

CARLO CHIURCO

IMAGINING A CARING SELF  
IN THE AGE OF POST-SUBJECTIVITY.  
A MODEST PROPOSAL

1. **O**UR time looks set in a seemingly inextricable schizophrenia. On the one hand, it seems that, in full accord with the *Zeitgeist* of post-modernism, we are living in a “post-subject” age, a time when the subject and its sovereignty look little more than a myth. On the other hand, however, our society – with politics and especially economy on the forefront – is ever further relying on a highly enhanced idea of subjectivity as the ultimate category of reality, without which present-day consumerist society would be simply unthinkable<sup>1</sup>. It was 19<sup>th</sup> century post-Hegelian philosophy that started to heavily criticize the sovereign sort of subjectivity that had been the unquestioned pillar of modern philosophy from Descartes to Hegel. Schopenhauer’s *Wille zur Leben*, reprised and modified by Nietzsche in terms of *Wille zur Macht*, was the first great challenge to the omnipotence of the I, reducing it to a trick of the innermost force of Nature. Perhaps it was Marx who best formulated the new paradigm to come, when he famously sentenced that it was existence that shaped the conscience (i.e. the subject), and not vice versa<sup>2</sup>. 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy and culture took great care to demonstrate in all possible ways that this paradigm was true: conscience was in-

<sup>1</sup> As for politics, such focusing on this idea of subjectivity as the very core of reality – in the sense of “what is truly and mostly real” – is rendered by the stress given to the almost epic rhetoric of civil rights on the one hand (we could say, from a “leftist” or progressive perspective), as well as the personalization of politics on the other (we could say, from a “rightist” or conservative one), now a phenomenon fully taken as normal within the political landscape of Western societies.

<sup>2</sup> K. MARX, *Zur kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Erstes Heft*, Vorwort, in *Marx / Engels Gesamtausgabe*, Zweite Abteilung: “*Das Kapital*” und *Vorarbeiten*, Band 2, II.2, Dietz, Berlin 1980, p. 100: «Es ist nicht das Bewußtsein der Menschen, das ihr Sein, sondern umgekehrt ihr gesellschaftliches Sein, das ihr Bewußtsein bestimmt» («It is not man’s conscience that determines his being; on the contrary, it is man’s social being that determines his conscience»). Here “existence” takes the form of man’s actual social being within the economic context of his time.

deed shaped by language (Heidegger, Wittgenstein), or it was reduced to natural phenomena (from neural functionality, as in neurosciences, to all the other sorts of reductionism practiced by empirical sciences *and* the philosophical schools that are tributaries to them), or to the unconscious (as in psychoanalysis). The man living in the beginning of the contemporary age was, as Robert Musil rightly put it, «a man without quality», and this is precisely the main (if only) form in which the actual existence of subjectivity is accepted still today. Post-modern philosophy has only deepened such analysis, making subjectivity, if possible, even weaker by placing it into a condition, the ends of whose spectrum run from fragmented to «liquid», to quote Zygmunt Bauman's successful definition. Deprived of quality, fragmented, liquid as it is, the subject as a substance, i.e. the sovereign-acting subject so cherished and pampered by modern philosophy from Descartes to Hegel, has long bowed down and left the stage.

Yet, as we said, this is not sparing our time a sort of schizophrenia. The domain of intellectual reflection – and this symposium is a good witness at that – may have long come to recognize the centrality and necessity of the sphere of *caring*, as a way both to reshape subjectivity on the ruins of the myth of its absolute sovereignty, and to overcome once and for all the impossibility for the modern subject to actually open itself towards the sphere of Other-ness – a need that indeed was born with the very naissance of modern subjectivity in Descartes' philosophy. Still, in the domain of real life we are nowadays seemingly trapped in what looks like an orgy of hyper-subjectivity. Our society is clearly experiencing a deep “economicistic” turn, where only economic categories – crisis, market, joblessness, job reform, competition, liberalism / anti-liberalism... – seem to be fit to define, in a way or another, *the whole* of human experience and existence. Yet such market society of ours is, in turn, almost entirely relying on consumerism, given that our economy is a deeply consumerist one: and consumerism is made of – and at the same time keeps on fostering – an ever-insatiable thirst for satisfaction, where the desires of the individuals are pampered, cultivated and enhanced until they reach the form of a near-ob-

