KRITIKE VOLUME SEVEN NUMBER ONE (JUNE 2013) 22-35

Article

On Beatitudes – A Critique of Historical Reason

Saitya Brata Das

Abstract: Can an unconditional happiness for the mortals be based on the plane of historical reason? If the task of world-historical politics of the profane order is none other than happiness itself, this happiness is never the conditio sine qua non, since it is based upon the relative conditions of the historical order which is marked by transiency and insufficiency. Taking Kierkegaard and Plato as our main reference points, this article argues that the singular notion of beatitudes is irreducible to any theodicy of history, and that the arrival of beatitudes demands an eschatological opening of history to the true conditio sine qua non. Beatitudes can only be a gift that marks everything human with an irreducible finitude of being. Nothing of the world-historical politics raises to the arrival of true beatitudes, but only as an eschatological suspension of its law, and abandonment, in the sense that Meister Eckhart speaks of *Gelazenheit*.

Keywords: Beatitudes, Kierkegaard, history, continental philosophy

'Can an eternal happiness be built upon the edifice of historical knowledge?' This question that we raise in this paper is the fundamental question of Johannes Climacus.[1] For the time being, allow me to keep aside the question of the enigmatic relationship between Johannes Climacus and Søren Kierkegaard. Could it have been otherwise than 'enigmatic'- this assuming of not just one but a series of pseudonyms, each meant to conceal and reveal at the same time of that which can only be paradox for us? Paradox, as we know, is a communication in the mode of indirection. The world appears to us paradoxical when it touches its very limit; existence manifests its paradox character when it reaches its extremity, when all that is familiar and harmonious, commensurate with our quotidian living away of our life suddenly appears questionable, strange and even monstrous. Does not all relationship when it touches "the extremity of

[1] See Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330

existence"[2] essentially become a paradox, in the sense that it must conceal in order to reveal, in order to incessantly name the nameless so that speech may not break off? It appears as if the relationship that one embarks at "the extremity of existence" is like the voyage that one undertakes in a perilous sea where one never returns without rendering oneself monstrous. Which eternal happiness does not know the essential "peril of being"[3] where being must risk itself, essentially, only because to exist is to belong to this essential peril – "the peril of being"?

Can eternal happiness be based upon historical reason? First of all this question itself is paradoxical: it points like an index, to what cannot be anticipated as meaning that is hermeneutically arrived within a given horizon of a 'world,' nor does it give us as a communicable content within a familiar context where the 'world' is manifested already. Rather it presents itself to us as riddle or as an essential secret that cannot be deciphered with an already known password. What is a paradox if it does not amount to seeing the invisible and to hear which is inaudible to the ear? That eternal happiness may come to us today, *here and now*: does it not amount to seeing the invisible and hearing the inaudible – which we call by this beautiful and the marvellous word 'promise'? That eternal happiness may come today, a 'today' that is *not yet* , not yet visible to the eye and audible to the ear - such a thought of invisible and inaudible can only be thought on the basis of promise given beforehand, immemorially, *always already*. Paradox is the hinge that opens or closes existence at its extremity to an event of eternity that surprises us because it arrives contra all our anticipation, all our hopes, and all our expectations, an event nevertheless we never cease waiting for, for it alone promises us happiness, for it alone may make, if it were possible, our existence beatific and redeeming. What do we, then, wait for if not that which refuses all our waiting precisely because we cannot wait for it enough? What do we, then, hope for if not that which we cannot hope for it enough, for it never allows itself to be measured by the measurements of our hope? Such a 'thing' called 'beatitude' or 'eternal happiness,' were it to exist and were it to be possible for us, such a 'thing' that we cannot hope because it is not given in our hope, such a 'thing' alone *gives* us our hope , and such a hope for the unhoped-for would alone make our existence beatific and redeeming. What alone and what fundamentally makes our existence an *existence,* in an emphatic sense of the *verbal* and not in the nominative, is a paradox. We are that being that continually orients itself to that where no paths lead, where no passwords help. As a result we are invited to do the impossible, in so far as we exist at all, to see the invisible and to hear the inaudible, to remember the immemorial and to anticipate the un-anticipatable. This is what the Platonic idea of *anamnesis* all about. Philosophy is fundamentally drafted on this paradox of existence, eliciting *astonishment* or *marvel*

[2] *Ibid*., 180.

