

# Review of: "Distance as the most essential form of human thought and subjectivity"

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The theory the author if this article intends to promote is the following one: "while the *thinking subject* was understood as a distancing from the world, distance was neither *articulated as the essence of thought* nor of the *inner transcendent dynamic of the human subject* (double defects)" Generalizing on this premise, it contends: "Western philosophy is nothing other than the performance of distance."

The author then proceeds with an analysis of different prominent contemporary philosophers: Heidegger, Blumenberg and Husserl

Adopting itself an Heideggerian point of view about the history of metaphysics, it states that it's not Being but Distance that has never been really thought. "In breaking away from traditional metaphysics, Heidegger conceptualized distance (difference) in his *Identität und Differenz* within his criticism of Hegel and Aristotle." But here we can wonder whether there is not actually already a kind of contradiction: how to say the whole "Western philosophy" if such a thing exists or ever existed, that is about distancing and yet saying it's something that never understood before Heidegger. If philosophy is a reflexive activity what is a philosophy that is ignoring or misunderstanding its own condition of possibility?

For the author, difference becomes here the name of distance (but are the same?): "In contrast to Hegel's closed circular circuit of thought,<sup>13</sup> Heidegger proposes another way: "thinking, tentatively named, is difference as difference"."

Unfortunately, the author is not bringing Derrida or even more Deleuze in the equation to develop this claim.

However an interesting point is that the author sees in Heidegger's conception of difference a limit to the pure understanding of distance: "The problem of thought in Heidegger is essentially the fact that Heidegger's *Dasein*, despite the *Mitsein*, is incapable of thought and interaction because it is incapable of distance." Interestingly it's the critic of the inauthenticity of *Dasein* which grounds *Dasein* in the absence of distance: "Consider this description of *Dasein*: "[T]he subject of affectivity, *Dasein*, is not a phenomenological but an ontological category, full of existence and empty of interiority and experience."<sup>27</sup> The lack of distance in *Dasein* is expressed in the lack of interiority, the lack of thought, as one given mode of human experience." However here the author could have better clarified the issue of affectivity in the relation to distance. It seems that distance is understood only in relation to consciousness and intellectual reflexivity but is there not distance even in the process of auto-affection? A path that the author can consider to explore.

Then distance is viewed from an anthropological perspective in reference to Hans Blumenberg's *Beschreibung des Menschen*. "Distance enables the development of plans in advance of enemies (e.g., traps, and recently, drones, and

chemical and nuclear weapons).” From this perspective distance is linked to anticipation: “If the subject of *actio per distans* is thoughtful it is also because, with a wider horizon of the distance before her as the source of anticipation” Here we can remind Bergson's idea that life = consciousness = choice = both memory and anticipation. But the author remains in the German tradition and did not integrate this in his narrative. The evolutionary vision of the subject constitution could be sustained by Bergson's *Matter & Memory*. Concluding about Hans Blumenberg's *Beschreibung des Menschen*: “In sum, a new form of experience of the self and the other appeared simultaneously with the evolutionary leap of *actio per distans*.”

Distance here as anthropological notion is distance between persons and not simply between us and the world. The question could be: what is more originary in terms of the genesis of distance: distance with others or with the world??

The author tries somewhat to understand by linking self-constitution with empathy in Husserl: “The thesis that distance sums up the human can be confirmed using Husserl's phenomenology in the idea of self-constitution through empathy (*Einfühlung*).” Here, in relation to Merleau-Ponty's Sorbonne course the author state: “Empathy therefore occurs in the mode of *difference* or *distance* between where I am (determination) and where I could be (indetermination).

Psychoanalysis claims that the infant cannot yet differentiate between itself and the world (e.g., the mother's breast; here and there). So, for many psychoanalysts (Freud, Winnicott, etc.) the self has not yet been constituted. Thus, distance is required for the self (e.g., the infant) to apperceive the other.”

Finally tackling the question of auto-affectivity and distance the author goes down to the different modes of incarnation of subjectivity: “This incomplete unity of my own body (*Leib-körper*) is seen in my inability to organize my experiences completely for myself. In fact, I connect my hunger, aching limbs, tiredness, or even my remembering with my body (*Körper*) by means of self-reflection, whereby this body (*Körper*), which is supposed to be mine, is not given to me “originally” like the body (*Körper*) of the other person and like my mental and psychic experiences are “originally” given to me. If the inside and outside body exclude each other, then the *zero point of self is therefore at a distance to the self*.”

One of the interesting consequence is theological: “God, coinciding with himself, implies a lack of distance (difference). The implication: God is not a thinking being, incapable of changes (regret, new conclusions, solutions, or answers). The thoughts of God coincide with his acts, eliminating the distance between abstract thinking and practical thinking and making a reflexivity between a here and there impossible.” However the author could have considered Spinozism as a nice way to resolve this conundrum.

In conclusion the author affirms: “Here, I have tried to establish that without the concept of distance, it would be difficult to conceptualize thoughts and their formations as ideas or senses (indetermination), eventually requiring linguistic concepts (determination).” However is it distance as a “concept” or a non-conceptual psychological feature that enables thought? It doesn't seem that the concept of distance is necessary for distancing: we can also say that it goes both ways. Thinking allows distancing as well as distancing makes thinking possible. An interesting following-up will be Virilio's thinking; if distance is the condition of thought then we can understand that in a world where distance is shortened and even short-circuited by the immediacy of digital medias and the acceleration of technological time-machines then thinking itself is at risk.