session. Still, in any case, it is the individual consumer, that is again *a subject*, that stands at the heart of the consumerist system, so that in a sense, manipulating as such system undoubtedly is, it also looks entirely built around consumers' needs. Such centrality of subjectivity in terms of the near-absolute<sup>3</sup> decisional power of the individual consumer also creates some very interesting side effects, which are just as obsessive as the social and psychic (vicious?) circle of desire and satisfaction fostered by consumerism. I am talking of the mass voyeurism and narcissism of our society, which express themselves in a dazzling variety of phenomena: no matter if we are talking about the obsession for a fit body, or the importance of following the "right" trends in fashion (or technology, tourism etc.), or the anxious need to *expose ourselves* in general even in the most ordinary and less meaningful aspects of our everyday life thanks to the diffusion of social networks, it is invariably a near-triumph of subjectivity we are experiencing in almost every field of human existence. A triumph that looks set to happen on a global scale, because such phenomena seem by and large to transcend cultural differences, and to pass unscathed even from the present global economic crisis, despite its rather systemic nature – or perhaps precisely because of it.

2. At a closer glance, however, even the hyper-inflated subject that stands at the core of our consumerist society looks far more fitting than first expected the general trend of an age that, being post-modern, is also post-subjective, so that also the schizophrenia highlighted in the opening lines of this article could happen to be an example of strict coherence, after all. This is because present-day subjectivity, hyper-inflated and center-of-the-stage as it undoubtedly is, is also very frail,

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<sup>3</sup> It should indeed be noted that such absolute-ness, so unquestionable in right ("we are working for you", "we are at your service", are the meanings underlying every advertising mantra), is not less fictitious as a matter of fact. The subject's choice is in fact (a) constrained because he can choose only from a *given* set of options, and (b) its absolute-ness is nonetheless immediately facing the irresistible power of persuasion. Advertising, political propaganda, facts distortion by the media, and media-fostered anxiety at always following the "right" trends (see below in the text) are all responsible for reducing that absolute-ness to little more than a claim deprived of real substance.

and definitely at a constant loss. What properly defines subjectivity is indeed the capability to possess and plan a project involving the whole of the individual human existence, to carry it on, and eventually turn it into reality. Subjectivity is therefore defined by its relation to the sphere of *desire*, and by the ability to cope with it, given that the force of desire is as strong as essentially ambivalent.

Desire shows its immense might in the burning intensity, by which we experience it. It is perhaps the strongest feeling a human being may have knowledge of, and such immense energy can be just as leading and inspirational, as ruinous and completely overrunning us because of its nature, which basically consists of mismeasure. Achieving a desire has always been the ratio, by which the worthiness of a human being, as well as his/her happiness, has been judged; and achieving it not at all costs, by respecting some moral limits, has always been seen as the distinctive feature of a truly ethical behavior. Seen from this perspective, our consumerist society has definitely not invented anything new, were not that, in its frantic seek for ever more desires to be satisfied at all costs, it has increasingly dispossessed subjectivity of its desire(s), as well as its ability to desire (truly and deeply) in general. Contemporary subjectivity is precisely defined by the number of desires it can satisfy, and the task of this satisfaction is so demanding, that subjectivity is asked to give itself fully to it. The subject's ability to define and even restrain its desire, in order to fulfill it, as well as to distance itself from it, is no longer cultivated or encouraged because it is seen as a negative force working to block self-satisfaction, and thus self-realization.

