. 218.

⁸ Evident from the interpretation that both make of the myth of the fall.

⁹ I surely do not claim here that *all animals* are incapable of knowing temporality thus. But I do not speak ‘animal’. Hence, I restrict my claim to human beings.

consequently, to the question: What do I do with this intelligibility? This is indeed the privilege of a *Da-sein*.

In all this, Flusser and Heidegger are in agreement. Heidegger even draws a distinction between *Geworfenheit* and *Verfallenheit* (fallenness) to emphasize the difference between the temporality of a *Dasein* and the temporality of *Da-sein*. “Falling is a definite existential character of *Da-sein* itself”, as Heidegger writes it¹⁰. *Da-sein* can (and often does) become blind (of its *Geworfenheit*) and plunges itself “into the groundlessness of everyday existence”, placing all its “possibilities into the service” of some ‘distraction’¹¹. In this case, it is said *Da-sein* has fallen. Heidegger insists fallenness here has no moral (religious) connotation, i.e., it has nothing to do with the idea of the Fall (as in the myth of the Fall in the Book of Genesis, 3) – fallenness is the inauthentic condition that leads to *Da-sein*’s fail to be itself¹². Nevertheless, as Karl Löwith, one of Heidegger’s children¹³, reminds us, correctly, the point here is that, for Heidegger, as *Geworfenheit*, man still has to face “pure reality”, i.e., the fact that “there is no ultimate wisdom about its when and its whereabouts” in Nature. That is, ‘man’ – and only ‘man’ – has to face its finitude, i.e., the futurity of its death. Hence, the immense “boredom, anxiety, and anticipation of death” that overtakes *Da-sein* (in Existentialism). By understanding itself as a “fall,” “man is confronted with nothingness and, by reaching out into this nothingness, he becomes conscious of Being as such”... and Heidegger calls this “consciousness” “the miracle of miracles”¹⁴. But in inauthenticity, *Da-sein* falls (again) into the forgetfulness of its *Geworfenheit* – its finitude – and misses the point of this ‘miracle of miracles’.

In principle, then, *Geworfenheit* and *Verfallenheit* seem to imply the same thing. But while *Geworfenheit* applies to all things (human and non-human), *Verfallenheit* (even in Heidegger’s understanding, and despite of his insistence that *Verfallenheit* has nothing to do with the Fall) applies only to *Da-sein*. Things ‘do not fall’ – they simply *happen* in temporality. Things cannot plunge into (*Verfallen*) inauthenticity... things cannot ‘fall prey’ and ‘fall away from themselves’... because they have only one mode of existence – which excludes the confrontation with nothingness (groundlessness, boredom, anxiety, anticipation of death, nausea, and so on), as things have no clue of the futurity of their inexistence in time. And, thus, things cannot philosophize either. Or, as Michael Inwood has it: “An unfallen *Dasein*

¹⁰ Heidegger 2001a: 220.

¹¹ Ibid.: 240.

¹² Ibid.: 176-179.

¹³ According to Richard Wolin (2003), Heidegger ‘had’ a few children – Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse, to be specific. We should certainly include Flusser in this list. That said, I do not use the term pejoratively here. I simply mean these thinkers were influenced by, and are responding to, Heidegger (one way or another). Cf. WOLIN, 2003.

¹⁴ Löwith 2022. 390.

cannot philosophize”¹⁵. Or, more metaphorically, as the poet from São Paulo, Arnaldo Antunes, would say: “Things [*Dasein*] have *weight, mass, volume, size, time, shape, color, position, texture, duration, density, smell, value, consistency, depth, contour, temperature, function, appearance, price, destiny, age, meaning*”... but things “have no peace of mind”¹⁶ either...; and, of course, neither can they feel anguish, disgust, nausea, and so on... because that is a ‘privilege’ of Spirit (*Da-sein*). Or in Flusser’s words, only *Da-sein* can experience “spiritual vertigo (without which there is no philosophical speculation that is good for anything)”¹⁷. In short: only *Da-sein* can, once confronted by the intelligibility of death’s futurity, face the question of its freedom. So, “it does not follow, then, that fallenness (*Verfallenheit*) is a bad thing”¹⁸. *Verfallenheit* is not a curse for *Da-sein* – unless, of course, *Da-sein* is solely grounded by *Gerede*, i.e., idle talk (*conversa fiada*). But, to Flusser, that which Heidegger calls inauthenticity, the forgetfulness of *Verfallenheit* (which, for Heidegger, is ‘potayto pothato’) is just another name for *Gerede*.

To expand this point, let us consider briefly the existential nausea experienced by Antoine Roquentin, the anguished character in Jean-Paul Sartre’s novel *La Nausée*.

Nausea is the name Sartre gives to the anguish that takes hold of *Da-sein* when it discovers the ultimate truth of human existence: that “Every existing thing is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness and dies by chance”¹⁹. Said differently, nausea is the bitter taste of discovering the facticity and contingency of human existence – it is *Da-sein* taking itself as immediate, finite existence. At first, when I come face to face with the absurdity of human existence, I might realize that that nausea is not within me. I can still take hold of my existence or of what is left of it (once I’ve realized, with the *Gītā*, that “for one who has taken birth, death is the most certain thing”²⁰). However, once I start giving too much thought to the so-called meaningless of human existence, insists Sartre, nausea stops being something just external, outside of me... I start feeling it in the walls, in the things, in the books I read, in the music I hear, in the people I meet... nausea is everywhere around me. And it comes, unexpectedly, from all sides, to penetrate my own existence (consciousness). It is, after all, this disgusting worldview that Roquentin relates thus: “Now I see: I recall better what I felt the other day at the seashore when I held the pebble. It was a sort of sweetish sickness. How unpleasant it was! It

¹⁵ Inwood, op. cit., p. 65-67.

¹⁶ Antunes 2000: 91.

¹⁷ Flusser, Ensaio 9, p. 48. Original: “Sem vertigem espiritual não há especulação filosófica que presta”.

¹⁸ Inwood, op. cit., ibid.

¹⁹ Sartre 2007: 180.

²⁰ Cf. *Bhagavad-Gītā*, chapter 2, verse 27.

came from the stone, I'm sure of it, it passed from the stone to my hand. Yes, that's it, that's just it – a sort of nausea in the hands.”²¹

Initially, then, under the spell of nausea, I feel that my body is the only ‘thing’ that is truly mine (albeit it is by now a nauseated body). But, eventually, even this – the feeling that the body is all I still have – nausea takes from me. Thus, in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre adds: “this is what we have described elsewhere under the name of *Nausea* – a dull and inescapable nausea that perpetually reveals my body to my consciousness”²².