[3] Jean-Louis Chretien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, trans. by Jeffry Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 22.

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330

from us, enabling us to be surprised by the arrival of that which is even beyond 'being.' Whether we call it 'Good' or by some other name, this 'Good' alone is the object of our *astonishment*. The profound relation between the question of Good and the question of beatitudes lies here. They are like the two rays of the Sun coming from the same source where the mortal cannot reach without being blinded, where one must learn to see the invisible and hear the inaudible.

*

A paradox is always a hinge. The twisting and turning of the hinge is the moment of peril, whose sense is given in the sense of *meta-physics* as such, when one says 'Good *beyond* being.' The sense of peril is given in the transcendence that is constitutive of Good, not as an accident or a property of Good, but as an *esse* of Good *as such*. The Good is an excess of being which means 'to put being at stake,' or 'to put being in peril.' By putting being at stake, or by putting being in peril, the Good gives being its *essence.* The *essence* of being is after all nothing other than the Good itself. This means being can never arrive at its *essence* without putting at stake everything of itself. It must renounce its claim of immanence and self-sufficiency, its sovereignty and autochthony. Now this is the paradox: being is exposed to its *esse* at the very moment of its utter abandonment and highest mortification. *To arrive at its essence which is Good, being must first of all abandon itself.* Being must abandon its ground so that it may *come* to its essence, for the essence of being is this *coming* itself, in the infinitude of the verbal sense as an event and not in the substantial sense as 'essence.' To put at stake everything and everyone is to be *under* the immense question mark over the entirety of the visible realm of the historical, profane order. Everything and everyone must be abandoned, for it is the characteristic of the historical world that it is in 'abandonment.' The early messianic-eschatological Judaic-Christian theology of history calls such characteristic mark of history as 'apostasy' (*Abfall*). History belongs as predicate to the un-predicative freedom that groundlessly opens the whole world of the historical which as such in its entirety must pass away, since it is grounded in the un-groundable and inscrutable freedom. What is freedom if not that which is before any ground at all?[4] Therefore the realm of the historical can never assume the decisiveness of judgment. Instead, it must itself be judged upon the basis of a principle heterogeneous to it. The order of the historical must therefore be abandoned to its transiency, to its dying. Now this dying can never be an act of thought, nor can it be the negation in the sense that Hegel grasped it as 'concept' (*Begriff*). Instead it can only be related to the decision of existence.

[4] Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. by David Ratmoko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 5.

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330

In the works of philosophers such as Schelling and Kierkegaard who draw upon the messianic-eschatological tradition, decision constitutes decisive importance which they make an existential 'category.' Decision alone can be decisive. Only existence can be decisive and on that decisiveness there hangs upon the possibility or impossibility of an eternal happiness, not as an act of will or power of subjectivity, but as *abandonment,* in the sense we spoke above, of all subjective and objective claims to sovereignty. We know from Schelling what this idea of 'decision' (*Entscheidung*) implies, an idea that Kierkegaard may have borrowed from his teacher: 'what-holds- apart-in-holding-together,' the chasm of being. The German word that Schelling uses is more telling. The root verb here *Scheidung* with which the prefix *Ent-* is joined, implies divorce or separation, cleft or cision. All who have followed Schelling in this regard have borrowed this most fascinating and most beautiful word for this 'chasm of being,' whether it is Kierkegaard, Heidegger or Rosenzweig. They call it *Existenz* in a very singular sense: not the identity of being and thought, an idea from Parmenides that has become the dominant task of western philosophy, but that which *spaces* apart being from thought, rendering existence itself as excessive or ecstatic, unpresentable in thought. Jacob Böhme calls *Ungrund* that which groundlessly exposes existence to its ground that can never itself be grounded. Schelling, inspired by Böhme, names this unnameable as *Unvordenkliche* - what exists before the thinkability in the concept that the sets apart the world from its foundation so that the world remains ecstatically open to its foundation without foundation.