Therefore, with regard to consumerist subjectivity's relation to desire, we shall say that it looks increasingly passive: once a desire – happening mostly in the form of an external stimulus rather than a strong emotion coming from interiority – starts stirring in the subject (mostly in terms of the need to possess something), consumerist subjectivity activates itself and tries to respond to this stimulus with different degrees of zeal and dedication by seizing the object (or the characteristic, or the event) whose possess had been previously signaled as important

and sense-giving. This scheme, of course, may look as too much of an automatism, and it is laid down this way only for the sake of our analysis' comfort.

Nonetheless, it is out of doubt that a subject that is properly established – that is, a subject that is also a *self* – indeed does know what he/she needs and, most of all, what he/she truly desires. Such subject is not short or deprived of a project concerning its life, and is therefore in the position of accepting and practicing what increasingly looks so difficult for us: that art of *postponing* its satisfaction precisely for the sake of truly and surely achieving it. But the self-less subject of consumerism, this true and cosmopolitan citizen of our time, looks more like a sort of black hole, a bottom-less gasping chasm: no matter how much it will be satisfied, it will always “need”, and claim, further and newer satisfactions of all sorts. Cosmopolitan, we said: because the lack of a self almost necessarily implies the lack of true cultural co-ordinates. Deprived of a self, the subject becomes technically replicable, just as the artwork in the title of Walter Benjamin's famous essay. And it becomes so, precisely because all the selfless subjects, individually different as they may be, still share the same feature: the sphere of desire of each of them is just as insatiable, and each subject basically coincides with its desire in that passive sense we have seen before<sup>4</sup>. It looks as if each subject reproduces the primeval Chaos (Chaos=«gaping chasm») of ancient Greek mythology, but in this case the meaning of the word “chaos” shows an inverted polarity, because instead of possessing the capability of expelling the whole *kosmos*, each of these selfless subjects seems capable of sucking it into the nothingness and meaninglessness of their inner core, just like a black hole would do.

3. Therefore it becomes clear that, on the one hand, never has subjectivity been so ubiquitous, cherished and pampered, than in the age when subject disappeared as a distinctive *substance*, and lost both its sovereignty and its very self. As a consequence, this subject remains as

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<sup>4</sup> As we saw before, the subject indeed coincides with its desire in all cases, but only its desire in the active sense is good for its self-realization.

such – that is, a subject, a subjectivity – but is entirely freed from – or it is rather incapable of – every sort of *care*, both towards itself (because it has a self no more) and towards the others. On the other hand, however, such great power possessed by subjectivity, along with the very position it holds at the centre of the stage of our time, marks and confirms, as we have seen, the end of the subject, rather than contradicts it, because subjectivity in our time is at its weakest. Despite the clear dangers that individuals face in this context – such as the risk of being manipulated while totally unaware of it, or the extreme difficulty to find a path towards authenticity –, present-day cultural and philosophical reflection prefers to clinch on the *dangers* carried on by the subjectivity of the sovereign sort, as if to exorcize its return.

The importance of *caring* indeed also stems out (at least partly) of such fear of the return of a full-scale, sovereign (that is, authoritarian and/or totalitarian) modern subjectivity of sort. Caring is seen as the right option for subjectivity in our time, a subjectivity that repudiates the typically modern self-reference of the I, and is thus finally capable to overcome the impossibility for the I to reach out for the Other(s), as it is clear in the words of Elena Pulcini: «To re-habilitate caring means, in other words, to think of a subject that is capable to overcome the dichotomy between *priority given to the I* and *priority given to the Other*, because such subject unites in itself both autonomy and dependence, liberty and relationship»<sup>5</sup>. What remains to be seen is if this “new”, caring subjectivity is but the last episode in – and, in a sense, the outcome of – the history of the progressive fall of modern-age sovereign subject, or a first attempt to go *beyond* its fall. The difference is not unimportant. In the first case, indeed, “caring subjectivity” would still carry within itself all the distinctive features – as well as the dangers and setbacks – of the liquid subjectivity of our time. In order not to remain the last remnant of a subjectivity long lost, but be instead the first attempt to imagine a new one, “caring subjectivity” must be judged on the basis of the nuance that the meaning of “caring” – that is, this open-ness to the Other which is rooted in its very nature – may assume in the eye of