However, in principle, as far as Flusser is concerned, the nausea Roquentin feels when, for instance, holding a pebble in his hands at the seashore, arises solely in the context of *Gerede*, idle talk. Idle talk – “conversa fiada” – causes or brings up nausea²³. Roquentin seems incapable of distinguishing between the *Geworfenheit* of the pebble and his own *Geworfenheit*. While holding the pebble in his hands, Roquentin perceives the temporality and facticity of the pebble, which exists, apparently, without reason; and this facticity passes from the stone to his own hands, body and mind. But this happens because: (a) Roquentin confuses both *Geworfenheit* (his and that of the stone) as *Verfallenheit*, and (b) he does not seem capable of answering, or at least considering the ethical weight of the most fundamental question that arises from the facticity of *Verfallenheit* – as far as Flusser is concerned – *Free for what?*... because this question only makes sense under what Flusser calls the “dense blanket of intersubjective relationships”²⁴. Intersubjectivity is, for Flusser, the primordial mode of Da-sein’s being-in-the-world. Subjectivity – the drama-queen of Existentialism (indeed, of most philosophies) – is something that occurs only once this ‘dense blanket of intersubjective relationship’ is removed. This is also to say that, for Flusser, the I-speak precedes the I-think, for, simply: “there is no reality prior to language, there is no Ego prior to language, and there is no language prior to languages”, thus, “I am really myself only insofar as I agree with others, in conversation – we are conversing”. That is: “The foundation of my reality is an agreement [in conversation] with others”²⁵. To be sure, *agreement* here does not mean simply concurring with others; rather, it is about accepting the ontological condition of intersubjectivity: that the We precede the I and the Thou. Most philosophies start from the premise that first there is an Ego (and I-am-myself) that can choose to relate with the world. Or even for those radical determinists

²¹ Sartre, op. cit., p. 19-20.

²² Sartre, 1992, p. 338.

²³ Flusser, 2012a, p. 153.

²⁴ Flusser, *Ensaïos* 5, p. 3.

²⁵ Flusser, *Magazine* 6, p. 23-62.

amongst ourselves²⁶ (and ‘God, there are many’), who are ready to reject the idea of ‘choice’ altogether, it is still the case that the ‘I-am-myself’ always comes first... it is all about “I, me, mine” (as George Harrison would have it)²⁷.

This primacy of the I is indeed the origin of Roquentin’s whole issue with nausea. It is all about him. He realizes he has ‘too much’ freedom... because he is alone... and that freedom is killing him. In his own words: “I am alone in this whole garden-rimmed street [or anywhere he goes for that matter]. Alone and Free. But this Freedom is rather like death”²⁸. And that is precisely Flusser’s whole point, as far as nausea is concerned: it arises only when the dense blanket of intersubjective relationship is removed. The removing of this dense blanket is also a form of *Gerede* (*conversa fiada*). One of the fundamental roles of idle talk is to relativize the ethical weight of intersubjectivity – and of the question about freedom that comes out of it: Free for what? And to Flusser it is (also) from this relativization that disgust or nausea arrives. Thus, in *The History of the Devil*, he writes: “We all have something we call ‘consciousness of good and evil’”, and which we generally “take as “absolute”. One of the roles of the “devil” (with all its masks and ambivalences) is to relativize this consciousness, transferring (eternal) value to ephemeral things (such as “soil”, “nation”, “status quo”, etc.)²⁹.

All that said, more to the point here: *Verfallenheit* ultimately points to an ethical dimension. To be a fallen being means to be spirit – to be spirit means to feel spiritual vertigo. The very philosophy that is good for something moves in (and by) spiritual vertigo. And, Flusser insists, spiritual vertigo has only one measure: “faith in immortality... and this faith cannot, thus, be eradicated”³⁰ (without the consequent nausea and despair). And the forgetfulness of this character of *Verfallenheit* is another name for *Gerede*. And Flusser and Heidegger both seem quite aware of the distinction between *Geworfenheit* and *Verfallenheit* in this context: things are temporal; but only Da-sein knows (experiences) time as a moving-toward-death. But the two philosophers do respond quite differently to this fact. To see the extent of their disagreement on this matter suffices to ask both the following questions: *How do I know I am temporal (mortal)?* And, *Why does that matter?*

²⁶ Flusser, to be sure, was one of them. We are invariably determined biologically, sociologically, psychologically, physically. And yet, “this does not take away from my inner conviction that sometimes I do what I do because I have decided to do it”. This is ultimately related to the distinction Flusser draws between the question *Free from what?* and *Free for what?*. As a (quasi)determinist, Flusser knows that, as doubly condemned creatures, we are not free *from* a number of restraints... and, yet, some freedom still remains... and hence the question: *Free for what?* Cf. Flusser, *Ensaïos* 5, p. 35.

²⁷ Harrison, “I Me Mine”, 1970.

²⁸ Sartre, 2007, p. 209.

²⁹ Flusser, 2012a, p. 145.

³⁰ Flusser, *Ensaïos* 7, p. 69.

In *Sein und Zeit* (SZ) Heidegger comes to the conclusion that Being – as in Dasein’s being – *is* time. To be human means to exist temporally, in the interval between birth and death. Being is time; and time is finite – it comes to an end with death. In Heidegger’s final words in SZ: “The existential-ontological constitution of Dasein’s totality is grounded in temporality”³¹. Genuine temporality is the apprehension of Da-sein’s finitude. For Heidegger, the crucial problem is that “since Aristotle” this “genuine temporality” has been misinterpreted. And, of course, Hegel is (in Heidegger’s eyes) one of the many authors of this history of misinterpretations of the notion of temporality³². The central problem for Heidegger in this context is the question of ‘counting time’ from a perception of the now-time. In this case, time is what we experience in the passing of these *nows*, so to speak. Or, as Heidegger has it: “Time is that which is ‘counted’ and which shows itself when one follows the travelling pointer [of a clock]”. Time is the “making-present of the” hands in a clock³³. In the case of Hegel, Heidegger continues, in this ‘making-present’ or the ‘passing-away’ of nows – which is also the “negation of the negation as punctuality” (since every time the traveling pointer of a clock point punctually to a ‘now’, the ‘now’ is no longer ‘now’, but a ‘past-now’). Thus, Hegel gets this much right: time is “intuited becoming”... the intuited becoming of something, that is, the intuited arising and passing of something *in* the stream of time. But, as far as Heidegger is concerned, Hegel ends up falling to the same old conceptual idea of time as a succession of nows. And, in doing so, he inevitably sees time “as the negative unity of Being-outside-of-itself” and, thus, sees time as “something simply abstract, ideal”³⁴. Hence, the problem, to Heidegger, is that from here, Hegel begins to interpret “this ‘becoming’ in an ‘abstract’ sense, which goes far beyond the representation of the ‘stream’ of time”³⁵... that is, beyond the temporality that Da-sein itself is. It is as if Time were eternal, while temporality temporalizes itself. Hegel, for his part, defines ‘time’ as spirit... and, “as its concept, Time is eternal”. It is the negativity that refers to itself... thus, time is the negation of negation. Metaphorically, it is like Kronos who, possessing all the series of time, “produces everything and destroys its products”³⁶; it devours past, present and future, and everything in them, precisely because Time is not determined in particular and effectively by any of them... the finite is transient, temporal... the true, the spirit, is eternal. Or, in the language of the *Phenomenology*, “Time is the concept [*Begriff*] itself that exists there and is represented to consciousness as empty intuition... Time is the pure self externally intuited by the self but not grasped

³¹ Heidegger, 2001a, p. 488.