Now *Existenz* is that what-is-torn-apart-while-held-together. It marks the *mediation* (of Hegel's *Vermittlung*) or generation (of the Neo-Platonic 'emanation') between infinity and finitude, eternity and time, divinity and mortality impossible. An irreducible chasm separates them, while attracting them to the monstrosity of copulation. It is the Heraclitean agony of the *agon* that marks the *logos* of mortality, and Hölderlinian eccentricity that in its monstrosity holds together while tearing apart time and eternity, the mortal and the divine, melancholy and joy. Only in this monstrosity may beatitudes manifest. The idea of beatitudes , or 'eternal happiness' as Kierkegaard calls it, is thus essentially a demonic or monstrous idea; or it is rather an idea of monstrosity or demonic par excellence, for it is only on the basis of this monstrosity may the world of the historical be redeemed. It is towards this point that I am attempting to move here, tying up so many diverse threads together. This monstrosity on the basis of which the whole transiency of the historical order can be offered an 'eternal happiness' or 'beatitudes,' Kierkegaard calls *Augenblick,* which is an excessive outburst of the moment when eternity arrives to us in the lightning flash of the advent. It is the moment when the whole of the historical order will arrive to its *essence* which is none other than its utter transiency. As Good manifests itself when being abandons itself, so *Augenblick* is the essence of manifestation because in it the whole realm of the historical abandons itself and thereby comes to

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330

its essence. In the abandonment of being, the Good *gives* itself to us as gift which, as we will see soon, is none but the very gift of being itself.

To speak phenomenologically, the moment is the *donation* of phenomenality as such in the sense that it *gives* to existence its *possibility* at all, given as the fecundity of temporality. Only existence is a possibility, the possibility that at any moment of existence may there arrive eternity. That eternity may manifest itself today, wounding existence at the extremity of its decision, is a wager not guaranteed by finality or even a result of a calculated programme given in our knowledge. To *wage* is a putting at stake of everything at once without reserve and without finality, without hope and without anticipation, without projection and without protention for that, paradoxically, which alone opens up the event of future for us. It is as if we must hope for that which does not allow itself to be hoped, i.e., the unhoped-for, which nevertheless may arrive from the extremity of future contra all calculations and all hopes. That eternity may arrive at each *hic et nunc*, that today there may erupt in the midst of my existence something like eternity for which I cannot wait, and yet which alone is worthy of waiting: this hope for the unhoped-for is a deformalization of every series of numbers that I constitute, of every measurement that I permit myself with the time that is at my disposal and of every concept that philosophy permits me to attain. *If existence were only the hopeful for the hoped-for, then there will never be any wager, and eternity would never arrive to the mortal, and then existence, merely caught up in relative happiness bound to despair, like the relative regimes of earthly sovereignties destined for its transience, would never have beatitudes. Beatitude is possible only if the possibility is given to us to hope for what we cannot hope for –to hope for the unhoped.*[5] Beatitudes would then mean that which while wounding us with the irremissible mark of finitude, nevertheless open us to the arrival of eternity that can never be hoped enough, and that must *always already* be hoped for, precisely because it is the only thing worthy of hope, the hope for the unhoped-for. Beatitude cannot be hoped for, for it is contradictory to all that can be hoped for. It is foreign to all that can be anticipated, programmed or projected by means of our power and of our capacity, of our law and justice, of our history and politics; and yet on the other hand, at the same time, beatitude is that which alone constitutes, in the most eminent degree in any qualitative sense, what we must hope for and long for at any time when existence is granted to us, were such a thing be possible for us, if such a thing be granted to us. Since what is given to us in the eminent sense of an essential gift must first of all be *let to* arrive, we can relate to such a gift only as renunciation or mortification of all claims to sovereignty, or all sovereign claims on the basis of the worldly power in the profane order. This is what Meister Eckhart calls *Gelazenheit* which Heidegger adopts in his own mode of thinking *Ereignis,* the event of appropriation. "The event of appropriation" is paradoxical in the sense that

[5] Chretien , *The Unforgettable.*

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330

Ereignis dispropriates us so that we belong to the event and not that the event belongs to us. *Gelassenheit* means *to let* appear that arrival without mastery, without triumphalism and without appropriation so that there may remain what can never be presented in our thought and which infinitely exceeds all our acts of grounding in the world. If what infinitely exceeds being is Good, then Good may not wholly belong to the domain of the nameability. If there remains the un-nameability in the gift and unthinkability in the Good, then this reserve belongs to the essential character of the gift itself that while giving us abandons us, leaving us bereft of the ability to name it.

