



Whither Transcendence? Immanence and Critique in *The Self-Emptying Subject*

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Abstract

This paper engages Alex Dubilet's *The Self-Emptying Subject: Kenosis and Immanence, Medieval to Modern* and his account of immanence and kenosis as exhibited in his reading of Hegel's concept of *Entäußerung* [externalization]. Specifically, I focus on the "problematic of desubjectivation" that centers Dubilet's critique of transcendence and its relationship to subjection and subjectivity. I reconsider the relationship made between this problematic, the ethics of kenosis, and the concept of immanence so as to demonstrate the ways in which Dubilet attempts to depart from transcendence, subjectivity, and their concomitant ethics. In particular, I consider his reading of Hegel's concept of *Entäußerung* and its similarities to the Young Hegelians' understanding of this concept. My reading of Dubilet suggests that while he seeks to depart from transcendence, he reintroduces transcendence through the "problematic of desubjectivation" and its relationship to kenosis. In conclusion, I question the philosophical import of immanence in contemporary critical inquiry and why its conceptualization is often positioned in opposition to transcendence.

Keywords Immanence · Transcendence · Hegel · Marx · Critique

And it is our task to show that the antithesis of divine and human is altogether illusory, that it is nothing else than the antithesis between the human nature in general and the human individual; that, consequently, the object and contents of the Christian religion are altogether human. (Feuerbach, 1989:14)

Alex Dubilet's *The Self-Emptying Subject: Kenosis and Immanence, Medieval to Modern* (henceforth, *SES*) offers a critical reassessment of the agonistic relationship

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between theology and philosophy. His book not only demonstrates how this relationship has led to academic and disciplinary divisions, but how it profoundly obscures our readings of important thinkers in European thought. One consequence of this division is the bifurcation of transcendence and immanence, the former becomes proper to the domain of theology and the latter, to the domain of philosophy. The crux of Dubilet's book is to question these axiomatic divisions and the consequent impasses they create for ethical thought.

Two problematics initiate and situate Dubilet's project: the first is the historical and disciplinary problematic that distinguishes philosophy from theology, a process Dubilet attributes to modern processes of secularization. The second, which will be the focus of this article, is the philosophical and theological groundwork on which this disciplinary bifurcation rests: the finitude-transcendence couplet. In this paper, I will recapitulate this latter aspect of Dubilet's argument in order to offer some critical remarks. My summary of *SES* will first concentrate on the stakes involved in resuscitating an analytic of kenosis, rehearsing key aspects of Dubilet's argument. I will then turn to Dubilet's reading of *Entäußerung* and its relationship to Young Hegelianism in order to raise some concerns about his critique of the finitude-transcendence couplet. In light of various critiques of transcendence that have emerged in the past several decades, my focus on Dubilet's reading of Hegel serves to provoke some further questions regarding the critique of transcendence and its relationship to alienation and kenosis. Ultimately, I hope to illustrate that Dubilet's account of immanence does not cohere with the underlying teleology implicit in an ethics of kenosis and the problematic of desubjectivation, which themselves reaffirm transcendence.

The goal of this engagement with Dubilet is to question the widening gap between immanence and transcendence in critical inquiry. In recent years, philosophers, anthropologists, and other scholars have scrutinized transcendence, especially given the growing popularity of thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze and his philosophical heirs. As a concept and philosophical orientation, transcendence occupies an important place in European thought, one that has developed from medieval theological discourses to its culmination in the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant. This history of transcendence, moreover, has an enduring relationship with immanence that has provoked important questions about divinity, causality, human cognition, and similar matters. Although the scope of this engagement cannot attend to these matters in the history of philosophy, I want to ask why critiques of transcendence have pitted it against immanence. Put differently, why have recent critiques of transcendence positioned transcendence in opposition to immanence? This is a question that will be difficult to answer, but I hope that my reading of *SES* and positioning Dubilet's argument within a larger tradition and trajectory of Marxism will clarify this problem in critical inquiry.¹ As I will argue below, my claim is that the specters of Marx have overdetermined the opposition between transcendence and immanence, in which Dubilet participates and perpetuates. My aim is not to offer an alternative framework, but to question the undergirding presuppositions at hand when one offers an account of immanence by way of a critique of transcendence.

