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Winqvist - Ambiguous Gift of Desire - JCRT 1.1

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The world is all that is the case. – L. Wittgenstein*What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you live and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will return to you." . . . Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine." – F. Nietzsche**The statement that God is being-itself is a nonsymbolic statement.* – P. Tillich

I want to think and talk about a gift, a bent, a capacity, a leaning, and a power within the always already *given* of consciousness. I want to talk about *desire* as an ambiguous gift, as the ambiguity of the given of consciousness. The originariness of consciousness at the beginning of what we know as thinking, at what we know as the capacity for reflexivity, is not itself a witness to the origin of consciousness. Whatever image of thought we will be working with will be a belated achievement of thinking. The memory of my first thoughts and my first words have been erased, forgotten or eroded in the consciousness that I now know.

Behind all the European faiths, religious and political, we find the first chapter of Genesis, which tells us that the world was created properly, that human existence is good, and that we are therefore entitled to multiply. Let us call this basic faith a *categorical agreement with being*.

3. The epigrams of Wittgenstein, Nietzsche and Tillich have a discordant resonance with each other as they make sense of the experience of consciousness. The demand that I experience in the wake of their voices is to think and speak on a plane of immanence. Yes, the world is the case; yes, there will be nothing new in it; and, yes, nonsymbolically the only proposition that I can say of God is that God is being-itself. Nonsymbolically, neither God nor being-itself can be mystified to say anything other than what I experience as the world that is the case. We do not begin with mystification. We begin with consciousness. We begin with objective consciousness. That is, in our noncontroversial experience, we know consciousness as consciousness takes an object. I know of no meaningful distinction between image and object in the theater of consciousness before consciousness folds on itself. In its primary manifestation, what we mean by the real is what we mean by consciousness. Problematicizing consciousness and problematicizing the real is a work or achievement within consciousness, although in the phenomenality of experience it is not necessarily a highly complex work or achievement. In our very ordinary experience consciousness manifests a capacity for an after-thinking. It can fold on itself. Consciousness can take its past thinking as an object of its present thinking. This seems to be an obvious capacity not unlike the capacity to choose to raise one's arm. We witness these capacities even if we do not understand them. To whatever we bear witness in our experience, the plane of consciousness in that witness is a plane of immanence.

4. The insistence that thinking even in figures of transcendence is inscribed on a plane of immanence is not an attempt to be reductive. It is instead a simple hesitancy that recognizes that thinking can lose itself in its capacity for complexification before it has assessed what is given in what we might call presentment of mind. There is a presence to mind, or consciousness, that in its presence can be simple. I can see a tree and I can think the image of a dog. I can do all of this without an understanding of neurophysiology, theories of representation or theories of cultural politics. There is a certain obviousness and incorrigibility about being able to see a tree or think a dog. Not only do these experiences insist on themselves but my thinking resists the imposition of any theory that says that I can't see a tree or think a dog when the phenomenality of my experience includes a specifically perceived tree and a specifically imagined dog. There is a certain self-authenticating credibility about the affirmation that what is present to consciousness is present to consciousness.
5. To say that I am conscious is not to say anything about the unconscious, what is not yet conscious, any "dark precursor" to consciousness, or the ontological status of images, concepts or words.¹ I am conscious of a world and I do not know what this *world* is; and, I am conscious of being conscious and I do not know what the *I* is that is conscious of being conscious. In the givenness of consciousness of the world I do not know the structure of the world or the infrastructure of the consciousness knowing the world. I am conscious and, because of what I do not know in the immediacy of the experience of being conscious, I am problematically conscious. I am interrogatively conscious and in this sense transcendently conscious. That is, consciousness can interrogate the conditions of its own possibility. Consciousness can be consciousness of such an interrogative possibility just as it can see a tree and think a dog.
6. Consciousness as a given may not be valued as a gift but it does have a certain serendipitous incorrigibility in its presentment. In the simplest manifestation of conscious phenomenality, a thereness of mind or thereness of the world, it doesn't tell the tale of its genealogy. This is why we do not have confidence in first philosophy as an independent and unique thinking about being, consciousness, or language. The originariness of our thinking which is an always already experience is not identical with its origin. The thinking of being *qua* being, the *cogito*, or a grammatology are all elaborations or complexifications which if willed are willed as an after-thinking of the given phenomenality of consciousness. If we are radically and skeptically empirical and admit as consciousness only what is given as consciousness, empiricism begins to look like a Berkeleyan idealism where we are only enfranchised to say that *esse* is *percipi* and quickly slip into the *cul de sac* of Santayana's solipsism of the present moment.²
7. What is evident is that thinkers of idealism or solipsism never stay with the minimalism of their thinking by their own engaging in practices aimed at the refutation of idealism [Kant] or in evoking God [Berkeley] or animal faith [Santayana] within the processes of thinking. At the end of the twentieth century it is clear that if philosophy has traversed the trajectory, suggested by Habermas, from philosophies of being to philosophies of consciousness to philosophies of language, that the basic concepts in these philosophies such as being, subjectivity, archewriting are themselves *aporetic* formulations or are intimately intertwined with *aporetic* formulations such as God, the transcendental imagination or *différance* that mark rifts, undecidabilities, incompleteness or indeterminacy on any plane of immanence. Thinking can secondarily formulate first principles which are not in themselves first principles. This recognition is a catharsis. Ironically, radical thinking regularly deracinates itself. It makes its own texts