<sup>5</sup> See, in this volume, the essay by Elena Pulcini, *Cura di sé, cura dell'altro*.

the observer. Caring, in other words, may be seen as another blow direct at the sovereign sort of subject, or as the property of a subject that, *essentially* caring as it may be (in the sense that caring is embedded in its very essence), still does not see the philosophical *need* to deny subjectivity the possession of the distinctive feature of its former sovereignty, i.e. *transcendentality*. Today's philosophical reflection – and philosophy of caring is no exception – is indeed extremely suspicious to recognize such transcendental status to the “new”, caring subjectivity. Yet in this way, and very likely also against its intentions, it ends up by siding with the basic trend of contemporary philosophy, and is therefore obliged to see the coming of the liquid, selfless, and disengaged subject as the coherent, necessary outcome of completely unvoidable historical turn seen as completely unavoidable.

4. The matter of the transcendental of the subject is precisely what, in my opinion, can really make the scale tip in one sense or another. Therefore philosophical reflection on caring stands on a forking path. If it is not ready to make this concession, then it will always found itself siding by the contemporary conception of subjectivity, which is at the same time selfless – and is therefore not capable of care for itself – and void, while this emptiness, to be continuously and perpetually re-filled by ever-new forms of satisfaction and appeasement, makes in turn caring for others completely impossible too. Therefore, if a new, caring subjectivity has to rise to fill the horizon of philosophical reflection, as well as to address the anxiety of our age, it is time in my opinion to lift the ban put on transcendental by contemporary philosophy. We will see below why this would be so important, especially from an ethical perspective; for now, let us shortly focus on how such transcendental should be conceived, if it is to be purposefully used again as a distinctive feature of subjectivity.

5.1 Contemporary philosophy is rightly suspicious of every return of transcendental, since it is precisely because of this category that, in the history of modern subjectivity, the way its sovereignty has been interpreted has witnessed first an absolutistic, then an authoritarian,

and finally a totalitarian turn. This has eventually created the belief in the contemporary philosophical and cultural environment that subjectivity is best kept precisely in its presently fragmented or liquid form. But looking in perspective at the history of modern subjectivity, two sort of mistakes – or misrepresentations – can be singled out, which have both led to this situation. To begin with, contemporary criticism against the subject's transcendentalism is right to point out at an essentially totalitarian deformation witnessed by the meaning of this distinctive feature of subjectivity during the history of modern philosophy, in which the subject has ended up occupying, so to speak, the whole of the semantic sphere, as well as the whole of reality itself. In this sense, when Hegelian philosophy stated that the whole of reality is produced by the absolute subject (that is, by a subjectivity made absolute), it simply limited itself to make completely explicit what had always dwelled in the very core of modern philosophy since Descartes. Such coincidence between the sphere of transcendental subjectivity and the whole of meaning / reality is indeed totalitarian, to quote Emmanuel Lévinas, nonetheless it rests on a basic deformation of the real nature of the subject's transcendentalism, and more precisely its reading such transcendentalism as pure *universality*. Such misunderstanding is peculiar of modern philosophy.

The transcendental nature of subjectivity was clear to Western philosophy at least since Aristotle. His famous sentence from the *De anima*, that «the soul is somewhat all things»<sup>6</sup>, shows that a conception of transcendentalism was already fully at work in his philosophy. This is indeed the articulated meaning of transcendentalism: to state that the subject is (a) a reality that is not founded on anything else, but rather the self-manifestation of thought as the ultimate founding ground of meaning / reality, and (b) that it is capable to virtually contain all of the determined meanings, pretty much like the meaning of «being» is not exhausted by the sum of all the determined meanings, «home», «table», «star», «the universe», and so on. But this does not mean in

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<sup>6</sup> ARISTOTLE, *De anima*, III 8, 431 b 20-21.

any way that subjectivity is an *infinite* substance. To state this implies a slight but important slide from the sphere of the transcendental to the sphere of the universal.