¹ Louis Althusser implied this connection between a critique of transcendence and the philosophical shift to a concept of immanence in his later work. See "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter" in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–1987* (2006).

From Theology to Philosophy: On the Secularization of Immanence

At the heart of it, *SES* provides a conceptual history of immanence and its relationship to the divine and the transcendent. In his manuscript, Dubilet argues that the history of Christian theology (and by extension, the history of European thought) is defined by a series of “theoretical partitions and purifications.”² The process of partitioning and purifying in *SES* is placed within a logic of secularization that can explain how philosophy and theology are valorized by and associated with immanence and transcendence, respectively. For Dubilet, secularization is as much a process of the translation of theological concepts into philosophical concepts as it is a provincialization of transcendence for theological discourse and immanence for philosophical discourse. Charles Taylor famously designates this provincialization as the “immanent frame” (Taylor, 2007). Dubilet seeks to unravel this immanent frame by demonstrating how it can, in fact, constitute theology, and how philosophy often disguises its transcendence when it differentiates itself from “theological illusions” (Dubilet, 2018:6).

Dubilet introduces his book with the numerous consequences and associations that emerge from the partition between theology and philosophy, transcendence and immanence. For example, modes of relation to the divine are characteristic of these divisions: such as analogy, belonging to theology, and univocity, which belongs to philosophy. Analogy suggests a relation to a divine being (e.g. God) that is necessarily mediated by symbols or metaphors that are not identical to the divine being. If the human cannot cognize the essence of divinity, then analogical tools become necessary to comprehend one’s relationship to the divine, Dubilet implies. Here, one can see how the finitude-transcendence couplet can be conditioned by this analogical relationship.³ In contrast, univocity, describes the processes and philosophies of immanence that Gilles Deleuze ascribes to thinkers (such as Spinoza) who seek to collapse the difference between a finite subject and a transcendent being, between a mode and its substance. But Dubilet wants to trouble these longstanding, purified bifurcations that quarantine theory into

...determinate contrast[s] between philosophy and theology, between immanence and transcendence, between ontology and a Go(o)d beyond Being, between univocity and analogy—the only question remaining being which side of the divide one will attempt to rethink creatively, inject with new theoretical life, and, by contrast, against which side will one polemicize to gather strength for one’s own legitimacy. (Dubilet, 2018:6)

Even thinkers like Deleuze, who pioneered the reconstruction of immanence within the canon of twentieth-century European thought, are caught in this binary. Citing François

² The specification of “medieval Christian theologians” is intended to be consistent with Dubilet’s analysis and to differentiate from both earlier Christian theologians, such as those who are a part of Greek tradition, as well as other traditions that have conceptualized the relationship between immanence and transcendence differently, such as the Islamic.

³ Immanuel Kant’s account of analogy, given the impossibility of a determinate concept of the supersensible, is key here. While Dubilet seems to recognize Kant’s importance for these questions and concerns, he is a minor figure in Dubilet’s book that is often cited and critiqued without much discussion. Although I cannot elucidate Kant’s role in *SES*, it is noteworthy and I will briefly return to it in the conclusion. See Kant’s *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (2004), pp. 102–112.

Laruelle, Dubilet proposes an immanence untethered from any specific discourse, theological or philosophical; a radical immanence, in which “no discourse has a final power over immanence and that immanence itself can never fully become the property of any discourse” (Dubilet, 2018: 7).

While this concern with the binary between theology and philosophy—and its attendant bifurcation of transcendence and immanence—is at the kernel of Dubilet’s book, “its import can only be properly comprehended when it is brought together with the question of the self-emptying of the subject” (Dubilet, 2018: 8). This is the main contribution of the book. The ethical framework of kenosis and the self-emptying subject provides a critical rejoinder to the accepted difference between philosophy and theology, transcendence and immanence. According to Dubilet, the self-emptying subject is a crucial and unexplored site through which to rethink the divisions between the subject, transcendence, and immanence, and to develop an ethical framework untethered from the transcendence-finitude couplet.