³² Ibid, p. 473.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 482-483.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 483.

³⁶ Hegel, 2018, §§257-258.

by the self; time is the merely intuited concept"... Time is the destiny and the necessity of the as yet not perfected Spirit, i.e., until it has overcome the externality of objective Substance"³⁷. Translating: knowing depends on time, on human action in the real world... for "Everything we know must come before us in a living phase of experience"³⁸. Thus, in a fundamental way, Hegel is not, despite Heidegger's criticism, claiming something much different here from Heidegger's own view: time is lived experience. Logic is atemporal (so is Mathematics)... *phenomenon* is not. There is no point in asking when does Pure Being becomes Pure Nothingness?... unless we can grasp *a* being's becoming in reality. In reality, 'becoming' is temporal: it is the turning of a being into nothingness. Hence the notion of Dasein (a concrete thing that exists in reality and moves, in time, from being to nothingness). But, again, Dasein knows no time. Spirit knows time. But to know time, Spirit itself has to appear in time, as a temporal thing (a Da-sein). Thus, Logic, Mathematics, and so on, cannot apprehend the concept of time as it truly is. Hence the movement from the *Logic* towards a *Philosophy of Nature* and, ultimately, a *Philosophy of Spirit (Phenomenology)*: it is in Nature that Da-sein, Spirit, can apprehend the concept of time as it is.

But *Time* cannot be confused with temporality or duration³⁹. In short: for Hegel there is a crucial distinction between Time and temporality: "...time itself is, in its concept, eternal; for it is not just any time, not even the now, but time-as-time; this very concept, however, like every concept in general, [is] the eternal, and therefore also [is] the absolute present"⁴⁰. To be counted, time has to become grasped in experience, as embodied in a Dasein. (But only Da-sein experiences time thus.)

Flusser, meanwhile, as we know, in postulating the 'devil' *as* Time, defines time, metaphorically, as the negation of negation (another name for the devil), precisely because, like Kronos, it produces everything and devours everything it produces. But Time is not temporality. The 'devil' falls... but, much like the Hegelian Spirit (*Geist*), "The devil is possibly immortal"⁴¹. Therefore, 'devil' (for Flusser) and *Geist* (for Hegel) are not temporality. As for Flusser, "The devil goes his way, and history sings the glory of its deeds. Humanity [on the other hand, as temporality] is as close or far from its goal as Adam and Eve" were, before and after the Fall⁴². Then, somewhat like Hegel, Flusser makes a distinction between Time and temporality (duration). This distinction becomes evident when we understand that,

³⁷ Hegel, 2022, §801.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Hegel, 2018, §§257-258.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Flusser, 2012a, p. 12.

⁴² Ibid., p. 21-22.

for Hegel, “Spirit falls into Time”⁴³, but *Spirit is not Time*. Things do not fall into Time... things are simply ‘thrown’ or ‘found’ in temporality by appearing to Da-sein, in phenomenal experience. Thus, *Time* is not ‘temporality’ – as far as Hegel and Flusser are concerned.

Heidegger, for his part, does not accept any distinction between Time and temporality – and, thus, seeks to overcome it, relating Time directly and exclusively to Da-sein (time *per se*): as Da-sein we do not experience time abstractly or separately... we *are* time. Da-sein is time; Time is Da-sein. And hence the various fundamental questions raised in the last paragraph of *SZ*: “How is this mode of the temporalizing of temporality to be interpreted?” “Is there a way which leads from primordial [abstract] time to the meaning of *Being*? Does time itself manifest as the horizon of *Being*?”⁴⁴

Despite Heidegger’s critique of the distinction between Time and temporality by Hegel, Aristotle, and others, these questions are not answered in *SZ*. To be sure, Heidegger is indeed quite interested in the question: “What belongs to the essence of spirit which makes it possible for it to fall into time?” In other words: How do I know I am temporal? True, “Da-sein is possible only by reason of its temporality” – and “temporality temporalizes itself” (time itself is ‘fugitive time’). But the temporality in which world-time temporalizes itself can only be apprehended properly through the time that passes-away towards death: that is, the time that Da-sein essentially is (a being-toward-death). “Da-sein knows fugitive time” only because it also knows “its ‘fugitive’ knowledge about its death”⁴⁵.

It is certainly important to underline that, by postulating Da-sein as time itself, Heidegger is evidently, as Joan Stambaugh rightly reminds us, in search of a “way out of [traditional, Aristotelian] metaphysics, which postulates Being exclusively as a kind of presence”⁴⁶. And, in this sense, and within our context, we have seen, Hegel does not escape Heidegger’s criticisms. In Hegel there is no room for the question of Being (as far as Heidegger goes); in fact, in Hegel “no question of this kind can even arise”, since he supposedly starts from “the identity of Being and Thinking as a real equivalence”⁴⁷. Therefore, against traditional metaphysics, and certainly against Hegel, in *SZ*, Heidegger seeks a “concept of time, toward that which Da-sein belongs more than anything to time, in terms of which ‘Being’ is given as presence”, and not as foundation. Consequently, he concludes, the “foundation of fundamental ontology is not any foundation”⁴⁸ outside of temporality; it is, in fact, the very temporality

⁴³ *Apud* Heidegger, op. cit., p. 480.

⁴⁴ Heidegger, op. cit., p. 488. Emphases original.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 480, 448, 478, respectively.

⁴⁶ Stambaugh, 1972, p. ix-x.

⁴⁷ Heidegger, 1972, p. 49.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 32.

of Da-sein. It is Da-sein itself as temporality. The original structure of temporality shows itself as the original condition of Da-sein, the ontological problem in its (own) event.

Flusser's general response... within incidental references to Levinas

Flusser does not seem to disagree with Heidegger on many of these points. And he would certainly accept the *urgency* of the final questions posed by Heidegger in the last paragraph of *SZ* – they are, in fact, primordial questions. However, unlike Heidegger, Flusser does not seem at all interested in the question of Time *per se*, as a structural temporality and original condition of Da-sein as such. Da-sein has only one already-given mode of temporality, *Geworfenheit*, that is, *finitude* (as explained above) – it is thus invariably a being-thrown-toward-death. The crucial question is: how does Da-sein know itself to be toward death? What is Da-sein's measurement standard to know death as facticity? And, why bother? Why *death* matters? And, as we will see later, for Flusser, the fact that *death matters* does not come about only when the question is explicitly posed, but by the very way we urgently try to live our (temporal) existence (our 'project') – authentically or otherwise.

