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Vahanian - Rebellious No - JCRT 1.2
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All human discourse is testimony to finitude, and what is meant here, by finitude, are the immediate limitations of materiality with the analytical rules of thought, rules that, if they are derivatives of material necessities, do also include a linguistic leap—the leap of faith to consciousness, the leap of sense—a leap not to be radically explained away by—although, to be sure, to be explained by—the electrical potentials of neural activity: an imaginary leap.

3. Unable at this time, in the context of religion, to treat of this leap scientifically, I do claim a certain validity to the heuristic scheme here presented, a validity in the Cartesian sense and strangely enough, not in that sense, that is, this validity does not gain its proof through argumentation, rather it is the validity that allows for an argumentative exfoliation. But, this exfoliation in turn yields the possibility of an indefinite critical dubiousness. When our discourses penetrate us deeply and reach our passions and comfort our yearnings, something happens, a theological venue, an ecstasis of the self, an expenditure of desire for meaningfulness and sensefulness. Dare I say, *we are happy*, and how precarious is that happiness, that unfathomable happiness—unattainable godly object of desire—so we must seek another venue, and it comes not, and there is no *reason* for it not to come—only finitude, *that's life*, they say. The cone of existence that precedes our psyche, and the cone of essence that precedes existence: *that's life*. And the very specific things that trouble our egoistic security every day: *life*. Or should I say *nature*? See that is the question, and that is always the question, and only conviction, not certitude, can begin to answer it. When a John Duns Scotus argues that man can in this life know eternal truths naturally, without the illumination of the Uncreated Light, this is a most endearing call to hope. *Being is univocal to God and His creatures*, so that we do have a certain natural knowledge of the immutable truth every time we know anything as it is, and consequently, we can know God; or otherwise put, we can find happiness, not to say, salvation. Conviction or assent, or faith seeking understanding are all symptomatic of a theological event whereby words are given body, a living paradigm, and make sense in this existential way. Can we think this theological event in itself? Evidently not, but we can imagine this event and its dynamics, we can seek the faith in understanding, an understanding, however, that we know to be heuristic, and, therefore, contingent upon the assent it induces or does not. For, the desire for theology is laden with the ambiguity of what it means to desire to live a mortal life. Living theologically is confronted by the limits of credibility of theological thinking, and further, by thinking's conditions of possibility. It is the coping with the confrontational nature between matters of fact and desire that is presently under investigation. Far from being a passive acceptance of fate, theology is foremost a salutary rebellion against determinism.
4. Whitehead's process cosmology will be appropriated in what follows since its heuristics define an ontology that is comprehensive of epistemological undecidability. Such an ontology affords a secular agenda to theology and the desire thereof.
5. Is there not a rebelliousness against *symbolic reference** inherent in the very desire for theology? If this is the case, then the rebellious no to the necessity of time and place is, in the end, the possibility for saying yes to fate.

** Symbolic reference is the passage from the mere apprehension of a datum to its conceptualization and verbalization—it is the leap to language and understanding. It has the same function as Kant's transcendental imagination or Derrida's Différance.*

6. Giorgio Agamben illustrates this rebellious no when he writes of the desire for an unattainable object of the melancholic, the substitution of part for a whole in synecdoche, the *Verleugnung* of the fetishist who simultaneously perceives and denies the reality of the *lost penis*, and the fetishistic character of the exchange value of a commodity—its useless value.¹
7. The rebellious no is the desire to evade the necessary troping of desire. It is the impetus to desire this or that, and then, this rather than that, or nothing, an unnameable nothing. The rebellious no is this force that is at once idolatrous and iconoclastic: iconoclastic because it always wants something else, idolatrous because this something else becomes hypostatized—as in *happiness*, or *God*.
8. In the Whitheadian cosmology, the concept of the rebellious no falls somewhere within the awareness that one can be dissatisfied by the satisfaction of one's *subjective aim**. It is from this unseemly paradox that we will depart, in an attempt to give definition and context to the rebellious no.