The universal is the actual Whole of meaning / reality, which cannot be overcome; the extreme limit of reality, beyond which there is only pure nothingness. It is a property that rather belongs to the sphere of *ontology* – i.e. the universal as such is a *reality*, something that really exists, just as being is *actually* a force that is capable to stand victoriously against nothingness –, whereas the property of being something transcendental simply means, as we have seen, to be self-founded, and to possess a meaning whose semantic extension cannot be paired by any determined meaning, not even the sum of all the  $x_n$  determined meanings imaginable. Finally, transcendental is a property that applies to several possible notions, not just the subject, whether universality applies only to itself.

It is precisely such overlapping of the universal and the transcendental that determined the eventual totalitarian turn experienced by the notion of sovereign subjectivity in modern philosophy. But this, of course, does not mean that transcendental is totalitarian in itself, nor that that turn in the history of Western philosophy was a necessary one. Becoming aware of this overlapping and avoiding it makes possible to deny that transcendental subjectivity is either the Whole of reality or its cause, and that is something essentially infinite – or «totalitarian», in the words of Lévinas.

5.2 On the other hand, contemporary philosophy falls prey of a misunderstanding of opposite sort, when it insists not just to refuse to refer transcendental to the subject as a property that essentially belongs to it, but also to deny the very existence of transcendental subjectivity itself. Indeed many branches of contemporary philosophy look at this notion as just another of the dreams pursued by metaphysics during the centuries, something that however cannot be really deemed to exist in the real world. This goes far beyond the humble suspicion, held by many (and by philosophy of caring among the others), that

sovereign subjectivity is to be refused because of its intrinsically totalitarian, and therefore violent, nature. As stated before, the main trend of contemporary philosophy is to reverse the traditional metaphysical tenet, according to which it is conscience that shapes existence, to state instead that existence is the force that shapes conscience. This is just another way of denying the existence of transcendental subjectivity, a denial that, as seen before, has led to the persuasion that subjectivity does not actually exist as a distinctive reality in general, and not just as something transcendental.

As shown before, there is an un-totalitarian way to think of subjectivity as a transcendental reality: now, I would like to argue the view that to deny (i) subjectivity its transcendentality means (ii) to deny, sooner or later, its very existence as such (that is, its existence as a subject); and that the latter denial (ii) comes, in time, as a *necessary* consequence of the former one (i). Why denying the existence of transcendentality should imply to deny the existence of subjectivity as such – as an autonomous, independent entity? Or, which is the same, why should the subject's finiteness – seen as something not compatible with the statement that the subject is transcendental – conflict against the notion of the subject as a fully autonomous entity? Again, in my opinion there is a misunderstanding at work in such views. To claim, as done before, that the subject is transcendental and *not* universal, thus decoupling transcendentality from universality, is indeed to state that the subject is *finite*. Therefore, the subject's finiteness may actually coexist with its autonomy without falling into contradiction.

But may such autonomy really exist without transcendentality? The liquid subjectivity of our consumerist age, after all, decides in full autonomy, even if it is heavily manipulated by the media and follows an imaginary that mostly does not belong to it, nor is its own product. Its word may be worth little more than the word of a servant, or a puppet. Still, the last word is its, and no-one else's.

Or is it? To make a statement is not the same thing as to uphold it,

as Aristotle famously said in *Metaphysica*, IV<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, the simple *act* of having the last say does not mean that that very act fully belongs to whom has produced it. The liquid subject may well have the last say, and take the final decision: but this decision is not really its own, and it acts as the final terminus of a chain of circumstances, in which it plays almost not part at all, except in the last stage. The fact that the liquid subject has the last say, and takes the final decision, only says about the fact that it is this subject and no one else that enacts that action, not that that action belongs to it<sup>8</sup>. Shortly, it says nothing about the actual *autonomy* of this subject while performing this action: it rather confirms that such autonomy is not at work in the process. Thus the autonomy of a subject does not simply lie in the paternity of its actions: it must therefore be found in the subject itself. A subject deprived of self, like the entirely «disengaged» subjectivity – as Charles Taylor has put it – of our consumerist age, is therefore not suitable to fulfill the requirements of the definition of autonomy.