The reconstruction of kenosis and its ethical framework offers a rejoinder not only to this canonical division, but also to the dominant ethical frameworks in twentieth-century continental thought: most notably, Michel Foucault and Emmanuel Levinas. According to Dubilet, Foucault’s devotion to an ethics of self-mastery in the latter part of his intellectual career deemphasizes the constitution of the subject through power in order to reclaim lost legacies of practical self-transformation. For Foucault, ethics underscores the subject’s relation to itself by which it is capable of cultivating virtues, affects, and dispositions, and he reinstates the primacy of the subject in relation to itself and its actions. Unlike Foucault, Levinas reconstructs the idea of first philosophy by establishing it on theologico-ethical grounds and alterity (the “pre-ontological”), rather than the self-constitution of the subject.⁴ This is especially exemplified in the theological relation between a religious subject and a divine being, where the (human) subject’s relation to the alterity of God undoes the desire for self-mastery and self-enclosure. Levinas emphasizes this point in his later writings, in which the subject’s relationship to the other always already precedes the subject’s relationship to itself.

Divergent as they are, the ethics and respective theories of subjectivity authored by Levinas and Foucault are limited by a relation to transcendence (as in the case Levinas) or the augmentation of the self through rigorous self-discipline (as in the case of Foucault). Dubilet targets these ethical paradigms due to their inability to reconcile the subject and the other, resulting in an ethics that either internalizes the self or totally severs the subject from transcendence.⁵ Against both of these paradigms, Dubilet seeks

⁴ While Levinas transforms his project over the course of his writing—from the teleological maturation of the finite subject and its relation with infinite transcendence to situating the ethical relation with transcendence prior to the constitution of subject—Levinas upholds the primacy of the relation between the subject and alterity. See Samuel Moyn’s *The Origins of the Other* (2005).

⁵ I am uncertain about Dubilet’s account of Foucault and Levinas. Foucault’s turn to the hermeneutics of the subject focused on the practices and conduct of the ancients, as Dubilet shows. However, Foucault neither affirmed nor discussed the existence of the other or transcendence in the theological idiom that Dubilet seems to ascribe to Foucault’s ethics. Levinas’ image of ethics is complicated because he heavily relied on a concept of divine transcendence, but in no way was this transcendence outside of, severed from, or totally distinct from the constitution of the subject. Levinas’ early dissertation *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology* demonstrates how phenomenology radically transformed the philosophical and theological concept of transcendence by arguing that it is always already constituted by the intuitive capacity of the subject’s mental states that are immanent with the objective world (what Husserl calls “immanent seeing”). See Levinas’ *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology* (1995).

to resuscitate a tradition that can be encapsulated by the Greek term *kenosis*, literally, “the act of emptying” that is situated within a “problematic of desubjectivation” (Dubilet, 2018: 18). The aim of *kenosis* and desubjectivation is to provide an ethical orientation for the subject so as to lose “itself and its identity as subject, in order to affirm a life no longer possessed or made to work in subservience to a transcendental ideal” (Dubilet, 2018: 18). It is this process of desubjectivation that catalyzes an act of self-emptying, and also initiates an immanence without an ostensible reliance on transcendence. Within this ethical framework, the act of self-emptying and desubjectivation leads to an “unrestrained immanence” where the correlation between subject and transcendence is provincialized and a “dispossessed life without a why, a common life detached from the matrices of subjection” is made possible (Dubilet, 2018: 16–17).⁶ As such, a dispossessed life does not work under the auspices of regulative ideals or teleological principles. Rather, self-emptying “marks the breakdown of all such teleological and accumulative movements” and toward “becoming nothing” (Dubilet, 2018: 17).⁷ Dubilet aptly anticipates his readers’ rebuttal: Is not “becoming nothing” just another mysticism tethered to a disguised God? As Dubilet demonstrates, the relationship between self-emptying and immanence cannot be reduced to a regulative and thus life-negating process, but one that affirms the vitality inherent in life itself, “*sans emploi, sans repos, sans réponse*” (Dubilet, 2018: 160; “without use, without rest, without reply”).