Thus nothing in the historical realm of self-legitimacy can attain beatitudes, because it may arrive only as an unconditional gift, since the gift introduces into the very being of our being an irreducible chasm, opening the foundation of our being to Good. The gift tears us apart from ourselves while giving us this gift of gift - being itself. The tearing is the characteristic of gift par excellence, thought radically. There is no gift without abyss, for all love is received with our mouth wide open, as the Greek word *Agape* implies. Now *Agape* not merely means love, it simultaneously means 'mouth opening wide,' the hiatus or the chasm or abyss. What, then, love gives – while giving itself - is this opening wide of our mouth with which word flourishes, bursts forth, and nourishes itself. The early Christian theologians, even St. Paul in his *Letter to the Corinthian* uses the word *Agape* (which appears first in Homer's *Odysseus*) to name the Word of God which is Christ himself. In St. Paul, such an *Agape* is shown to be qualitatively different from *Eros.* What then the gift gives, before anything given, is this tearing itself. Our being must first of all be torn apart while holding us in this tear, exposing us to a fundamental cleft or separation. Only then may there arrive 'being,' or better, *Existenz* itself. *Existenz* is in that sense a fundamental reception of the gift, the gift with which peril unceasingly calls us towards itself, as into the void. One could even say that what the gift gives is first of all this voiding itself. The gift voids away and makes everything new again; it transfigures us and redeems us by giving us the void, by making us *atopic*, without "habitation and a name." Beatitude is thus not of this world, the world that harmoniously coincides with itself or history that is contemporaneous with itself, for such a world is none but a *topia* that is marked by "a habitation and a name." *A-gape* on the other hand makes the world strange and *atopic.* It opens wide the mouth of the world, and sets afire the prisons of the world so that the migratory birds, the words, can fly again. The lightning flash of the *Augenblick* that sets fire to the prisons of the world is the moment of de-cision that alone makes existence an *Existenz* , an event of being. Far from being opposed to event, being would be none other than this event itself, the phosphorescence of an arrival whose radiance will show one day the paths that the migratory birds are to travel.

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330

*

> You have often heard me mention in many circumstances, namely, that something divine and supernatural (*daimonion*) happens to me – precisely the phenomenon that Meletus makes a joke of in the indictment. This sign, which comes as a kind of voice, first begun for me when I was a child; whenever it comes, it always forbids me to do whatever I am about to do, but never makes any positive commands.[6]

> 'What then is Love?'? I asked. 'Is he mortal?' 'Of course not.' 'Well – then *what*?' 'As in the former instance, he is neither mortal nor immortal, but a mean between the two.' 'What is he, Diotima?' 'He is a *daimon.*'[7]

There is always something demonic about the *eudaemons,* those angelic guardians that without our notice watch us, like expert night watchmen. The entirety of existence of Socrates is this *paideia*: a form of praxis as *asketes*, won through death, death being the most rigorous form of *asketes* or *aescesis*, as Socrates so movingly evokes in his *Phaedo*. Won through death, one thereby learns to *become* demonic. *Beatitudo* or happiness is essentially demonic. To become *demonic* or to learn to become *demonic* is the purpose of true philosophy. One must stake everything there; one must take 'the step of death.' This is the idea of Montaigne's "learning how to die" which is not a mastery of death, but an *aescesis* through which one learns to be abandoned by the world. The Socratic existence is this incessant, through daily *asketes*, attempt of this step, of this leap into the *demonic,* for the question of eternal happiness is the interest of *Existenz* itself. No doubt for Johannes Climacus or for Søren Kierkegaard, apart from Christ only Socrates is the emblem or paradigm of the passion of the infinite par excellence. This paradigmatic consists of Socrates possessing un-imitable and unrecognizable features and bearing strange or monstrous gestures to the point of ugliness. The singularity of Socrates for Kierkegaard lies in his continuous ability to maintain through the strangeness of his existence "the wound of the negative"[8] , that "the thorn in the flesh"[9] without compromise, without giving way to aestheticism or to an ideal of familial beauty. Lacking "a local habitation and a name," the existential world of Socrates therefore

[6] Plato, *Apology*, in *Selected Dialogues of Plato*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 304.