Hence, for Flusser, Time and temporality are not one and the same. So, in “Da Superação”, he writes: “My time” is not the time of eternity. My time “is limited, rigidly, absurdly, by my birth and my death”⁴⁹. The awareness of my finitude, which seems to interest Heidegger in *SZ*, can, of course, answer a series of philosophical questions about the ultimate character of things; but it does not answer the most fundamental question for Da-sein, as far as Flusser is concerned: *Free for what?* A question that arises already under the ‘dense blanket of intersubjective relationship’. And the only structure given as the original condition of the question of Da-sein, as an ontological problem in its occurrence, in the face of this question, and which is worth considering, is therefore intersubjectivity itself. Furthermore, this interest is not ontological. It is, primordially, and ethical problem. We hear Flusser insisting: “The other does not exist without me, and I do not exist without the other; it is from the intersubjective, concrete, immediate relationship that both arise”⁵⁰. And the proper (only) mode of dealing with intersubjectivity as such is Ethics. But the Thou and the I in themselves are not the mediators of this relationship.

Therefore, intersubjectivity, again as far as Flusser is concerned, is mediated by an unconditional hyperbole, a Transcendence: the “highest and deepest mystery is the existence with others in the

⁴⁹ Flusser, *Ensaio* 5, p. 109-110.

⁵⁰ Flusser, *Ensaio* 2, p. 90.

face of the Other”⁵¹. Outside of this *mystery*, Da-sein does not even exist... except as an *abyss*, a *nothingness*, a *disgust*, an *anguish*, an *absurdity* – a nullifying condition that, for Flusser, in repeated words, is revealed only and exclusively “in the sense of the context from which the dense blanket of intersubjective relations has been removed”⁵². Thus, again, the (proper) philosophical way of dealing with the primacy of intersubjectivity is evidently Ethics. Therefore, Ethics is, for Flusser, *philosophia prima*. And if the devil’s book is ethical in any reasonable sense, it is so in the sense that Flusser seeks to postulate (*exaggerate* is perhaps the most appropriate term) the condition of the abyss that arises in the absence of an understanding of fundamental intersubjectivity. In other words: one of Flusser’s most fundamental purposes in *The History of the Devil* is to show how effective reality (*Wirklichkeit*) appears when the dense ethical blanket of intersubjective relations has been removed.

So, this is also to say that intersubjectivity precedes not only subjectivity, but precedes the very structure of Da-sein’s temporality. Temporality is – along with *intuition*, *desire*, *reason*, *speech*, *thought* (modes of the intellect) – part of the infrastructure of the Ego, the so-called superstructure. The superstructure precedes the infrastructures... but for Flusser, the world is made of intersubjective threads, the Self, the superstructure, is a thick shell that forms around the intellect; so, first there is intersubjectivity, and only then the superstructure is gathered, apparently around the ‘intellect’. In this case we ought to consider: Is the intellect the primordial structure of the ‘self’, then?

The short answer is: No! – In his ontological treatise, *Language and Reality*, Flusser distinguishes between two types of intellect: *sensu stricto* and *sensu lato* – and writes: “The intellect *sensu stricto* is a weaving that uses words as threads. The intellect *sensu lato* has an anteroom in which a spinning mill operates that transforms raw cotton (data of the senses) into threads (words). Most raw material, however, already comes in the form of threads [words]”⁵³.

We are therefore faced with some of the most fundamental axioms of Flusser’s ontology: “There is no reality prior to languages, there is no ‘I’ [Ego] prior to languages, and there is no language prior to languages”; naturally, “I am really myself because I agree with others, conversing – we are conversing”⁵⁴. Hence, speaking of temporality, reason, thought, language, etc., aspects of the infrastructure of the self, Flusser says, is easier than speaking of the superstructure (the *I-think*, the *thick shell*, complexly made of intersubjective threads): “All words seeking to signify it [the superstructure] are flawed, because they are intellectual”. And this multiplicity of flaws in speaking of the I-think leads

⁵¹ Flusser, op. cit., p. 61.

⁵² Flusser, *Ensaïos* 5, p. 3.

⁵³ Flusser, 2012b, p. 49.

⁵⁴ Flusser, *Ensaïos* 11, p. 36-37.

to nothingness, disgust, anguish, etc. That is how one becomes an Antoine Roquentin. I must return to my primordial mode of being-in-the-world, *I-speak*; only in conversation, in existence with others before ‘the Other’, do I truly exist. “Nothing more can be said about” this “I”... except that “it is the meaning... the direction in which the thoughts of the intellect [including the notion of temporality] run, and that they represent an upper limit of language”. And the *reason* of the I-speak, Language itself, “appears [in this environment] as a process seeking to overcome itself”⁵⁵.

And, for both Flusser and Levinas, this intersubjective mode of language has a fundamentally religious characteristic. Specifically, Levinas calls “this bond” or revelation “that is established between” sameness (the I) and otherness (the Thou) through language, “without however constituting a totality, ‘RELIGION’”⁵⁶. For Flusser, as I have mentioned before, but it does not hurt to reiterate: “the foundation of my reality is an agreement with others”, in immanence, i.e., on the very plane of existence, where the “highest and deepest mystery is the existence with others before the Other”⁵⁷. But since for Flusser “there is no reality prior to languages, there is no I prior to languages, and there is no language prior to languages”, naturally, “I am truly myself because I agree with others, conversing – we are conversing”⁵⁸. Flusser, in turn, calls the effective and immanent reality that comes out of language (*Wirklichkeit*) thus conceived as “Religiosity” (*Religiosidade*)⁵⁹.

Having said all this, as far as *Time* and *temporality* go, for Flusser, we are left with the following questions that, in a fundamental way, dialogue with the final questions Heidegger posed in the last paragraph of *SZ*: How do I know that ‘my time’ is not the time of eternity? How do I know that Time and temporality are two distinct phenomena? How do I measure the urgency of my finitude? In other words: How do I ‘know’ I am *Geworfenheit*... a ‘fugitive time’ towards death (to use Heidegger’s language)? And why knowing I am fugitive time towards death matter? (Remember: as long as Da-sein is not fully involved in *Gerede*, or *conversa fiada*.)

As difficult as it may be to answer these questions, for Flusser we can only reach them through the I-speak, through intersubjectivity; through the fact that I am not without the other, and the other is not without me. Therefore, these are fundamentally ethical questions. So Flusser can write: “Love your other as yourself” [means]: “assume otherness without losing your identity”... In fact: the other does not exist without me, and I do not exist without the other”. It is from the I-speak, “from the

⁵⁵ Flusser, 2012b, p. 62.