** The subjective aim is the telos of a concrescence of feelings and concepts (also called a proposition) to their aim as an actual entity. A subjective aim is satisfied when a concrescence is actualized according to the bent of its components. All things actual are the result of the satisfaction of their aim. Whether their aim is to please us or not is irrelevant.*

1. Dissatisfaction in the higher phases of experience and the satisfaction of a propositional structure:

1.1 The satisfaction of a subjective aim is independent of the *subject/superject**'s objective satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

** The subject/superject is the enlightened concept of the subject where a double Copernican revolution has occurred in that there is the Kantian notion that we construct our apprehensions, but reciprocally, objects as complex paradigms construct our subjectivity. Hence as product of the world we are subject while as builders of this same world we are superject. Now a subject/superject is always in the in-itself process of satisfying its propositional aim. Her objective satisfaction, however, is not necessary in that the satisfaction for us as objects of our subjectivity is not systematic.*

1.1.1 In other words, subjective satisfaction is necessary for the possibility of objective referentiality. And, although the possibility of objective satisfaction is dependent on subjective satisfaction, in actuality, the objective sense of pleasure or displeasure is independent of subjective satisfaction.

1.1.2 Hence, there is always subjective satisfaction, but there is not always objective satisfaction—the experience of it.

¹Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* trans. Ronald Martinez (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1993). >

1.2 Objective satisfaction depends on the level of complexity of the concrescence of feelings and *eternal objects**.

** Eternal objects, or pure potentials for the determination of fact, or forms of definiteness, are objects in potentia. The fact that they are in potentia implies that they were once actual rather than passive, and it is indeed this past actuality that endows them with the potential to be actualized again and again. Their actualization is instantiated as they are integrated into a propositional aim or concrescence.*

It is thanks to this concrescence that language can come alive and signify in excess of a purely semantic discourse that speaks to us not, in order not to say nothing.

1.2.1 Thus, whenever there is a paucity of feelings or eternal objects or both in the satisfaction of a subjective aim, there ensues disappointment, if not in actuality, in possibility.

1.2.1.1 It is indeed possible that a simple-minded subject/superject does not objectively suffer from his lack of integration of feelings or of eternal objects. For such subject/superjects the rebellious no or theological desire is not an issue. We will, thus, bracket out this dimension of our inquiry, although it may be worthy of further investigation.

1.2.2 Here, paucity and complexity are relative to a specific *nexus**, so that we are not measuring them against a universal standard, but rather, according to the potential of each subject/superject.

** A nexus is a complex relationship of actual entities so as to form a more or less durable organization in space and time. The human being is a nexus of body and mind, or spirit and matter, or feelings and eternal objects.*

1.2.3 Complexity means that in the leap of symbolic reference, *conceptual valuation** and *_reversion*_* allow for feelings and their homologue eternal objects to fuse in consciousness so as to liberate lively ideas.

** Conceptual valuation is when a conceptual feeling is derived from a physical feeling.*

** Conceptual reversion is when a conceptual feeling is derived, not from an immediate physical feeling, but from some eternal object(s) (some memory).*

1.2.3.1 Consequently, what is relative is also the degree of liveliness and the quality of idea achieved in the liberation.

1.2.3.2 For some subject/superjects, liveliness may be attained if and only if ideas are part of a highly abstract integration, a sublimation. For others, integration may be more synthetically metaphorical, that is, obviously and literally embodied with *affect**. Here, language's synthetic embodiment of affect is the condition that allows for the condensation and displacement of feelings, for their integration.

**An affect is something that is physical and something that we can conceptually describe through the language of feelings and emotions. Affects are physically felt, but are also determined by words, by virtue of the mind's power to remind us of experiences. So affects are never original, they are always already interpreted—whether fear or anger or love, these are determinations that we learn to recognize in our own body of experiences, for the initial affect is blind, like a Kantian intuition without a concept. And so, a complex elocution is worthless if it has lost its capacity to elicit affect, just as concepts without intuitions are empty.²*

²Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martins Press, 1965). >

1.3 The question of relativity in complexity is quintessential for understanding the nature of the rebellious no.

1.3.1 This means that the liberation of lively ideas is brought about by a tension between affect and concept.

1.3.1.1 It is in this tension that the rebellious no is born.

1.3.1.2 This tension is called desire.

2. Desire and the satisfaction of a propositional structure:

2.1 The universal notion of the tension between affect and concept (that is, desire as situated for a subject/superject) corresponds to the sum of all subjective aims, potential and past.