[7] Plato, *Symposium,* in *Selected Dialogues of Plato*, 247-8.

[8] Kierkegaard, *Concluding*, 72.

[9] Letter to the Corinthians 12:7-10.

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330

appears to us as unfamiliar and incomprehensible. "Which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not"[10].

The daimon of Socrates[11] is the paradoxical existence. Being neither mortal nor divine, it *spaces* them apart by holding them together. The daimon thus marks the qualitative distinction between the divine and the mortal, between eternity and time, which being qualitative, is not amenable to the speculations of historical reason, to the calculation of the worldly powers of the profane order that can only be based upon approximation at best, at least when it is the question of eternal happiness. How can, then, eternal happiness be based upon the edifice of historical reason? Johannes Climacus' infinite interrogation is this infinite discernment of that which is a qualitative distinction and not a quantitative approximation; it is not a relative and attenuated variations of historical knowledge. All analogy between eternity and time that appeals to historical knowledge and to its pure positing power of law must be suspended here. Socrates' *daimon* never gives positive commands in the form of *thetic* but merely enables the suspension of law, for the true positive must be given beforehand in the very gift of being as sublime donation, before any opposition between positive and negative. *The demonic beatitude is the suspension of law, for it opens us to "Good beyond the being."* It is the renunciation of the analogy between the divine and the mortal, the analogy that is the source of all sovereign claims of the mortals. Instead the promise of beatitudes incessantly calls us to *Gelassenheit* – abandonment and 'to let be' so that *beatitudo* arrives in an unconditional arrival. "To learn to die" in Socratic sense is learning to abandon or suspend the work of law, and to contemplate through philosophical dialectic that "Good beyond being" that arrives to us immemorially and which must be renewed each time anew in our life, unceasingly, as an infinite task of life. We must ceaselessly discover the Good in us that is given to us immemorially which is the idea of infinitude in us, through learning to be abandoned by the world, and learning to abandon the world of the world-historical politics.

*

Marked by the proper name, existence is singular, each time anew and each time – not yet finished, not yet completed. Ernst Bloch, in a Schellingian messianic manner, calls this 'not yet' (*Noch Nicht*) as the fundamental character of existence itself. Singularity would not then be an accidental feature of existence as one

[10] Jeremiah 5.21.

[11] I am very grateful to an anonymous reviewer who brought to my attention the complicated place of daimon in Socrates' life as philosopher. Here I would like to underline that the phrase here 'daimon of Socrates' should be taken in the least possessive and less exclusive sense than it may appear to be, and that it should be understood – here I agree with the reviewer – only in the sense of an analogy that Socrates is 'likened to be Eros.'

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330

property among others, but the very essential *how* of existence. *Existenz exists primordially and essentially as Noch Nicht* . Thus when Søren Kierkegaard writes 'particular' as the *how* of existence, it is not meant 'particular' in the recognizable sense of the term. First of all, it does not belong to the genus or species; it is not the beginning of a series of numbers; it does not belong to the grammatical domain of both articles definite and indefinite, as it slides away from all indications and each predicates. It is *singular* in the true sense of the term: it occurs only once, and once only. The thought of the singular is thus a taulogical thought. Inserting it into the consolation of recollection of its eternal origin is a speculative compromise where *Existenz* is at once annulled. *Existenz* whose singularity is waged each time on the basis of its mortality is essentially and irreducibly finite. Now it is this mortality which is the indigestible remnant of system, of each system, whatever name we give it, and under whatever denomination it appears. As Jacob Böhme speaks of nature - it is what is expelled or vomited out, as it is also from which one flees it for the sake of self-preservation in great anxiety, though it alone can consummate being and give being the possibility of its essence, that is, the Good itself.