In order to reclaim a tradition of kenotic ethics and its attendant problematic against the authority of Levinas and Foucault, Dubilet appeals to Eckhart, Hegel, and Bataille. The book proceeds into an exposition of these three thinkers, who articulate the ethics of *kenosis* and the self-emptying subject in different ways. Beginning with the Dominican theologian Meister Eckhart, Dubilet outlines key aspects of his sermons that helped pioneer a kenotic lexicon. Dubilet finds in Eckhart a theological companion who demonstrates the potential of an unrestrained immanence that emphasizes a dispossessed life, or what Eckhart calls “a life without a why.” In his writings, the Dominican theologian uses theological vocabulary to subvert “the theological matrix of external relations between creature and creator” (Dubilet, 2018: 8). Thereafter, Dubilet reinterprets Hegel’s use of *Entäußerung* [externalization] as one of the first philosophical critiques of the finitude-transcendence couple. The figure of unhappy consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the act of annihilating finitude in *Faith and Knowledge* provide an essential turn away from transcendence in German Idealism. Dubilet associates the valorization of transcendence in thinkers like Kant and Fichte with the moral abasement of the finite subject. In Dubilet’s reading, Kant’s and Fichte’s association of these two—transcendence and moral abasement—is turned into an imperative to discover the conditions of possibility to raise the subject onto the summit

⁶ It is interesting to compare Dubilet’s critique of the correlation between subjectivity and transcendence and Quentin Meillassoux’s recent critique of fideism, or the necessary correlation between being and thinking that Meillassoux points out as a consequence of the theological and religious thinking. See Meillassoux’s *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (2010).

⁷ It appears that Dubilet is here opposing the teleological reasoning Hegel inherited from the Aristotelian tradition and its conception of ethical life. But Dubilet differentiates the immanence contained within teleological reasoning (what Robert Brandom, 1979 aptly calls “the social synthesis of objective spirit”) and the immanence he seeks to establish via the subject of *kenosis*. On the relationship between teleology, immanence, and ethical life in Hegel see Andreja Novakovic’s *Hegel on Second Nature in Ethical Life* (2017).

of unachievable regulative principles. Lastly, Dubilet reads Bataille as providing the most radical inversion of the self-enclosed, autonomous subject. The twentieth century French thinker strongly conveys Dubilet's recovery of the problematic of desubjectivation and its analytics. Through the figures of the wound, servility, and loss, Bataille's writings offer a closer approximation of that which precedes and exceeds the subjectivation and subjection that constitute the subject. It is this problematic of desubjectivation and Dubilet's equation between subjectivation, subjectivity, and subjection that will be the object of my concern in the following section with specific regard to Dubilet's rereading of Hegel's concept of *Entäußerung*.

This short account of Dubilet's provocative book is intended to contextualize my concern with the problematic of desubjectivation and its importance for Dubilet's reconstruction of kenosis. Before proceeding, it is important to disaggregate the different problems to which Dubilet is attempting to respond. While Dubilet claims they are interconnected, distinguishing between three different problems will be important in my critical discussion to follow. On the first level, there is the deceptive bifurcation between transcendence and immanence replicated in the modern disciplinary division between theology and philosophy. Second, there is the problem of ethics, by which I assume Dubilet means the particular actions, practices, orientations, and affects that are forged in the effort to realize an ideal subject.⁸ Lastly, is the problem of subjectivity and the problematic of desubjectivation that Dubilet seeks to resuscitate. If, for Dubilet, subjectivity is always already subjection (Dubilet, 2018: 174), then kenosis and desubjectivation purportedly provide an ethics that seeks to untether itself from this subjection and the forms of transcendence that undergird it. In other words, the problematic of desubjectivation becomes the alternative groundwork on which Dubilet offers his account of ethics outside the boundaries dividing theology and philosophy, transcendence and immanence.

An Immanence “that precedes and exceeds all subjects”: The Problematic of Desubjectivation

Throughout *SES*, the phrase “precedes and exceeds” is used to valorize the matrix of kenosis, immanence, and desubjectivation over and against the constitution of a finite subject and its relationship to transcendence. By claiming that desubjectivation “precedes and exceeds” all subjectivity, Dubilet offers an account of radical immanence that synthesizes the aforementioned bifurcations and divisions. This aspect of Dubilet's book is amplified as Dubilet departs from the theological lexicon of kenosis established by Eckhart to the works of Hegel and Bataille. In this section, my focus will primarily concern Dubilet's reading of Hegel and the questions and problems animated by it. My aim is to demonstrate how a kenotic ethics undermines Dubilet's desire to establish a radical plane of immanence, one which is purged of all kinds of transcendence and subjection. While I appreciate Dubilet's reversal by which immanence precedes and exceeds any form of transcendence, it is difficult to understand how this immanence

⁸ Although Dubilet does not provide a clear definition of what he understands as ethics or ethical life, his discussion on Levinas' and Foucault's ethical paradigms and his passing remarks on thinkers such as Kant and Fichte suggest that this definition suffices.

can be maintained within the problematic of desubjectivation if it remains within a teleological logic, the end of which is a non-subject. This difficulty is exhibited in Dubilet's use of Hegel.