2.1.1 Thus, for every actual occasion, its subjective aim is the effect of the tension or difference of potentials between affect and concept.

2.1.2 Desire, as this tension, signifies the complex process of representation, the possibility of the transcendental imagination, or symbolic reference.

2.1.2.1 Desire authorizes the sublation of an object under a concept, and the ensuing satisfaction from the sublation.

2.1.2.1.1 Desire is thus both a desire for conceptuality and a desire for liveliness of affect, a tension.

2.2 The nature of the tension between affect and concept—of a subjective aim—is *prehensile**.

* *Prehensions, or concrete facts of relatedness. A prehensile tension is thus one concretely relating affect and concept.*

2.2.1 The subject/superject is prehended and prehends.

2.2.1.1 Desire is thus the composite substance of spatial and temporal intuition. It is a third term, a medieval phantasm, a theological copula, the Light.

2.2.1.1.1 This is both a refutation of idealism and a refutation of dead materialism. Indeed, to postulate a mediating term is to postulate the otherness and reality, at once, of the objects of desire (that we are not just imagining an essence out there to stupid material things) and of the ontological origin of desire (that it comes from without, whether it has a design or an absolute end or not—this is unknowable regardless of 2000 years of intellectual effort).

2.3 That tension, desire—the composite substance of temporal and spatial intuition—is prehensive in nature implies that there is a heterological infrastructure to consciousness. The opening of thought and things to their radical otherness implies that thinking is not immune to what is outside the range of consciousness. Thinking is no less material than the body. Consciousness is the symptom of an organic nexus driven by a desire that, essentially, is no more intellectual than it is material. What it is, as said above, cannot be known.

2.3.1 If it can be said that tension occurs between affect and concept, in actuality, it occurs between heterological quanta of which some are predominantly affective and some predominantly conceptual. There are no simple affects, or simple concepts.

2.3.1.1 That there is a multiplicity of affects and concepts, and further, that there is a heterology of both affect and concept are direct consequences of propositions 2.2 through 2.2.1.1.1. Desire, as prehensive, prohibits pure idealism or dead materialism.

2.3.1.2 Thinking is a feeling and feeling is a thinking. There is no way out of representation.

2.4 That tension, desire, the composite substance of spatial and temporal intuition progresses into a heterological infrastructure shows that the *mating of intensity with survival** requires a paradoxical relationship of the subject and the superject.

** A static organization like a rock survives very well and very long compared to the more fragile organization of a dog who requires a certain intensity of experience for his survival and also for his happiness. The goal of many is the pursuit of happiness—as in the attainment of the supreme good in the love of God, or as in falling in love—and this goal extends beyond the bare basic needs for a minimalist survival of the body. Hence, when depression is termed the disease of the wealthy this does not mean that he who is depressed would be better off fighting for survival in the tundra. It means that the fighting for survival has attained a level of complexity on a par with the human potential for happiness. That this is a luxury is not denied. That it is a necessity is implied.*

2.4.1 If it were the case that coming to representation implied the coupling of simple affects with simple concepts, the satisfaction of the subjective aim—granted that it allowed for the integration of both affects and concepts—would inevitably result in objective satisfaction.

2.4.2 The paradox is that for objective satisfaction to occur there must be simultaneously the superject's desire toprehend and the subject's desire to be prehendend: the desire to prehend appears to oppose the desire to be prehendend in the coming together of the subject/superject. Integration occurs through the tension of desire between subjection and superjection.

2.4.2.1 Thus, causal efficacy is more than a simple teleology of a subjective aim, it is also a teleology of a superjective aim. Of course, for Whitehead, the subjective aim includes superjection in its teleology. Indeed, the subjective aim's teleological movement is the tension between subjection and superjection.

2.5 That desire is a tension between affect and concept, and that it is prehensile implies that desire is both *deferential** and differential.