Such a 'thing' called mortality appears to us only as suspension of law, for all concept, in the sense of *Begriff* (which means 'grasping' or 'seizing'), is positing, and all law is a self-positing immanence. Both Schelling and Kierkegaard's critiques of Hegel is fundamentally about this problem: how can the Good be thought on the basis of law?

Thus the universality of the world-historical progression, given in the concept of the concept itself, is the order of false universality. It posits only the visible order of the historical that must pass away, since it essentially is transient. The visible order of the historical cannot attain, on the basis of its self-consuming immanence, true universality, for it is marked by a non-autochthony and non-autarchy, by its non-sufficiency and by its incapacity to attain redemption by means of its own force. It can only be at best the realm of *apostasy*. One historical order passes away, giving its way to another, often in the most violent manner, following the same law of sovereignty and same logic of legitimization. Even though one historical order is like a step in a ladder that leads you each time higher than the one before, still the distinction between these steps are quantitative one. One thus never reaches the moment where eternity erupts 'today' and 'now,' for time thought qualitatively, as Rosenzweig beautifully evokes in his *Star of Redemption*, does not ripen like the fruits in the tree nor does it grow like steps of a ladder. The march of world-historical politics, as Hegel dramatizes in such an unforgettable manner in his *Phenomenology of Spirit,* is a march of history that ripens like a fruit, and when the whole of history makes the world like a wall, painted grey on grey, history itself becomes a museum of petrified images. The true universality, on the other hand, must speak in the name of an absolute that refuses the embodiment of an eternal happiness in any of its historical, relative, epochal manifestation, because it is based

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330

upon the qualitative distinction between eternity and time, the divine and the mortal. Thus it does not permit in any epochal, historical order the embodiment of the divine in the human terms. Even if one historical order passes away giving way to the better regime, since the distinction between these historical orders is merely quantitative one,[12] the world remains an *Agape*. It remains a chasm with its mouth wide open, a gap that does not allow the circle of history to reach the extremity of its origin and end at 'one' instant, at 'one' point. How can, then, existence which itself is this *Agape* find its eternal happiness in the order of the historical? Any attempt to bring this fundamental *Agape* to a closure will bring nothing worse than disaster. All theodicy of history attempts to realize on the basis of its power of law the divine on the immanent plane of history, thereby forgetting or closing off the *Agape* that first of all gives the world for us. In a very beautiful text, Jacob Taubes brings this point to a succinct summary: "If the messianic idea in Judaism is not interiorized, it can turn 'the landscape of redemption' into a blazing apocalypse. If one is to enter irrevocably into history, it is imperative to beware of the illusion that redemption happens on the stage of history. For every attempt to bring about redemption on the level of history without a transfiguration of the messianic idea leads straight into abyss."[13]

What is true universal other than the idea of redemption? The idea of redemption, which cannot be reduced either to the concept of an aesthetic totality or a world-historical system, is truly bound up with the event of beatitude. In the second theses of his *Philosophy of History*, Walter Benjamin evokes such an idea of happiness which is not the idea of happiness that human beings pursue in the profane order of the historical in the name of worldly powers. It rather arrives when there passes away what must pass away. We can say with Benjamin that the arrival of beatitude marks the suspension of law. In one of his early texts Benjamin names the method of such a politics as 'nihilism.'[14] Such eschatological politics of world nihilism cannot be the aim or *telos* of the world-historical politics on the stage of history. Absolved from the mythic order of law that constitutes the tragic, it is even free from fate. Only then, fateless and free from the order of the determinate movement of the dialectical historical, redemption assumes the eternity of happiness. Being released from fate, the arrival of beatitudes is the true event, because all true events break out of fate, out of the immanence of destiny. This is actually, thought profoundly and in an un-usual sense, what the Platonic idea of the "Good beyond being" evokes, an idea of Idea itself that is true universal in that it embodies itself only as singular and never as mere particular instantiation of genus

[12] See Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

[13] Jacob Taubes, *From Cult to Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 9.