In Dubilet's reading of Hegel, the figure of the unhappy consciousness provides a pivot on which the subject is stretched between a life-negating transcendence—one that turns the subject inward and brews unhappiness—and a life-affirming immanence. The situation that results in the unhappy consciousness is determinately figured by the finite subject who seeks to transcend itself and achieve its own self-sufficiency and freedom. The drive to free oneself by transcending one's own condition is at the same time the drive to renounce one's very essence as finite in order to be otherwise: infinite, free, and rational. Although the drive to freedom is not equivalent to self-renunciation per se, Dubilet demonstrates how “finding one's essence and freedom elsewhere, in opposition to oneself, produces the imperative to free oneself from oneself, an imperative of self-renunciation” (Dubilet, 2018: 107). The unhappiness of this consciousness is a necessary corollary to this self-defeating drive, which is part of a network of dualities and bifurcations prefigured in contradiction and not “dialectically related” (Dubilet, 2018: 108).

Placing Hegel within the problematic of desubjectivation, Dubilet asserts a relationship between the structure of the unhappy consciousness, its symptomatic self-renunciation, and Hegel's concept of *Entäußerung* which appears later in the *Phenomenology*. In this sense, *SES* fills an important gap within Hegelian scholarship, which often overlooks the relationship between the unhappy consciousness and its convalescence in *Entäußerung* (Dubilet, 2018: 114). Read together, the structure of *Entäußerung* and its externalizing mode provides an “immanent critique” of the “conceptual grammars and lived experiences” that give rise to the unhappy consciousness (Dubilet, 2018: 114). Here, Dubilet entertains the oppositions at the center of the unhappy consciousness so as to demonstrate the dialectical relationships hidden by its striving for transcendence.

The concept of *Entäußerung* is an important way to do this given the diverse and divergent ways in which Hegel and Hegelianisms have wielded it in different contexts. On the one hand, *Entäußerung* is associated with the problem of *Entfremdung* or estrangement, a problem that especially arises in the Young Hegelians. (I will turn to this use of *Entäußerung* later.) On the other hand, *Entäußerung* also denotes the incessant externalization of a self that disavows the internalization of the subject in relationship to transcendence and creates an “impersonal immanence that precedes and exceeds all subjects” (Dubilet, 2018: 115). What is essential in this structure is:

the dissolution of the grammar that takes the interiorized subject as an unsurpassable horizon of life. It reverses the process of violent purification inaugurated in the figure of the *Herr* [master], but does so without reinvesting what is thereby divested into an other. (Dubilet, 2018: 115)

According to Dubilet's reading, the Hegelian affirmation of life occurs in the movement of *Entäußerung* by undoing the work of internalization that results in “the violent formation of the subject” (Dubilet, 2018: 117). Against the common reading of *Entäußerung*, Dubilet equates the effects of externalization with the self-emptying subject. *Entäußerung*, then, is not a process of approximation or mediation between

an estranged subject and an emulated image (as in the case of Christ and the ascetic practices of mimesis), where the logic of self-renunciation and sacrifice remains operative. Rather, its immanence frustrates the ability to be appropriated or propertied by an individual subject. The immanence contained within kenotic *Entäußerung*, and Dubilet's valorization of it, awards *Entäußerung* a glimpse of eternity: "*Entäußerung* is what remains at the very end and in excess of every end, such that no end, no telos can finally be figured as either transcendence or enclosure" (Dubilet, 2018: 116).