⁵⁶ Levinas, 2007, p. 40f. Emphasis added.

⁵⁷ Flusser, Ensaios 2, p. 61.

⁵⁸ Flusser, Ensaios 11, p. 36-37.

⁵⁹ Cf. Flusser, 2002.

intersubjective, concrete, immediate relationship... that both arise”⁶⁰. We are, already, in temporality, as finitude. Consequently, distancing himself from the Heidegger of *SZ*, it is the founding foundation of this “letting myself be” (some eternal value) that really interests Flusser – and not the “temporality”, or the “history” or the finitude of Da-sein *per se*, wherein this letting-me-being takes place.

To Flusser, Da-sein is not the foundation of anything. Therefore, in the essay “Do Tempo e como ele acabará”, after stating that “The question: ‘What is time?’ is one of those questions that admits of no answers” – despite the many attempts (by the Rigveda, the Book of Genesis, Augustine, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Bergson, etc.) –, he concludes: time and temporality only makes sense in light of some eternal value. Thus, he insists, faith in an eternal value, in a Transcendence, that is, “faith in an extratemporal reality, in a reality only beyond time, is not only rational”, but also constitutes: “...ultimately, the basis of all intellectual and spiritual discipline, including all knowledge. This faith cannot therefore be eradicated. Time is therefore the form by which the human spirit moves away from its origins. The end of time is the return, perhaps enriched, of this spirit to its origin. Time is the abyss that separates the spirit from the “thing”... That is why time is almost unbearable: it is capable of swallowing us up, annihilating us in this way. And it can be overcome only by faith in immortality. This faith, as I have tried to demonstrate, is indestructible. Its voice, however, is currently being stifled by the insistent and consistent argumentation of conscious reason. The problem is: is this voice still audible?”⁶¹

In short, then, one of Flusser’s fundamental concerns in *The History of the Devil* (and everywhere else) – it is not wrong to say – is precisely this: How to keep “the voice of faith in immortality” audible? And, in this endeavor, in a path contrary to the Hegelian path, Flusser will affirm that History, far from being a march of God on Earth⁶², in an ever-widening path, towards the Absolute, is, in fact, a movement away from the Sacred. Therefore, for Flusser, in an (almost) Platonic turn, the founding foundation of letting myself be is not time at all: it is timeless; it is outside and beyond time. And the mediation of the Other – also known as the Ineffable, Overdetermined – is also extratemporal, because it is excess. In short, in Flusser, it is this Overdetermined, Sacred Other that is the mediator of the Thou/I relationship.

From here, we could expand the theme in multiple ways. To be comprehensive, we would have to draw the distinctions and similarities between Flusser and Hegel on this overdeterminacy of Being (the Absolute). We should also consider the points of contact (and departure) between Flusser and

⁶⁰ Flusser, *Ensaíos* 2, p. 90.

⁶¹ Flusser, *Ensaíos* 7, p. 69.

⁶² Hegel, 2012, p. 279.

Levinas, and Flusser and Heidegger on a number of issues interrelated. But that would take me adrift and beyond the scope (word-count) of this paper. So, to conclude, I'd like to consider, too briefly to be sure, the overarching nature of the Transcendence – the mediator of the I-Thou relationship – in Flusser.

Flusser and the Transcendence... towards a conclusion

In this final partz of our discussion, I take on the challenge of extending the understanding of three of Flusser's most fundamental theses, as far as his Ethics is concerned. The three theses are as follow:

- (1) "there is no reality prior to language, there is no I prior to language, and there are no languages prior to language" ... "I am truly myself because I agree with others, conversing – we are conversing"⁶³;
- (2) "the highest and deepest mystery [of human existence] is the existence with others before the Other"⁶⁴; and
- (3) "for us, God is not dead: he lives in the other"⁶⁵.

The extension of these three theses, through an essay on exegesis and hermeneutics, seeks above all to clarify a little more the nature of the Other (the Transcendent) – the mediator of the highest and deepest mystery of human existence (the relationship with others) – in Flusser's philosophical thought. This clarification is fundamental because, as we have seen, for Flusser, without spiritual vertigo – and spirituality evidently implies a Transcendence – there is no philosophizing that is worthwhile. Having clarified this, let us begin.

Thesis 1 points to a particular characteristic of Flusser, not only the philosopher, that is, not only the significance of Flusser's ontological, epistemological and ethical thought, but essentially to the understanding of Flusser, the human being. Due to its nature and particularities, we may say that *Thesis 1* points, for obvious reasons, to what we can call a 'conversational existentialism' – a characteristic of Flusser's overarching philosophy that is also revealed, and explained, by the derivational (subsequent) thesis, *Thesis 2*: "I am really myself because I agree with others, talking – we are conversing". Thus, the being that I am is always, as we have already noted, an intersubjectivity and an incompleteness. Flusser calls this 'incompleteness' *Entwurf* (project)⁶⁶. This project – this intersubjectivity and incompleteness that being is – ends only with the arrival of the absolute master, death. So, *becoming*, the horizon of the

⁶³ Flusser, Magazine 6, p. 23-62.

⁶⁴ Flusser, Ensaïos 2, p. 61.

⁶⁵ Flusser, 2007, p. 223.

⁶⁶ Flusser, Ensaïos 7, p. 70.

Entwurf, invariably indicates that we are beings-toward-death. “Undoubtedly: we will die”. Da-sein, supposedly, is the only being that knows itself as a being-toward-death. And in this Heidegger and Flusser are in agreement. But, to Flusser, we know this in three distinctive manners.

We certainly know this for “objective reasons”: (i) “due to the illness of our bodily organs”, and (ii) “by analogy” with the death of others. But, more fundamentally, we know this (iii) “thanks to an immediate knowledge; namely: by the urgency with which we experience every moment”⁶⁷ that determines our finitude. Moreover, it is in this urgency – which has as its fundamental characteristic not only the knowledge of being-toward-death, but the need for the “negation of the world that” surrounds us, i.e., Da-sein is an animal that does not accept “the givenness” (the gift) of nature – and that, apparently, it is in this capacity to negate nature that the human dignity lies⁶⁸. And the perception of this urgency is (can only be) awakened by Da-sein’s knowledge of temporality, i.e., the knowledge of the intelligibility of its limitations in time. Awareness of death, knowing oneself to be-toward-death, “is the knowledge of the limitation of our temporality”⁶⁹ – which, as we have discussed earlier, is never the time of eternity. This instant knowledge and the urgency with which we experience every moment of the *Project* (we essentially are) only makes sense “with faith in immortality”. We have also seen that, to Flusser, “this faith is indestructible”, despite philosophical attempts to suffocate it”⁷⁰.