¹See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* trans. Paul Patton [New York: Columbia University Press, 1994] p.120.

²George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* [Indianapolis: The Liberal Arts Press, 1957] p.24, and George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, [New York: Dover, 1955] pp.13-20.

insecure by pushing them to the limits of their determinateness. Yes, it makes sense for Tillich in the rigorosity of his analysis of the existential situation to say that “the statement that God is being-itself is a non-symbolic statement.”³ On a plane of immanence this is saying that God is dead. On a plane of immanence the procedure of the schematism of the pure concepts of the understanding is a displacement or loss of the self and *différance* is the closure of the book and the beginning of writing as an endless play of signifying. What we have witnessed and called postmodern philosophy and theology are deconstructionist writings of the death of God as the unbearable lightness of being *qua* being and in the wake of the death of God the experience of the displacement of the subject or loss of the unified self.⁴ It is possible that we are too far removed from the explanatory power of philosophies of being to be deeply troubled by the death of God; but, most of us are still troubled by the displacement of subjectivity or loss of a unified self that is an ungrounding of truth and meaning. It is hard to give up the little woman or little man of interiority making sense out of watching the theater of the play of phenomenal images and thus to think of the theater itself as the interiority of thinking. It is hard to think of sense or meaning as appearances functionally rooted in contingent relationships of disparate forces. It is hard to think of singularities clustered in multiplicities constituting empiricities in the phenomenality of appearance that we cannot get behind because they are themselves the conditions of what is given as consciousness. It is hard to give up an image of thinking that simulates the reflexivity of thinking without ever being able to confirm the identity of the image with the thinking of which it is its belated or deferred effect.