Earlier, I suggested that we analytically disaggregate Dubilet's argument into three parts in order to understand the stakes that undergird his project: 1) recovering immanence outside the auto-differentiation of philosophy and theology (which in Hegel becomes *Entäußerung*); 2) unearthing an ethics through the reconstruction of kenosis; and 3) the dissolution of the subject in the problematic of desubjectivation. Although Dubilet suggests that these three problematics are interrelated, I want to suggest otherwise. If Hegel's *Entäußerung* is an eternal immanence that cannot be enclosed or appropriated by a subject, then this process of externalization and the other accounts of immanence that Dubilet offers have to be separated from both a kenotic ethics (i.e. self-emptying) and its correlate desubjectivation. If *kenosis* and *desubjectivation* are the names to describe the process of self-emptying that detaches a subject from its subjection, then both processes have to start with the subject and end with a non-subjected individual. The gerund *self-emptying* and the deverbal noun *desubjectivation* require asking: who is being self-emptied and desubjectivized? These terms neither precede nor exceed any subject. On the contrary, they are wedged at the center of subjectivity, in the midst of subjection. As a result, Dubilet appears to be sawing off the branch he is sitting on by conjoining eternal immanence with the teleological process of kenosis and desubjectivation. A teleological logic that moves toward a non-subject cannot encompass the kind of immanence that Dubilet is after. In other words, such a radical immanence, demonstrated in Hegel's *Entäußerung*, cannot be maintained within the problematic of desubjectivation and cannot be accomplished by kenosis.

This is not to suggest the necessity of subjectivity. Rather, in Dubilet's treatment, self-emptying reverts to the kind of transcendence that he critiques. The desired movement from an unhappy consciousness to a (yet unrealized) kenotic subject is structurally futuristic. Like transcendence, the temporality of kenosis is encumbered by "a future that always remains merely a future" (Dubilet, 2018: 174). The desire to be self-emptied, then, coincides with the language of resistance against subjection, to become free of the shackles that "enforce forms of transcendence" that are not presently realized (Dubilet, 2018: 176). The temporality of kenosis, thus, diminishes and restrains the potential for an immanence without recoil.

While Dubilet interprets the immanence internal to *Entäußerung* as a kenotic practice, it may be better understood as a reformulation of the Young Hegelians' understanding of estrangement. Dubilet's reading of the concept of *Entäußerung* as a manifesto for detaching oneself from the violent subjection imposed by transcendence recalls Feuerbach's and Marx's differentiation between *Entäußerung* from *Entfremdung*, as well as their synchronization in the political state, capitalism (in Marx), or Christianity and transcendence (in Dubilet and Feuerbach). Contrary to the title of Dubilet's first chapter on Hegel—"From Estrangement to *Entäußerung*"—Dubilet goes from estrangement to *Entäußerung* and back to estrangement once more.

By severing the relation between the unhappy consciousness and the purported immanence internal to a self-emptying *Entäußerung*, Dubilet operationalizes immanence so as to transcend transcendence. Because both Feuerbach and Marx make no appearance in the book, drawing a connection between Dubilet and the Young Hegelians may seem speculative. However, the resemblances between Dubilet's reading of Hegel and the Young Hegelians' are striking; and these resemblances potentially make the motives of Dubilet's reconstruction of kenosis explicit.

Both Feuerbach and Marx offer an important account of man's estrangement from his natural dispositions that alienates him from his immediate relationship with the material world. As an essential quality of man, *Entäußerung* describes the objectification of man's subjective will into the world, particularly through labor. Outside of the exploitation of labor, Marx situates *Entäußerung* in the unification of man's relationship with nature, the material world. According to Marx, man's subjectivity, his organic body, cannot subsist if it does not form a bond with the natural world, his "inorganic body," which offers him the tools to satisfy his needs (Marx, 1992b: 328). Or, to put it in Dubilet's words, the subject cannot be emptied of its subjection without this immanent, imperceptible relationship between organic and inorganic body.

The problem of transcendence is exemplified in the breakdown between organic and inorganic bodies. According to Marx, the dialectic that relates the organic body (corporeal existence) with the human's inorganic body (the natural world) is interrupted by the forces of the political state (in the early Marx) and capitalism (in the later Marx) precisely because both appropriate man's objectifying labor and sever the bond between them. In the case of the political state, for example, this manifests in the bifurcation of civil society from the state apparatus. Such a bifurcation circumscribes the reproduction of needs and subsistence apart from the functioning of the state, which gives the human subject his membership within the imaginary collective, the citizenry. With regard to labor and the production of capital, Marx explicates in his 1844 manuscripts:

The externalization [*Entäußerung*] of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien. (Marx, 1992b: 324)

When processes of externalization are appropriated by regimes of transcendence this often functions as the condition for one's estrangement from oneself.⁹ Thus, the immanent unity that is valorized by Marx and Dubilet between the organic and inorganic body is exhausted and, in its place, a new unity emerges between *Entäußerung* and *Entfremdung*, externalization and estrangement.