With all this, as a corollary, I maintain that there is, albeit in a diffuse and opaque form, a great common theme in all of Flusser’s philosophical thought, which has to do with the possibility of thinking about transcendence, in different stages and planes of existence. And, just as the idea (the importance) of mortality, of human finitude, personified by the urgency with which we experience every moment, only makes sense – and can only be transcended – from a faith in immortality, *transcension* itself only makes sense from a standpoint of a Transcendence. Therefore, Flusser’s notion of transcendence is, in its radicalized forms, haunted by the prerogative of the Sacred, the Holy, the Mystery, the Unspeakable, the Transcendent (Flusser, in fact, uses several terms for the *Divine* in this context). And all this seems to point to a basic distinction in Flusser between temporal, ephemeral, and eternal (again, despite Flusser’s diffuse language). But this diffusion is proof, I believe, of Flusser’s understanding that this Transcendence is (and can only be) Overdeterminacy (*I Am that I Am*). After all, even arguing that “there is no reality prior to languages, there is no I prior to languages, and there is

⁶⁷ Flusser, op. cit., p. 24.

⁶⁸ Flusser, *Magazines* 8, p. 25.

⁶⁹ Flusser, *Ensaio* 7, p. 24.

⁷⁰ Flusser, op. cit., p. 69.

no language prior to languages”⁷¹, Flusser admits that language itself (all of it) is a “great ‘attempt to articulate [this] inarticulable’, this Overdeterminacy (this Transcendence). For, we hear him affirm: “Language as a whole, thought as a whole, is, I suspect, a single gigantic prayer, a unique prayer”⁷². In this context, it is not uncommon to hear Flusser say that the *Object* of this great and unique prayer, the Inarticulable, resembles that whom “Kierkegaard called the completely different”⁷³. The *completely different*, or “the totally Other”, for Kierkegaard is, as everyone knows, God (specifically, the Judeo-Christian God). Or, better, it points to the “absolute otherness of God”⁷⁴. Flusser maintains this “absolute otherness” in the sense that the Sacred is inarticulable, because it is Overdeterminacy. This Overdeterminacy indicates the acceptance that we never see all of reality. Because wanting to see all of reality is wanting to subjugate it to the human will. Let us recall, in this context, the distinction that Flusser draws between the painter and the cartographer. “The painter (the one who seeks to capture the vision of the landscape)”, is an obscurantist, a diffuser, for the cartographer (the one who tries to reduce “the landscape to its flat and boring clarity”). But, Flusser insists, true religiosity, the true sense of religiosity is the point of view of the “painter”, who is not bothered by the sacred dimension (hence, the Overdeterminacy) of the world – and, therefore, does not seek to name it absolutely⁷⁵. In short: the painter works with (not against) light and darkness; because she understands that they are two fundamental aspects of reality... even so, the focus is not on the light or shadow itself, but on the beautiful, on the significant, which can be grasped through language, as the *Wirklichkeit* (effective reality as grasped through language).

This is to say that Flusser places the possibility of articulating the inarticulable, of the Overdeterminacy of the Sacred, in the ethical substance, to use a Hegelian term, and through language, since, for him, as *Thesis 3* above clearly states: “God is not dead: he lives in the other”⁷⁶. Perhaps because Flusser was himself in fact a *conversational existentialist*, i.e., someone who truly believed that I am really myself because I agree with others, in conversation – *we are* conversing (and for whom the highest and deepest mystery is in fact existence with others in the face of the Other), it is not always easy to say what we want to say about some of his central philosophical ideas, especially when it comes to the nature of this Other, the Mediator... not only of intersubjectivity but, it seems, of all *Wirklichkeit*, the

⁷¹ Flusser, *Magazines* 6, p. 23-62.

⁷² Flusser, *Ensaio* 11, p. 36-37.

⁷³ Flusser, 2012b, p. 145.

⁷⁴ It is important to emphasize that this “absolute otherness” is, for Kierkegaard (as for Hegel), God the Father and, admittedly, is overcome in Christ. Cf. Gouwens, 2016, p. 89.

⁷⁵ Flusser, *Ensaio* 5, p. 67-68.

⁷⁶ Flusser, 2007, p. 223.

realm of wisdom, meaning and beauty as such. Indeed, throughout his career, that is, his existence, Flusser always maintained an ambivalent approach to this Transcendence. This ambivalence is evidently present in the central texts, such as the book of the devil itself, as I have tried to demonstrate. But it was already present in the first text we know of Flusser's: the *Drama Saul*, written in Prague, around 1935-1936⁷⁷. And it was surely present in his personal and/or professional conversations about Transcendence – which, to be sure, were always essentially Socratic conversations. One great examples of this ambivalence in this sense is reported in an interview by Dora Ferreira da Silva, as I summarize. Dora tells us that in her first meeting with Flusser, before any formal introduction, Flusser inspired her with the following question: “Do you believe in God?” She justifies the abrupt question by claiming that Flusser seemed like a person who had no time for trivialities. He inspired the feeling of being a person who should have something urgent to say about the Sacred. Nevertheless Flusser's first reaction to the question was anything but inspiring. He is said to have said: “Don't talk to me about this!” (i.e., about “God”). However, since Flusser was “a very expressive person”, he did not just say “Don't talk to me about this!”... the phrase was accompanied by “a real dance of repulsion to the question”. So, upon hearing the question ‘Do you believe in God?’, Flusser “stood up from his chair, and started throwing his arms ostentatiously in the air, as if wanting to repel” God. But the extravagant dance of repulsion lasted only a few seconds. Flusser would soon spend the entire night “talking about the Holy”⁷⁸.

Interestingly enough, more than 40 years later, in his philosophical autobiography, when explaining the main differences between himself and another friend, the English Jew living in São Paulo, Romy Fink, Flusser recalls (and sides with) Dora's sense of spirituality. Flusser's main disagreement with Fink, as he himself explains, had to do with his radical reluctance to accept Fink's idea of “Judaism” as a “political praxis with a ‘transcendent’ meaning”. In other words: the idea that “being [religiously] Jewish” required a stance of political engagement. And Flusser explains: “Romy lived like that. For me, this is impossible. Existentially impossible. I am not, existentially, a Jew”. And he was not “existentially Jewish”, he says, because he believed that “It is only Divine service through service to others”, and not through service to a homeland, “that saves me”. After all: “The supreme Jewish commandment: ‘Love your God above all things!’ is synonymous with ‘Love your neighbor’, and the rest is hypocrisy”⁷⁹.

⁷⁷ Batkičková, 2019.

⁷⁸ Dora Ferreira da Silva, em entrevista. Disponível em: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-8qx1kX8g>

⁷⁹ Flusser, 2007, p. 232.