But has this self to be also a transcendental one? The self, in order to be, needs to be completely distinct from everything else. But distinction – the property of being innerly different – could be understood in two ways, a passive and an active one. In a passive sense, “to be different” is simply to be understood as the property, possessed by everything, of being different from everything else. We could call this property “*outer* difference”, or the outer sense of being different. But in an active sense, difference – i.e., being different – refers to something that is different because it is of a different class, superior to other things, and this is precisely the case of the self. This may be called the

<sup>7</sup> See ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, IV 3, 1005 b 25-26.

<sup>8</sup> The problem may become easier to understand, should we refer to a couple of categories that were extremely important to medieval thinkers, but have now long fallen from grace: *libertas* and *liberum arbitrium*. To possess the latter, and to exert it, does not imply to possess and exert real freedom, *libertas*. The liquid subject of our time indeed possesses *liberum arbitrium*, so it can be said that its actions belong to it, and to it only; but the fact that such subject is the only one to possess the ownership of its actions does not necessarily imply that it is also free, nor that its actions actually stem from freedom (*libertas*). Indeed the subject of the consumerist age acts – that is, it buys and consumes – but not freely, being heavily manipulated by the pressuring environment around it.

*inner* sense of difference. Both senses of difference can be predicated of the self, but it is only the second that distinguishes it as that source of authenticity, to which we usually refer to when we talk about it.

Therefore, the self must be different, in a sense that what makes it different cannot be tracked down in all the other classes containing all possible existent beings. Such difference might then arguably consist in being transcendental; but it could be objected that it might also consist in some odd quality capable to open a chasm between the self and all of the other beings – just think of eternity, for instance. To which it should be replied that such inner difference, utterly qualitative as it may be, should not imply the rejection of finiteness, because such rejection properly belongs only to universality, to which the self clearly does not belong. Therefore, there is only one utterly qualitative difference of the inner sort that is not bound to infinity, and this is transcendental: as a consequence, the self, if it possesses full-scale autonomy, must also necessarily be transcendental.

It then follows that subjectivity must necessarily be conceived as a transcendental entity: therefore philosophy of caring would better take this state of things into account when trying to shape the new, caring subjectivity that is to be.

6. Finally, I would like to briefly sketch why a renovated interest on transcendental subjectivity by the philosophical reflection on caring would have, in my opinion, positive ethical consequences. Just as Pulcini has highlighted in the sentence quoted above, a truly “caring subjectivity” consists of a carefully balancing act: trying to avoid an excess of self-reference, as well as an obsessive priority given to the Other. After the fall of modern, sovereign subjectivity, and in the hope to leave behind as soon as possible our present age populated by fragmented, selfless subjects, subjectivity must be clearly conceived anew around *relationship* as its main core. Being a subject must definitely mean an open-ness towards the relational sphere, where the Other is finally met and welcome, then recognized as who she/he is, and eventually not manipulated. Caring may be seen as an aspect of such open-ness, a

way for it to express itself – other ways being love, friendship, good politics... –, or it can also be plainly synonymic with it: caring, in this sense, becomes the promise made by the subject never to treat the Other as an object, but as it is: another subject.

But such open-ness – in which we agree that caring subjectivity, and indeed subjectivity in general, consists or should consist – has a two-folded meaning, theoretical and ethical. From the ethical point of view, this open-ness needs caring subjectivity to be truly founded in order to become an existential and ethical project. In other words, this caring, oblation dimension of subjectivity can be actually deemed really ethical only if it descends from a fully aware *decision* made by a completely autonomous subjectivity to open itself to the Other – which in turn is but another fully autonomous self –, to accept and recognize it as it is, and to take care of her/him. Only in this case caring may become perhaps the extreme form of accomplishment of ethics, and it can also eventually substantiate in the best way what is *good*. Good is this reciprocal recognition occurring between two subjects, which self-expresses itself in the form of a reciprocal and mutual care carried on by both of them.