A similar question arises in Marx's analysis of the system of estrangement and Dubilet's analysis of subjection in transcendence: how does man free himself from this appropriating, alienating force? Prior to 1844 and his departure from the Young

⁹ For purposes of clarification, I am referring to state apparatuses, capitalism, and Christianity as "regimes of transcendence."

Hegelians, Marx offers a definitive solution to the problem of alienation: human emancipation (Marx, 1992a). Marx reads the estrangement of man produced by structures such as the political state or capitalism as an unsuccessful form of externalization, one which *mediates* the relationship between the organic body and material subsistence needed from the inorganic body. “General human emancipation,” specifically with regard to the organic body’s relationship to the political state, becomes the true solution to this problem (Marx, 1992a: 237). Like Marx, Dubilet’s account of transcendence characterizes it as a mediating structure that forcefully severs the finite subject from its ethical telos. Although Dubilet suggests that immanence can be operative in the act of externalization, he diminishes this immanent force by basing its operation on the overcoming of transcendent self-negation, as the Young Marx similarly does. In other words, the concept of immanence in Marx and Dubilet is construed in the shadows of transcendence, in which they both strive to defeat its alienating force.

Distinguished from “general human emancipation,” political emancipation divides man into two parts, into the reduction of man to a “member of civil society, the *egoistic, independent individual*” and “the *citizen, the moral person*” (Marx, 1992a: 234; original emphasis). And we can see this theme in Dubilet’s argument, where being in subjection means being “doubly subjected” to one’s egoistic self and to a moral, transcendent order (Dubilet, 2018: 45). In this case, for Marx, that transcendent order is the political state, which distributes its power through the production of a citizenry. But general human emancipation emerges when “real, individual man” is unified against the abstracting “form of political force” (Marx, 1992a: 237) that divides man between civil society and collective existence. This is where Marx and Dubilet are closest. As opposed to the emancipation promised by transcendence (and transcending transcendence), real emancipation cannot be completed without the realization of man as a real self, his species-being [*Gattungswesen*]; and, moreover, one’s species-being, for Marx, can only be accomplished through the reunification between the natural world and man’s corporeal existence. This underlying ontology of man in Marx can be located in implicit ways in Dubilet’s argument. His concern for immanence and its relationship to man’s struggle against transcendence leads Dubilet down the same rabbit hole, a conception of man who must regain his original state, being one with nature. If we are to take the resemblance between Dubilet and Marx seriously, then Dubilet’s critique of transcendence should end with what Herbert Marcuse (a strong proponent of Hegelian Marxism) once called “the Great Refusal”—a final, liberating protest against all political, economic, and social forces that bifurcate man’s two bodies (Marcuse, 2002: 66). The final end of the estranged human being would then be to reconcile with himself, rediscover his relationship with nature, and regain contact with his original state, without being divided and undone by subjection (Foucault, 1997: 282).¹⁰

Rather than dialectically relating emancipation to subjection, Dubilet places real emancipation in opposition to subjection produced by transcendent powers. In putting subjection-transcendence and kenosis-immanence in such opposition, Dubilet undercuts the interrelationship between subjectivity in transcendence and immanence in overcoming transcendence. Dubilet’s static opposition exemplifies a species of

¹⁰ Foucault’s critique of Marxism and analytics of liberation apply here as well. See Foucault’s “The Ethics of Concern as a Practice of Freedom” (1997).

contemplative materialism that Marx had turned away from by 1844. Dubilet makes use of contemplative materialism throughout his book, starting with estrangement, as a mere fact, and providing its opposite—immanence—as remedy (Marx, 1978: 144). By proposing this binary, Dubilet operationalizes a logic of domination that he attributes to transcendence, against which “resistance” and “subversion” (two words that Dubilet often uses favorably) remain the only forms of recourse. In the end, the reconstruction of immanence through a kenotic ethics unintentionally transforms the desire to self-empty into a desire to transcend transcendence. Here, I am not proposing that immanence itself always contains within it a kernel of transcendence, but that the very structure of Dubilet’s argument makes the conversion of immanence into a kind of transcendence inevitable. Is there any immanence in transcending transcendence?