In short, the very essence of the spiritual vertigo that Da-sein essentially is, for Flusser, was not grounded in being Jewish or being anything else (for that matter)... it was something already transcendent. Let us therefore repeat *Thesis 2*: “the highest and deepest mystery [of human existence] is existence with others before the Other”⁸⁰. For Flusser, political engagement was therefore a haunting (in fact, a diabolical mask) that needs to be transcended because, fundamentally, no homeland has eternal value. And he explains: “For me, religious experience in politics is ‘superficiality’”. And he justifies: “My religious experience holds me back. I do not experience Him [God] in the other, but in solitude before the entirely different. In intimacy. A-socially”. And he adds: “I am a Christian in this sense. I know very well that there is no fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity. I know very well that Judaism also admits the intimate experience of God, and Christianity also admits a religious political engagement. But the accent is different in the two religions, and the older I get, the more it seems to me that this is the true distinction, and not the figure of “Christ”. [Christ] is only the consequence of religious interiorization [of that fundamental Jewish commandment]. Although I have a heavy conscience, I cannot engage in the Jewish sense of the term. This is why I left Brazil: to seek interiority. In short, I have existentially chosen Dora against Romy”⁸¹.

So, more than 40 years after that (Socratic) conversation with Dora Ferreira da Silva about the Sacred, Flusser admitted that he was closer to her than to the Judaism that required political engagement from him. And in a short essay entitled “Poems by Dora Ferreira da Silva” we may find foreshadowings of the reason for this choice. Dora’s poetry, in addition to the beauty of its language, is, he says, imbued with “the spirit astonished by the mystery that is articulated in it”, and “carries our thoughts on the waves of the sea and of love... to the port of oblivion... that kingdom, of which it is possible to speak only poetically”⁸². This ‘kingdom’, I have no doubt, is, in part, the kingdom of Transcendence.

That said, there still seems to be a contradiction here. First, Flusser says, in the same text (*Bodenlos*), “for us, God is not dead: he lives in the other”⁸³; then he says that he does not experience “Him [God] in the other, but in solitude, in intimacy, before the entirely different”⁸⁴. So, what is it, really? Do I experience the Other in solitude? Or does the Other live in the other? Therefore, I propose

⁸⁰ Flusser, *Ensaio 2*, p. 61.

⁸¹ Flusser, 2007, p. 233.

⁸² Flusser, *Ensaio 15*, p. 3.

⁸³ Flusser, 2007, p. 233.

⁸⁴ Et seq.

that we look at these questions. And I propose that we do this by contrasting Flusser's idea of the Other with the Other (Transcendence) as it appears in Levinas (for hermeneutical reasons).

Postscript: Flusser and Levinas, 'The Other'...

There is no point in trying to discuss Levinas' comprehensive view of the Other here. What follows is thus a rough summary. That said, this much is clear: there is a principle of unconditionality – a third condition of mediation, of a divine nature – rooted in Levinas' notion of intersubjectivity. In Levinas, the human is brought to the fore through transcendence, a hyperbole. Hence, Ethics is a divine gift (possibly the only means by which the Other manifests itself). In Levinas' own words, Ethics is a divine grace: it is “‘Thanks to God’ that I am other for others”. And: “‘The passage of God, of whom I can only speak by reference to this help or this grace [intersubjectivity], is precisely the reversion of the incomparable subject into a member of society’”⁸⁵. However, in Levinas, it seems, it is not only the human that is brought to the fore in intersubjectivity; God himself emerges *from* (is *born out of*) this relationship – and in this, Flusser differs radically from Levinas.

Opinions differ, to be sure, on the correct interpretation of Levinas' phrase “‘Thanks to God’”⁸⁶. And I am not whatsoever interested in resolving the status of the divine (metaphysical) Other in Levinas here. What needs to be clear – because, in Levinas, it is clear – are the following points:

- (1) there is a mediating transcendence between the Thou and the I in Levinas,
- (2) it is thanks to this mediating transcendence, God, that “‘I am other for others’”,
- (3) but this God is, in principle, invisible, and,
- (4) in the impossibility of “‘direct understanding of God for a gaze directed [directly] at him’”⁸⁷, I am left with the gaze of the other, like the “‘passage of God’” on earth – “‘God is the other’”⁸⁸, i.e., the invisible God appears as a demand for justice and ethical responsibility for the other, therefore,
- (5) “‘to know God is to know what I must do’”⁸⁹ when the other “‘calls me’” to an ethical action. And, in this call, “‘I am irreplaceable’”; i.e., the responsibility IS MINE⁹⁰ (and nobody's else).

In fact, Levinas speculates, it has always been this way, at least as far as the Talmudic tradition is concerned. After all, as far as we know: when the Commandments were given to humanity, God did

⁸⁵ Levinas 2011: 183.

⁸⁶ Cf. Bergo 2024, in: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/levinas/>

⁸⁷ Levinas 2007: 78.

⁸⁸ Ibid.: 211.

⁸⁹ Levinas, 1997, p. 17.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 177.

not descend from Mount Sinai, and Moses never ascended to Heaven. So, what actually happened when Moses climbed that mountain to “speak with the Lord?” Simple: “God folded the heavens like a cloak”⁹¹ in the form of the commandments – which can be summed up in two, as everyone is well aware: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart... and You shall love your neighbor as yourself”⁹² –; and thus, with the heavens folded like a cloak, the “God of heaven [made himself] accessible, without losing any of his transcendence, but without, however, denying freedom to the believer”⁹³.

It is evidently in this light that we must understand Flusser’s ethical shift, summarized in the change from the question ‘Free *from* What?’ to ‘Free *for* What?’. After all, for Flusser, it seems more than clear that this freedom of responsibility – Free for what? – is more than implicit in the Judeo-Christian doctrines⁹⁴. We have already seen above that his inability to accept Romy Fink’s premise that being Jewish is to engage politically revolves fundamentally around his understanding of the commandment (of Christ) “Love your neighbor as yourself”. And on this, Flusser and Levinas are, it seems to me, in complete agreement. In any case, when Levinas says “Thanks to God I am someone else for others,” despite the controversies, we know for sure what he is talking about. In his own words: when he says “Thanks to God,” precisely, this *à-Dieu* is not a process in being; it is not even part of Being... it is, therefore, in fact, Transcendent. However, “in the call to myself, I am referred to the other man through whom this call signifies, to the neighbor for whom I have” affective responsibility⁹⁵. Essentially, to summarize, Levinas and Flusser remove God from the equation (as a demand for Ethics). God is not a competitor of my responsibility, my love, my affection for others; the very predisposition to the ethical substance (and, hence, to the Ethical Call), which must invariably go to the other (the neighbor), is already a gift from God. Thus, it is clear that, for both Levinas and Flusser, the invocation of the possibility of an intersubjective existence (the only possibility that makes sense for these two thinkers) brings with it a moral precondition. And this moral precondition is mediated or guaranteed by an unconditional, transcendent hyperbole. But, at this point, I see Flusser distancing himself from Levinas in a fundamental way. To explain.