8. All of these recognitions are based on evidence within thinking that its phenomenal manifestations are subverted or transcended by its own capacities to construct figurations of a primary process as a condition for the secondary manifestation that we know as the first meaning of thinking. That is, consciousness subverts itself with its capacity to think the idea of the unconscious or not yet conscious as a response to understand the presence of anomalous parapraxes in the psychopathology of everyday life. A concept like the unconscious is the achievement of an alogical negative fissuring of the phenomenal display of experience. There can also be a transcendence of consciousness that fissures its phenomenal display by its capacity to complexify its phenomenal display into configurations of meaning that are not commensurate with its own logic. Whitehead’s causal efficacy is a necessary condition for presentational immediacy but it is never contained within its explanatory presence. Deleuze’s “dark precursor” for a logic of sense is already a part of reality that is a condition for understanding and not its result. Although, paradoxically, the concept is a result of the thinking that we call understanding.
9. The given of consciousness is not only the simple given of the phenomenality of present images. This given includes also a given capacity, gift, or bent to complexify itself in configurations of extremity, reflexivities, folds, tropes and nonconcepts. That we *can* think theologically, cosmologically or metaphysically is ascertained by the *fact* of thinking theologically, cosmologically or metaphysically.
10. This gift, capacity or bent is an exigency of thinking that in its extreme expression is theological. We are capable of thinking the notion of “that than which nothing greater can be thought.” When this capacity is experienced as a need we can name it desire. Desire is an ambiguous gift. The capacity to formulate and think a *term* of the ontological argument secures an affirmation

³Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol.I. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951] p.238.

⁴For an interweaving of concepts of the death of God, the loss of self, the end of history and the closure of the book see Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984] Part I.

of the existence of such a capacity to think. It marks or remarks a desire for ultimacy. It is a formal achievement of thinking. It does not secure a content for thinking. There is a distinction between the formal and material infrastructure of thinking. Thinking the concept of “that than which nothing greater can be thought” does not provide an image. It is, as Tillich understood, a non-symbolic concept. To have an ultimate concern says much about what it means to be consciously human. But, it does not in-itself provide an object or tell us about the object of the ultimate concern. Desire is an ambiguous gift because it is an unfinished reality. Desire cannot guarantee its satisfaction.

11. Desire is an ambiguous gift of the givenness of consciousness because, although it is an elaboration of this given, it is itself hard to think. Desire is a gift within the given that is unlike the clarity and distinctness of the phenomenality of experience that is presentationally immediate. Desire hints that the image of thought that resolves itself into identities and has dominated so much of the western philosophical tradition is not adequate. The image is prephilosophical and has always troubled philosophy by being able to be troubled by philosophy. The image is probably generated alongside a faithful habit or habit of faith rather than being the result of the analysis of the phenomenality of experience.
12. In the dialectic of fictional exfoliations of Nietzschean philosophy, Milan Kundera names this habit of faith *a categorical agreement with being*.⁵
13. He calls the aesthetic ideal of this agreement *kitsch*. “Kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence.”⁶ It excludes from its paradise any excitement, bodily stains or excrement, and desire.
14. The problem with an image of *a categorical agreement with being* is that it requires a philosophy of identity to realize itself and identity is analytically troubled by the need for third form [Plato], phantasms [The Aristotelean tradition] or a transcendental imagination [Kant]. It always seems to be the third that is a hybrid and not pure. It appears that whenever we rigorously think about thinking that identities are surface effects of differences. Identity is among simulacra. What drops out of sight is the generation of the image, the thickness of the body and the dark precursor of sense or the complex realm of formal possibility embedded in the materiality of the world that is the case.
15. To think only about identities is to be bound to a surface simplicity. In this clean well-lighted place thinking is too easily trivialized. There is neither depth nor an equivalent surface complexity. We lose meaning philosophically and affect psychologically. This thinking is not enough. It is *kitsch* because it is a moral abstraction. It is a moral abstraction that is challenged by the aesthetic capacity for thinking to reflexively complexify itself. It is a moral abstraction that denies its genealogy. It is a forgetfulness that forgets its forgetfulness.
16. As we have been taught by Deleuze, Nietzsche’s introduction of sense and value into philosophical thinking would make us suspicious of any epistemology that is dependent upon a moral abstraction no matter how good it makes us feel. The gift of desire that comes with the givenness of consciousness is the felt capacity to ingress into the thinking process the experience of whatever we call the thirdness of form so that the process repeats life but always with a difference. Anything less than a thinking about thinking that can express its own creativity is a thinking that will be disappointing.
17. In the experience of its productive secondariness, thinking needs to be able to value the creativity of its productive imagination. To be responsive to its own desire, thinking needs

⁵Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* trans. Michael Henry Heim [New York: Harper and Row, 1984] p.238.