Whither Transcendence? A Concluding Note

My reading of Dubilet focuses on the resemblances between his critical analysis and the analyses found in Young Hegelianism, specifically in the young Marx. We saw that in *SES*, the assumed totality between kenosis, the problematic of desubjectivation, and immanence frustrated Dubilet’s account of radical immanence. Rather, within this framework, Dubilet reestablishes the very subject which he seeks to dispose. As I have shown above, Dubilet’s account of immanence is incoherent within the underlying teleological logic of kenosis and the problematic of desubjectivation, both of which reintroduce and reaffirm transcendence.

In this concluding note I want to touch on two confluences that sustain Dubilet’s argument and may provide an important segue into rethinking immanence: the reduction of subjectivity to subjection and the reduction of the transcendental to transcendence. Both of these confluences constitute the foundation on which he can make claims against subjectivity and transcendence writ large. Certainly, both subjectivity and the transcendental share etymological roots and significant conceptual overlap with subjection and transcendence, respectively. However, it is important to note that their uses in the history of modern philosophy are not always commensurate with subjection and transcendence. In other words, a critique of subjection and transcendence does not necessarily entail a critique of subjectivity and the transcendental. The first reduction (of subjectivity to subjection) recalls a key aspect of Dubilet’s understanding of subjectivity and its relationship to transcendence: “The subject is doubly subjected—to a transcendent, divine other and to itself—becoming the key site in the apparatus of mediation that bind them together externally through obedience, duty, and work” (Dubilet, 2018: 45). While the duality of this subjection is important, what is significant to note is the rhetorical move Dubilet makes to conjoin the subject with subjection. Cryptically citing and affirming Louis Althusser’s thesis of interpellation, Dubilet also participates in his reduction of subjectivity as subjection to a dominating, interpellating power that can hail the subject into subjection. This conflation, I think, contributes to Dubilet’s mistaken partnership between kenosis and immanence.

The second reduction, which relates to the first, is that the transcendental is always already transcendence. While both have intersecting histories, “transcendence” and “the transcendental” have different uses within the history of philosophy and theology. For example, when Kant or Fichte (both of whom Dubilet cites unfavorably) spoke of

“transcendental logic,” “transcendental deduction,” or “transcendental philosophy” I do not think they referred to the transcendent or divine force that Dubilet implicitly equates with the “transcendental.” Of course, this is debatable. Although Dubilet passively uses the concept “transcendental” in his book, his critical reading of Kant’s and Fichte’s ethical thought in relationship to Hegel’s indicate this confusion of terms. Certainly, there are cases in which subjectivity can become subjection and where the transcendental can become transcendence. Here, however, what I am suggesting is that a distinction be made between these pairs of terms in order to rethink a transcendence and subjectivity without subjection, and the logics of resistance or self-emptying that are intended to remedy them. Such a distinction made between subjection and subjectivity and transcendence and the transcendental cannot be reduced to the problem identified and centered in Dubilet’s book—namely, the axiomatic division between philosophy and theology.

Perhaps we must reconsider both transcendence and subjectivity and fill in the ever-growing analytical gap between transcendence and immanence. *SES* is one example of an established trend in the move toward immanence against transcendence and its philosophy. Critiques of transcendence are not unique to the contemporary moment and have occupied key thinkers in the past two decades in their resurgent interest in Spinoza and the heightened importance of Deleuze and his philosophical counterparts (e.g. in the writings of Levi Bryant, Manuel DeLanda, and Elizabeth Grosz). Against foundational concepts of a transcendental philosophy, concepts such as normativity, critique, and form, immanence has emerged as a critical tool to assess global problems, from the ecological crisis to populism and new forms of capital. At a time when contemporary politics is often diagnosed and associated with the malaise of transcendence, the unearthing of immanence offers an alternative analytic to rethink the conditions of the political, ecological, and social catastrophes the world faces. However, an important question remains, one which I cannot (and do not seek to) presently answer: *Wither transcendence?* What is to be done with its histories, concepts, and political import? Such questions are worthy of rigorous and sustained investigation. Here, I can only preliminarily indicate the conceptual steps and boundaries that are necessary for any attempt to rethink the critique of transcendence, and establish an account of immanence that is not tethered to this critique.

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