[14] Walter Benjamin, "The Theologico-Political Fragment," in *Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1986), 313.

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330

or species. The singular is by definition an *Agape*. It is through the *Agape* that marks our finitude, existence is exposed to the universal which is not a homogenous container filled with non-differential content but an incommensurable assemblage or constellation of singulars. Is not it what the Platonic notion of Idea all about where the true universal is thought in relation to the singularity of ideas which are always finite in number and yet each overflowing to the Infinite, gaped wide open, like the mouth of the cave of the world through which the rays of the Sun will one day arrive?

*

Beatitude is the advent of the infinite in us. The possibility of such an arrival never ceases wounding us the moment the passion for beatitude takes birth in our soul. For this beatitude to be received, our existence itself must be an *Agape*, a tearing distance that enables nearness to be near to us. *Agape* is nothing else but the birth of our soul; it is the structural opening of existence as such. Being marked by this irremissible wound, the mortals learn to partake the infinite, as gift and never as possession. The passion of philosophy or the idea of philosophy, as conceived by Socrates, is none other than this passion for beatitude. It is this passion that is the origin of philosophy, the passion that moves philosophy by touching the extremity of our existence. That there should be philosophy amidst the mortal human beings is not fortuitous affair, as Heidegger keeps reminding us. It bears the infinite passion of Infinite, in an eminent sense, which is always to be understood existentially and not categorically. St. Augustine therefore makes beatitudes the highest task of existence , inseparable from the idea of being itself as gift, coming from an infinite source forever inexhaustible in our naming of it and unfathomable in our thinking of it, because in order for that to be possible, the naming itself must *already* be a donation. For Spinoza, beatitude is attained by the highest mode of knowledge which, in distinction from all other kinds of knowledge, is love. It is not that knowledge which is the cognition of the world nor is it cognizing of God as he is present, but an "intellectual love" of the One who is infinite in the most eminent sense. This "intellectual love" is always attended by beatitudes, for we cannot love God other than "under the form of eternity."[15] How can the form of eternity be loved other than as the love of life itself? Philosophy for Spinoza turns out to be the contemplation of life, precisely because it contemplates beatitude which is the true consummation of life, life as pure affirmation, not yet wounded by death. The word *Agape* in Greek implies simultaneously love and death, love that is ceaselessly in strife with death, and must be won through death, "for love –as the saying goes - is as strong death"[16]. "A free man," writes Spinoza, "thinks nothing less than of death;

[15] Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics*, trans. by R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1955), 263.
[16] Song of Solomon 8:6

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330

and his wisdom is a meditation not of death, but of life"[17]. Johannes Climacus' question (Can the eternal happiness be based upon the historical?), on the other hand, is oriented towards an affirmation that must pass through *Agape*, for beatitude is an interest (which is *inter-esse*: in-between, a hiatus or gap) for that being alone who is irreducibly finite, and whose existence constantly presupposes the qualitative distinction between eternity and time, the divine and the mortal, the unconditional and the conditioned. As a result she must continuously traverse the abyss, not as an immanent transition forming a continuum, but by a qualitative leap on the part of the being whose very being is a chasm and an essential peril. Likewise the order of history itself is nothing like an immanent generation but an order of finitude that must groundlessly be kept open, for it has groundlessly been opened in an immemorial origin that will never have any predicate in any historical remembrance. As a result the historical order, because of its non-autochthony and apostasy, must always appeal to an arrival heterogeneous to it for its consummation that must disrupt the whole order of the historical, in the name of beatitude that can never be realized in the profane order of the historical. The philosopher, then, must contemplate death, not in order to petrify existence and thinking with lifelessness, but precisely to seize and to be seized by that moment through which eternity traverses the entirety of our existence through the *agape* of death. Only then eternity may arrive today, and only then the mortal can attain blessedness, not on the basis of an aesthetization of totality, or on the basis of the tragic beauty of the world-historical atonement, but only on the basis of impossibility. This impossibility is a paradox that eternity may arrive precisely when all hopes for the hoped for have been finished and are abandoned. Beatitude is an eschatological idea, in the sense that it seeks its way out of any attempts at the world-historical totalization.