** The word deferential is used to emphasize that valuation—the bent that shapes the direction of desire—is not stubborn. Rather, it oscillates in determining its object, an object that thence becomes unattainable and unnameable.*

2.5.1 Desire defers to the subject/superject's leap of symbolic reference into *presentational immediacy**.

** The world in presentational immediacy is the world-for-us, as we perceive it. This notion is collateral with that of causal-efficacy, which in its purpose is synonymous with Kant's schematism of the understanding. Causal efficacy is the teleological movement of all becomings—the concrescence of diverse prehensions. The subject-superject's causal efficacious and mediating movement allows for a world in presentational immediacy.*

2.5.1.1 In which instance desire's deferral forces a differentiation between affect and concept, where affect defers to concept. In this case, the superject prehends desire.

2.5.2 But when affect defers to concept, the subject/superject also defers to desire. In this case, desire prehends the subject, and concept defers to affect.

2.6 The possibility of objective satisfaction is, thus, not a matter of differentiation from causal efficacy to presentational immediacy in symbolic reference, but rather, it is a matter of deferral.

2.6.1 The issue of deferral is the paradox of the relationship of the subject and the superject and the consequent problem of the mating of intensity with survival. In psychoanalytic terms deferral refers to *desexualization*, where the primary process defers to the secondary process, while, paradoxically, *the forces the ego uses against the instincts are derivative of the instincts themselves*.³ Hence, desexualization is never complete, although there is a weakening of the id whereby satisfaction is gained through delay and indirection. From any serious imbalance between the subject and the superject such as overzealous repressive mechanisms, this isolation can result in our impression *that there is no id left in some particularly passionless members of the species and that all of their psychic energy has gone into ego formation*⁴, can cause *emotional frigidity*, even if there is such a thing as the *normal* process of isolation that yields logical thinking.

2.7 Anxiety and depression are both illustrative of the objective dissatisfaction that is due to an imbalance of deferral and that signifies the difficulties of the mating of intensity with survival. Focusing on the processes of anxiety and depression, because these are concrete and difficult shared experiences, will help us to define and understand the mechanism of the rebellious no.

3. Depression and the mating of intensity with survival:

3.1 It is clear that when a subject/superject is depressed and her life seems empty there is still presentational immediacy, and thus differentiation. But, there is a loss of causal efficacy due to a lack of intensity.

3.1.1 Consequently, there is no liberation of lively ideas.

3.1.2 Moreover, lack of intensity signifies that there is a loss of tension between affect and concept, and that there is an acute tension between the subject and the superject.

3.1.2.1 Indeed, there is a loss of tension between affect and concept, and a discrepancy is felt between how the subject is affected by deep feelings and how the superject conceptualizes a void. Without the tension between affect and concept there results an imbalance of deferral. Words mean nothing, and this is deeply felt as a loss.

3.1.2.2 One may want to argue that there is also an acute tension between affect and concept, but were this the case, then there would be failure of presentational immediacy, and not loss of causal efficacy.

3.1.2.3 One may also want to argue that there is a loss of differentiation, since there is a loss of causal efficacy, but, although differentiation may not be optimal, it is still present, or else the subject/superject would also lose presentational immediacy.

3.1.3 The lack of tension between affect and concept corresponds to a lack of intensity, which lack of intensity about life is due to the excessive tension between the subject and the superject.

³Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1972), p.134. >

⁴Charles Brenner, *An Elementary Textbook of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Anchor Books, 1974), p.64.

3.1.3.1 There is lack of intensity when there is a repression of affect, that is when the deferral of desire to the superject—that is itself a desire to conceptualize—is greater than the deferral of the subject to desire—a desire that is itself iconoclastic. Otherwise put, the subject is rebellious, it does not want to be wanting under the rule of the superject, because the rule of the superject is inadequate to assuage want. Gratification is indefinitely delayed. This is the rebellion against symbolic reference.

3.1.3.1.1 Therefore, the subject experiences desire as excess and the superject experiences desire as a lack.

3.1.3.1.2 In other words, the superego controls the id, but the id no longer controls the superego's control of itself through the ego.

3.2 When depression is mild, survival is not mated with intensity, but survival is possible.

3.2.1 The loss of causal efficacy is not complete. The subject still defers enough to desire that desire's deferral to the superject does not prevent tending to primary needs.

