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THE END OF EMANCIPATION IN THE AGE OF POSTSECULARISM

Among many definitions, the human being is often described as a cultural entity. The experience of each individual is shaped by the era in which they live and by the symbolic frameworks within which that experience is formed—that is, by the culture that (re)produces those frameworks. Subjectivity, in a certain sense, presupposes a relationship with the collective. Culture enables the individual to connect their experiences with those of others. As Derrida emphasizes, the subject defines itself in relation to otherness.

Subjectivity implies inner autonomy, separateness, individuality, and self-awareness. It also entails authenticity. The subject is unique; their experience is unrepeatable. However, it is crucial to note that the subject's experience does not emerge or unfold in a vacuum—experience is necessarily intersubjective. Everything external that is experienced, perceived, evaluated, and internalized shapes the concrete subject.

In the context of constant surveillance, which characterizes the modern era, the content to which the subject relates is increasingly mediated. The subject within the digital environment—daily exposed to digital stimuli—finds itself in a state of unfreedom and conformity, where one-dimensional existence becomes a *modus vivendi*.

Given the characteristics of the contemporary context, marked by the liminality of the digital subject, algopolitics, and digital ghettoization, subjectivity—understood as a space of inner autonomy—is fundamentally challenged. The imperatives of optimization, efficiency, and flexibility transform the role of the human being from the end goal of action into a means, a resource, or a component of economic growth. In this sense, the very idea of emancipation—as a key ideal of secular and Enlightenment traditions—is called into question. Emancipation implies the opposite of such transformation: the liberation of the subject from dogma, ignorance, dependence, and prejudice. Its mission is, in essence, the acquisition, appropriation, conquest, or construction of freedom. In the technocratic-consumerist lexicon, one might say that the end product or desired outcome of emancipation is the autonomous subject—a human being who thinks independently, decides freely, and acts according to an internal logic that is uniquely their own. Education is the tool for achieving such autonomy. Yet in current market conditions, education has been degraded into pseudo-education, or half-education, while secularism is often replaced by its distorted form—pseudo-secularism. The absence of critical thinking, which both formal and informal education should foster, contributes to the reduction of the human being to situationalism—an individuality tasked with adapting to pre-existing circumstances. Reflection is replaced by description, studiousness by narrativity, and depth by superficiality.

The ideologies of transhumanism and posthumanism challenge the foundations of traditional humanist values, including the idea of emancipation. While transhumanism aspires to transcend the human—by enhancing capabilities and optimizing both body and mind—posthumanism interrogates the anthropocentric core of humanism itself. It denies human exceptionalism, the privileged status of the human species over all others. The dethronement of man—once seen as

the pinnacle of evolution in both secular and clerical humanist traditions—has led to a reversal of expectations and a redefinition of humanity’s trajectory. The concept of emancipation is supplanted by the concept of adaptation. The guiding principle is no longer the liberation of the subject but its integration into broader systems of production and reproduction, into new hybrid and virtual modes of existence. The subject is now required to adapt to conditions shaped by mechanisms of governance and control—by inflexible political and economic systems that demand extreme flexibility from the individual. In other words, the ideal of humanism—the self-reliant, critically thinking individual—has been thoroughly betrayed. The human has lost their sense of purpose or existential meaning. And with the loss of meaning comes the loss of direction once provided by meaningful education. The influence of transhumanist and posthumanist narratives—both of which accompany and shape technological development—has destabilized the position of universalist narratives. Some of those narratives once enabled the liberation of billions, gave rise to declarations of human rights, established the rule of law, and created a global economy.

In the postsecular age, the subject is no longer viewed primarily as a locus of autonomous consciousness and will. Rather, the human becomes a data producer, an algorithmically profiled entity, an object of surveillance, modification, optimization, and control. The horizon of the phenomenal has shifted. The boundaries of the body and the very nature of presence—through technologies such as artificial intelligence, neural interfaces, biotechnological engineering, online social networks, and virtual reality—pose new challenges for understanding subjectivity. Despite the pervasive rationalization of society, it is clear that human behavior is increasingly governed by impulsive, spontaneous, and often irrational decisions. In short, we witness countless daily examples of duplicity, opportunism, carelessness, incompetence, violence, and intolerance. It is evident that contemporary society is not ruled by reason or positive values, but by affect, irrationality, and destructiveness.

Postsecularism often presents itself—and seeks to be perceived—as secularism. It may appear to represent a re-clericalization or re-traditionalization of society—a return of ecclesiastical influence and religious dogmatism—but this is only partially true. While postsecularism is indeed dogmatic, its dogma is not religious. Technology, data, and markets have become the new deities. We are confronted with a form of sacralization devoid of religious sanctity. In the context of posthumanism, sacrality is purely eschatological. The human mission is to ensure progress, growth, efficiency, and productivity. In this process, meaning is lost, and with it the direction once offered by education. Emancipation, once the core mission of education, has been supplanted by consumption. In its place, thinking is replaced by the proliferation of opinion. It is exceedingly rare today for individuals—within the postsecular, post-truth, and globally censored context—to generate something authentic from their internalized experience and to develop critical distance from dominant public discourse and officially sanctioned truth. Instead, the subject is configured externally. In other words, the subject has become a rarity. Elias Canetti reminds us that the crowd erases difference. It absorbs the subject, who dissolves into it. Within the mass, the subject can only follow the impulse of the mass. And the mass does not ask—it reacts.

Individualism gives way to digital interactivity. The solitary thinker is replaced by the hyperproductive, self-aggrandizing enthusiasm of those who have never heard of Julien Sorel,

Josef Knecht, or Heinrich Faust. Thought is increasingly deemed irrelevant—unless it is visible, public, and reactive. The overwhelming desire for approval eclipses the pursuit of insight, marking a shift from contemplation to constant stimulation. The abandonment of emancipation is not merely a consequence of the postsecular condition—it is a prerequisite for it. And yet, if we had never known freedom, we might not even know that we had lost anything.