If Pierre Hayat is right that Levinas’ “philosophy is constructed on the basis of an unconstructed intuition,” then there is no *a priori* notion of God in Levinas, after all, “transcendence is born

⁹¹ Levinas, 2011, p. 158.

⁹² Cf. The Gospel of Mathew, 22.

⁹³ Levinas, op. cit., *ibid*.

⁹⁴ Flusser 2007: 309.

⁹⁵ Levinas 2007: 177.

of the intersubjective relationship”⁹⁶. In this case, there is a radical distinction between Flusser and Levinas on this point. It is not surprising that Merold Westphal states that “For Levinas the Other is, in the first instance, the human Other, and the first commandment is “You shall not kill”, while for Kierkegaard the Other is, in the first instance, the divine Other, and the first commandment is “You shall have no other gods before me”⁹⁷.

Flusser does not make this distinction because for him, essentially, God is certainly alive in the other, as we have seen... but “He” is certainly not born of (or in) the intersubjective relationship: “He” is in fact given *a priori*. For Flusser, the face of the other will tell me nothing about God if I have not yet learned the supreme lesson of “Judaism”: that the “Supreme Jewish commandment: “Love your God above all things!” is synonymous with “Love your neighbor”, and the rest is hypocrisy”⁹⁸.

And curiously – but not unexpectedly – in order to emphasize the *a priori* construction of this realization, Flusser invariably has to appeal to the figure of Christ. After all, it was Christ who (famously) erased the ontological gap between the “Thou shalt not kill” and the “Thou shalt have no other gods before me”⁹⁹... when he stated that all the 10 commandments are summarized into these two ‘supreme commandments’. Thus, Flusser admits: “[Christ] is only the consequence of the religious interiorization” of this Supreme commandment¹⁰⁰; meaning that there is, in fact, no internal conflict between Judaism and Christianity. I.e.: Christ was a bridge builder.

Perhaps in all this Flusser is simply recognizing and justifying some of his own ontological and intersubjective threads. Two of these fundamental threads were, certainly, Judaism and Catholicism (found in Brazil). Of course, for Flusser, we know, “It is necessary to assume these imposed threads”... in order to, finally, “deny them and transcend to the level of my intersubjective relations”¹⁰¹. But the justification for this entire dialectic of transcendence is, it seems to me, always already situated – and moves – in his conceptualization of the Sacred: from where the notion of “eternal value” derives... just as the problem of finitude, of the temporality of Da-sein, can only be overcome “with faith in immortality”¹⁰²... the rest is idle talk. I conclude, at this point, therefore, with Flusser’s own words: “Jesus Christ was the perfect Jew. The disaster was that the Christians transformed him completely and, because of that, the Jews abandoned him.”¹⁰³

⁹⁶ Hayat 1999: ix-xxiv.

⁹⁷ Westphal 1992: 241-261.

⁹⁸ Flusser 2007: 232.

⁹⁹ Westphal, op. cit., ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Flusser, op. cit., p. 233.

¹⁰¹ Flusser, *Ensaio* 2, p. 61-62.

¹⁰² Flusser, *Ensaio* 7, p. 69.

¹⁰³ Flusser, *Magazines* 6, p. 84.

Assuming the meaning of “perfect Jew” that we see in a series of four essays entitled “Being Jewish” by Flusser, the true character of Jesus emerges (for Flusser): Jesus was an excellent builder of bridges that “point” to the “intersubjectivity of the Eternal”¹⁰⁴. Therefore, let us try, once again, to conclude, still with Flusser’s words: as a “perfect Jew”, Jesus would have, it seems, shown the possibility of “an entire anthropology founded on a specific experience of the Sacred”¹⁰⁵ – i.e., “God did not die, he lives in the other”. Moreover, from there, the only imperative that really matters to Flusser: “Love your other as yourself” – the rest is idle talk. In other words, Jesus, the “perfect Jew”, would have shown that: “The true crisis of religiosity lies in the impossibility that we feel to experience God in the other man. It is a crisis of confidence in man. God died because we no longer believe in others and in ourselves. And this crisis is exactly the same for Christians and Jews.”¹⁰⁶

Religiosity, properly speaking, i.e., *Wirklichkeit*, let us recall, presents itself as an effective and intersubjective reality, *through* language... hence, it is the field of meaning, wisdom and beauty – it is, thus, an ethical substance. Jesus, as a ‘perfect Jew’, had as his fundamental mission to point to this clearing. However, *pointing* is not yet a salvation. Salvation comes from the Ethical Call, and answering to this Call is my responsibility.

Or, in a more ‘philosophical language’, we could say, with Slavoj Žižek, that Jesus, the ‘perfect Jew’, is the embodied lesson that “even God [the Father] needs an external and decentralized point of identification in some minimal fantasy scenario,” i.e., Jesus was the lesson that “God himself”, in Its own, as imitating Roquentin, is not “directly what he is” outside of intersubjectivity; in the abstractedness of the I-Am; therefore, God “appears” in Christ, *in* the ethical substance¹⁰⁷.

Žižek intends to echo here (without admitting it) one of Hegel’s most fundamental theses in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, namely: the idea that “the divine nature itself,” in its “first sphere [God the Father]”, exists only in its immediacy or abstractness. However, “The abstractness of God the Father is abandoned in the Son”, that is, in the death of Christ. However, “death” is still pure negation. As the logic of Hegel’s dialectic demands, this negation must be negated and transcended (*Aufhebung*); and it will be, “in the unity of the Father and the Son – love or Spirit”¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁴ Flusser, *Ensaio* 17, p. 31.

¹⁰⁵ Flusser, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹⁰⁶ *Et seq.*

¹⁰⁷ Žižek 2014: 184-185.

¹⁰⁸ Hegel 2007: 370.

Spirit, as everyone knows, is another name for the community, where the conversation about unity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) takes place. It is, therefore, a fundamentally ethical substance. Essentially because, for Hegel, by dying on the cross, Christ does not reconcile nor save the Universal – he simply gives existential purpose to the lack or deficiency that, once the blanket of intersubjectivity is removed, *Da-sein* basically is. For, as Hölderlin would say (through Heidegger’s mouth): “The heavenly powers / Cannot do everything. It is mortals / Who first reach the abyss”¹⁰⁹. And, as far as Flusser is concerned, in the abyss, it is discovered that *God did not die, he lives in the other*.

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¹⁰⁹ Hölderlin, “Mnemosyne”, *apud* Heidegger, “What are Poets for?”, in: Heidegger 2001b: 90.

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