3.3 When depression is major, survival is threatened and intensity is diminished.

3.3.1 The subject no longer defers to desire. The loss of causal efficacy is complete. The subject/superject can no longer tend to basic needs on her own.

3.3.2 Consequently, a measure of intensity, and a measure of subjective deferral to desire, are required for survival.

3.4 I will not attempt, here, to explain why depression occurs, that is, why there is a loss of subjective deferral to desire, but obviously there are many possible causes, and there is always a cause, be it solely biological and genetic.

4. Anxiety and the mating of intensity with survival:

4.1 When a subject/superject is anxious and she feels paralyzed there is still presentational immediacy—indeed, there is an overwhelming sense of presentational immediacy—and, thus, there is differentiation. But, as with depression, there is a loss of causal efficacy. In the case of anxiety, however surprisingly, the loss of causal efficacy is due to an excess of intensity.

4.1.1 There are many lively ideas, but these do not effect a liberation of intensity, they create more intensity.

4.1.2 This excess of intensity is autoprojective, meaning that it is not enfranchising of a conrescent objective satisfaction.

4.1.2.1 Here, the autoprojection of intensity forestalls the tension between affect and concept. There is also a discrepancy between how the subject is affected and how the superject conceptualizes outrageously and irrelevantly.

4.1.2.1.1 The subject/superject worries and loses focus and concentration.

4.1.3 There results an imbalance of deferral. The lack of tension between affect and concept corresponds to an excess of autoprojective intensity, which excess provokes an excess of tension between the subject and the superject.

4.1.3.1 There is an excess of autoprojective intensity when there is a misinterpretation of affect, that is when the deferral of the subject to desire—an iconoclastic desire—is greater than the deferral of desire to the superject—an idolatrous desire for conceptuality.

4.1.3.1.1 Therefore the superject's experience of desire is overwhelming and the subject feels a lack as it lags behind its insatiable desire.

4.1.3.1.2 In other words, the id no longer controls the superego's control of itself. The superego controls the id, and the autoprojected intensity controls the superego.

4.2 When anxiety is mild, survival is heightened by intensity.

4.2.1 The loss of causal efficacy is not complete; rather, causal efficacy is forced to integrate the autoprojected intensity. In a sense, then, one can argue that there is an increase of causal efficacy, even though such causal efficacy is convoluted.

4.2.1.1 There is, thus, a loss of regular causal efficacy, but an increase of causal efficacious movement.

4.2.1.2 The subject defers to desire, but desire is reinforced by the autoprojected intensity as it defers to the superego, so that the deferral to the superego is less than the subject's deferral to desire plus the autoprojected intensity. The subject/superject, thus, attends with great care to primary need. Indeed, her sense of what constitutes primary needs is elevated.

4.3 When anxiety is irrelevant and excessive, the subject/superject is paralyzed by fear.

4.3.1 The increase of convoluted causal efficacy is frenetic and results in the paralysis of causal efficacy. The autoprojected intensity short-circuits the causal efficacious movement. The subject/superject can no longer tend to basic needs. Desire no longer defers to the superject.

4.3.2 Consequently, a measure of autoprojective intensity and a measure of desire's deferral to the superject are required for the mating of survival with intensity.

5. Complexity and the rebellious no in the mating of intensity with survival:

5.1 As seen earlier, the level of complexity of the concrescence of feelings and eternal objects for the objective satisfaction of the mating of intensity with survival requires a paradoxical relationship of the subject and the superject.

5.1.1 Complexity, therefore, means that there must be a complex relationship between the subject and the superject.

5.1.2 Thinking with complexity means thinking paradoxically.

5.2 But paradoxes, if not despairing, are always overwhelming. They can bring about depression or anxiety. They do not always bring objective satisfaction. Why?

5.2.1 Because when depressed, the subject is no longer prehended by desire, by the desire to say yes to fate, it no longer defers to desire. The subject/superject rebels against the desire to say yes to fate.

5.2.2 And because when anxious, the superject no longer prehends desire, the desire to say yes to fate. Desire no longer defers to the superject. The subject/superject rebels against the desire to say yes to fate.