⁶Ibid., p.248.

to be able to value those products which can function heuristically and often relativistically in its further complexification and satisfaction. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze writes that “the thought which is born in thought, the act of thinking which is neither given by innateness nor presupposed by reminiscence but engendered in its generality, is a thought without image.”⁷ Those who read Deleuze know that in this quote it is a particular image that Deleuze is rejecting, an image of thinking sameness, an image of a *categorical agreement with being*. It is the becoming of thinking, the making of arrangements or rhizomorphic like assemblages that better expresses thought born in the always already of thinking.⁸ We need different concepts to think thinking in its generality or desire.⁹

18. All of this emphasis on thinking out of thinking can mislead us back to Descartes’ *cogito*. I think that this would be a mistake because it is possible to caricature Descartes and read his *Meditations* as a reinscription of the image of thinking as a *categorical agreement with being*. The *Meditations* can be read as a creation story. Descartes’ radical doubt is a method of exclusion and forgetfulness. We can forget all of the mess of existence that is not clear and distinctly certain. The self is created as a pure subjectivity and that which is other is brought back through the capacity of a pure subjectivity to think a reality that is more than itself. Under the aegis of a constructed pure subjectivity Descartes can be about the naming of the other. Descartes can name God, the animals or the world. Here, the *categorical agreement with being* is an agreement with the being or *I am* of the *cogito*. Locke complicated the discussion with the *aporetic* notion of the idea but kept the *cogito* pure with the notion of the *tabula rasa*. Berkeley understood that it never made sense to think of the mind as a *tabula rasa*. The thickness of experience was always too complex of an affair that when reduced to its simplest expression is the relatedness of *esse* is *percipi* and not a blank slate that has itself never been experienced. Thinking has a capacity to fold its exteriority into an interiority through formulations of extremity that are the complexifications of reflexivity as a secondary process. There is no subjectivity that can be separated from objectivity in a radical skeptical empiricism. There are only arrangements or associations. When arrangements contract through repetitions we have a habit and that habit is as Hume suggests what we mean by subjectivity when we are unable to establish subjectivity in a causal nexus. Hume is, as Boundas suggests in his reading of Deleuze’s study of Hume, a philosopher of the imagination.¹⁰ Hume is the mediating imaginative link between Berkeley’s unconstrained empirical idealism and Kant’s strict transcendental idealism. Kant’s unity of apperception is a Humean habit. This claim is a viable construction when we read backward from Deleuze into Hume and forward from Hume to Kant.
19. The most important implication of Hume’s denial that there is any simple sense impression of a necessary connexion is that it is at the same time a denial of privilege to any “certain way” of thinking that excludes other ways of thinking. Hume invokes taste and sentiment in philosophy and reintroduces desire in giving assent to any particular arguments or arrangements in thinking. “I do nothing but decide from my feeling concerning the superiority of their influence.”¹¹ Thinking is the becoming of habits that have consequences. Thinking that has intensity or force and vivacity is self-authenticating. Criteria for assent in thinking fall

⁷Deleuze, 167.

⁸See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* trans. Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987] Chpt. One, Introduction: Rhizome. Pp.3-25.

⁹cf. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, pp.147-148.

¹⁰Translator’s introduction to Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature* trans. Constantin V. Boundas [New York: Columbia University Press, 1991] p.7.

¹¹David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge [London: Oxford University Press, 1896] p.103.

back on thinking itself.