But in order to do that, we must first re-enstate the self's autonomy in its full form, which implies to re-enstate the subject's transcendental. Therefore transcendental, which is a quintessentially theoretical category, becomes the condition that makes possible for caring to achieve its strongest and most elevated ethical sense. And given that, as we said, open-ness is not simply the completion of subjectivity as its finally achieved practical and ethical perfection, but is also the very meaning of subjectivity itself (it is what subjectivity consists of), such open-ness must coincide with transcendental.

7. Transcendental is neither necessarily totalitarian, nor excluding the dimension of human finiteness. To re-enstate it as the proper and distinctive mark of subjectivity would let us overcome the presently dismal state of the subject, fragmented and invaded as it is, center-of-the-stage and paroxysmal narcissistic, yet completely incapable to take care neither of itself nor of the others. Secondly, it would

also help founding the notion of care on a strong philosophical basis, thus avoiding any possible siding-up with post-modernism, which defends precisely such notion of the fragmented subject as the only possible one. Thirdly, it would also help to exclude a possible (and, again, typically post-modern) conflict between “caring” and “good”. Indeed, when reading texts on philosophy of caring one has often the impression that *caring* is treated as a sort of remnant of *good* – this very ancient idea of ethics –, its disempowered avatar, the best we can ask and imagine in our post-world where all the Great Narrations of metaphysics – such as transcendentalism and, indeed, good – are but distant myths. Caring is also sometimes seen as the “right” sort of good – not universal-reaching, not transcendental, not infected by anything that reeks of metaphysics –, just as the fragmented subject is seen as the only sort of subject that makes real sense. In fact there is no need of such conflict between caring and good, and caring, by bounding its fate to the newly re-enstated transcendental subjectivity, may legitimately aspire to be the highest degree of ethical perfection.

Finally, the re-enstatement of transcendentalism would place clear boundaries around the notion of caring, thus excluding that the caring subject, swinging from an opposite to another, gets wholly dispersed in the sea of the other-ness of the Other, thus becoming just another variation on the theme of the post-modern liquid subjectivity. The caring subject must be essentially open, that is in a relationship, and to build a relationship is to build a nexus; but it cannot simply be *pure* relationship, or it would once again become dispossessed of its self – not to mention the fact that, at this point, should one of the two poles of the relationship become nothing, this would lead to the complete annihilation of the relationship itself.

Nexus are important, yet the subject – that is the self, or conscience, or, if it sounds not too old-fashioned, *soul* – is precisely but *the* place where nexus happen and dwell, especially the *necessary* ones, such as those that blossom from caring.

**ABSTRACT:** *IMAGINING A CARING SELF IN THE AGE OF POST-SUBJECTIVITY. A MODEST PROPOSAL*

This article discusses the possibility of successfully reintroducing a notion of subjectivity of transcendental sort in the context of contemporary philosophical reflection about caring. The notion of caring revolves around a new kind of subjectivity, far from the sovereign and ultimately totalitarian subject typical of modern philosophy. Yet, as this article tries to argue, also present-day fragmented and liquid subjectivity, non-violent as it might seem, is unfit to bear the burden of the effort of imagining a new subjectivity built around caring as its core. Transcendentality – far from being necessarily implicated with violence and philosophical, as well as political, totalitarianism – may instead be non-violent and respectful of human finiteness, and therefore free from the suspect of restoring old metaphysical views about a fully sovereign subject. All of the more, it makes the notion of caring achieve an iconic status as the very coronation of ethics, in the terms of what can actually substantiate an otherwise intellectualistic (or “too metaphysical”) notion of good.