*

Can the eternal happiness be based upon the edifice of the historical? Johannes Climacus' question of happiness is not at all the happiness of one self-absorbed, solipsistic consciousness shut within oneself and thus separating oneself from the universal. What Johannes Climacus is fundamentally concerned with is this promise of eternal happiness that is tied up with redemption that is true universal, and which therefore must continually put into question the false universality of world-historical politics. Thought negatively, Kierkegaard's eschatology is the critique of the world, and critique of religion itself, religion that institutionalizes in human terms (like any other human institutions like the State, etc.) of what exceeds the power, the capacity or mastery of the 'human,' what can appear only on the basis of the paradox or a monstrosity, and what can arrive to us

[17] Spinoza, *The Ethics*, 23.

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330

only in the unconditionality of the gift. Such a gift, while arriving to us, never ceases delivering us to the peril of our being. Existence is only *always already* singular, not in the sense of having a proper name shut within the interiority of inner consciousness, but rather precisely the opposite. For Kierkegaard, existence is the name of bursting out of immanence so that reception of the gift of beatitude may be possible. It is the spacing of an *Agape* which differentiates the one from oneself so that she can be given the gift of her being. Only such singularity which is the very mode of existence as such, the *how* of existence, can it fundamentally expose itself to true universality, beyond the universal logic of the historical reason. What Johannes Climacus calls 'subjectivity' or 'inwardness' is to be taken in the language of the parable in that it belongs to the "indirect communication." All profound relationship – like the relation to God for Climacus –that is taken at the "extremity of existence" is essentially a parabolic or paradoxical relationship. *As life must be won through death, so eternity must be seized momentarily through the wound of time.* Beatitude is paradoxical: it welcomes the eternity in time which is never and never reached by the movement of the historical time of the world-historical politics. As decision is always taken at "the extremity of existence," so the arrival of eternity happens at the extremity of time which is never to be thought as the end of a scale through progressive growing of time, but as an indeterminate eruption of something wholly heterogeneous at any moment of presence. Nothing is guaranteed here however. This is implied in the notion of faith which Søren Kierkegaard elaborates. What is faith if the object of faith is guaranteed by knowledge or by any calculable project and programme, to see what the eyes can see and to hear what the ears can hear? If beatitude is possible for the mortals, then it must be possible at *any* moment, and if such moment were to happen, it must break out of historical time of world-historical politics. Singularity is for Kierkegaard always this eschatological idea, an *Eschatos* that must be thought without finality and without 'end' in the movement of the world-historical progression. The singularity of the existentiality of *Existenz* lies, in distinction from the pretension of a speculative thinker like Hegel, in that existence itself is thought to be eschatological in essence, in the sense that the possibility of its 'any time' of eternity is such a possibility that even impossible must be possible. Beatitude is the partaking of the infinite, not as one possibility among other possibilities in the world, but as the possibility of an *atopic* that keeps the mouth of the world wide open. Never a capacity or a possession, beatitude is the reception of an unconditional gift through which the mortal partakes in the divine excess. But this reception demands that the mortals must renounce all forms of triumphalism and all egoistic claims to any form of sovereignty in the profane order. The excess of beatitude over each and every worldly claim to sovereignty on the basis of law, this excess also marks the very destitute character of us the mortal ones. More and more we learn to be destitute in the world, more and more we partake in an excess that

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330

comes to us as an unconditional gift, never as surety or as return profit of a judicious investment, but in an unconditional manner in the true sense of the term. It is a surprise.

Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

References

Barth, Karl, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

Benjamin, Walter, "The Theologico-Political Fragment," in *Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1986).

Chretien, Jean-Louis, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, trans. by Jeffry Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

Kierkegaard, Søren, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Plato, *Apology*, in *Selected Dialogues of Plato*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (New York: Modern Library, 2000).

_____, *Symposium,* in *Selected Dialogues of Plato*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (New York: Modern Library, 2000).

Spinoza, Baruch, *The Ethics*, trans. by R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1955).

Taubes, Jacob, *From Cult to Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

_____, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. by David Ratmoko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_12/das_june2013.pdf
ISSN 1908-7330