20. This in no way means that thinking is simply willful. The originariness of thinking is experienced as fully contingent and not as fully relative. I am always already thinking. My capacity to complicate that thinking is a given capacity within what is already given. A taste for Plato or Kant or Derrida does not privilege these philosophers on their own terms. It instead imports a systematicity, functional or dysfunctional, into an already existing processional nexus. To newly read or think a philosopher's work is to augment the heterogeneity of the consciousness that is already at work. It is not unlike the importing of new sensations by traveling to new places. The materiality of thinking in spoken or written language imposes on the sensory experience of consciousness as does the materiality of a Gothic cathedral. It doesn't make sense to say that a cathedral is true and that an airport is untrue or that a horse is true and a cow is untrue. We distinguish these experiences based on their differences and intensities and our tastes.. We also do this in our thinking about thinking.
21. Desire seeks intensity in thinking as its satisfaction. Its ambiguity as a gift is that without satisfaction it is a restlessness; and, moves or strategies in thinking to increase intensity can disrupt a secure habit of subjectivity. Arrangements are subject to disordering. Desire is a vectored gift. It moves thinking into difference and not sameness. There is no repetition without difference. There is no movement of sameness. The gift of desire is the language of a trope for acknowledging that the given of consciousness is givenness of a movement. There is no sameness in the phenomenality of conscious experience. Sameness is a construction from familiarity and similarity read back onto the forgetfulness of past conscious experiences. We may desire the security of constructions of sameness in movements of consciousness because of the shadowing sense of a possible disordering; but, this desire conflicts with the self-authenticating desire for intensity. Ironically, the security of sameness can diminish the consciousness that it is trying to secure.
22. The problem with trying to justify or privilege any particular constructions of consciousness is that, as given, there is no inside or outside of consciousness to which consciousness can appeal. Consciousness as a recurrent vectored phenomena can activate new vectors by folding and complexifying itself but then what is still given is consciousness.¹² We don't seem to be able to say anything other than that consciousness is feeling and its measure is its own force and vivacity. Psychologically we experience a diminishment of consciousness when we think and speak without affect and aesthetically we experience a diminishment of consciousness in the blurring of contrast. On all levels, philosophically, psychologically or neurophysiologically, consciousness is manifest or given in a hybrid construction of heterogenous realities or forces. There is always some configuration of a contrast between a figure and a ground or a contrast between two actualities or between actualities and possibilities. These distinctions are primarily variations on coarse and fine grained descriptive analyses of what we know as the phenomenality of consciousness.
23. The question we face in whatever is the moment of our thinking is not whether we accept the privileged given of consciousness and desire as a gift of possible complexification within that given. We have no choice. The question is what we do with consciousness and its manifest possibilities as given. Can we say *yes* to what is the case?
24. I think we can only say *yes* if we realize that desire is bound to the experience of difference. Of course, we can secondarily know and talk about desire as a tropological figuration in the

¹²See Paul M. Churchland, *The Engine of Reason, the Seat of the Soul: A Philosophical Journey into the Brain* [Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995] p.101 and Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* [New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1994] pp.241-243.

language of difference. And, since the only languages we know are languages of difference, desire can only be reinforced and intensified in its expression. The question of *yes* or *no* to the gift of desire is practically a question of whether we in the linguistic elaboration or folding of consciousness will enfranchise or banish the language of desire.

25. I am not talking about words. Words by themselves can pornographically isolate desire from its entailments and risks. Desire is an affair of complexity. It is the freedom of consciousness to augment itself by cathecting its primary process of coming to representation by attending to the heterogenous world of its contextuality, by importing and entertaining the systematicity of order in language and the systematicity of thinking other than itself and by the capacity of consciousness to fold reflexively on itself in the generation of a new order. The question is whether we will strategically and tactically implement desire in what we call and know as thinking. That is, are we willing to say *yes* to desire by experimentally developing strategies and tactics within our discursive and thinking practices to constantly intertwine the given of actuality with the given of possibility?
26. If we say *yes*, there are no safe texts. There is no identity to which we can return. The eternal recurrence of the same is the repetition of difference. The courage to say *yes* resides in the desiring knowledge that we can never exhaust what it means to say *yes*. In that moment of thinking courage, maybe we understand Nietzsche when he says to his demon: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine."¹³

Notes

¹³Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Vintage Books, 1974] pp.273-274.