5.3 When objective dissatisfaction occurs, there emerges a rebellion against complexity, the paradoxical relationship between the subject and the superject.

5.3.1 Thus, when depressed, the subject/superject no longer wants to think.

5.3.2 And when anxious, the subject/superject can no longer think.

5.3.3 This rebelliousness against the necessity of time and place, the necessity of the subject/superject's paradoxical relationship, is the desire for objective satisfaction.

5.4 The problem is that there is no objective satisfaction without the subject/superject, and moreover, that the subject/superject is only determined to achieve subjective satisfaction, the object of which condemns us to freedom.

5.4.1 There is no objective satisfaction without the desire to say yes to fate because desire enfranchises the process of the subject/superject. And the desire for objective satisfaction engenders a rebellion against saying yes to fate.

5.4.2 Objective satisfaction occurs when rebellion induces a transvaluation of values.

5.4.2.1 Rebellion induces transvaluation because it promotes the activity of the subject/superject as it puts a demand for importance on the integration of affect and concept into a higher phase of experience.

6. And, thus, in the end, we rebel so as to accept that our freedom is a complex of deferral from which there is no way out.

6.1 Rebellion is a move akin to Deleuze's *repetition* or to Freud's *Verleugnung*. Neither a passive acceptance of the normative, formal constraints of language, nor an anarchic retreat unto the silent turmoil of uncanny forces, rebellion *steals* affect from language and *offers* what it stole back to language, perceives a loss in language and denies the perception in language. Rebellion's theft is not unwarranted, for it did not agree with an initial transaction that claimed analogy or identity in its exchange. If, when we speak, one of our multiple *I*'s steals a language, so too language robs us of one of our dearest *I*'s, cheating it of its true meaning. This is the behavior that we call exchange. As if exchanging apples for oranges could do the trick. "No," says rebellion, "I'll steal the apples from you and I will give you the oranges."

6.2 Rebellion is an active negotiation of the multiple *I*'s of our subjectivity. It is not simply a psychological dynamic, although it is certainly an existential dynamic. The negotiation of the subject and superject is also epistemological, for the question in rebellion is not only *who am I*, it is equally *how do I know*, and more generally *what is the infinite*? The point to be made is that the problem is located in the polarity object-subject, inner-outer, where the morphic boundaries of the human cannot be extended to the human experience, where the question of the metaphysics of being is just as *enlightened* as that of the philosophy of language. The subject and the superject are one and the same thing. They represent the polarity of the human experience, and the rebellion that takes place is not simply against the world, it is also an internal rebellion where multiple *I*'s argue for the authenticity of their insights. Hence, the negotiation that takes place is global: it is a negotiation of the self in the world, of the inner self with the larger self, of the world in the self, of desire with its object, of words and their affect, of consciousness with the in-itself perceived for- itself by a self that has no essential unity, that is a *complexion*--only skin deep.

6.2.1 With this, narcissism, the love of one's image, becomes a desire to know the other, for the image of self is incapable of containing the self. To the contrary, the image of self is an image of the otherness of self. The narcissist is, thus, an idolater of himself as an object--an object other than the *I* that loves. He rebels, thinking he can short-circuit mediation in love of an ultimate object by loving the origin of the love. But, mistakingly

loving the image of this source, he objectifies himself all the more, he gives himself over to language. He loves his image, forgetting to love himself. He sees the other in himself. He saves himself.

6.3 This is, however, a radically contingent soteriology. Immediate gratification proving impossible for survival, the negotiation of desire requires a medium, substitution, sublimation—a desexualization that is not complete, the redirection of desire, and not the mere acceptance of this redirection, but its arbitration, where the subject says to the superject *not this way, that way! I don't want to love God, I want to love elephants. No, not elephants! Knowledge, or beauty, or Max, or myself.* And elephants can save you just as well as God provided that they carry the affect, the incommensurable affect of the human in their meaning. But they do not have to, and they do not always, for what is the point of saving what is not lost.

Notes

Noëlle Vahanian was born in Valence, France and holds a Ph.D from Syracuse University. She is visiting assistant professor of philosophy, Le Moyne College. She works at the crossroads between transcendental thought, secular theology, and political philosophy.