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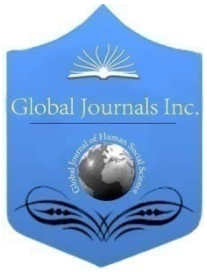

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# Becoming of Being as the Ground to Technology and Its Relationship to Humanity's Subjectification

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*Keywords:* *becoming, change, technology, subjectification.*

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# Becoming of Being as the Ground to Technology and Its Relationship to Humanity's Subjectification

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## I. Introduction

Metaphysics as established by the Presocratics often begins with a discussion of being that does not change, which may be described as a first cause. Since a first cause is considered to be immutable and eternal, it is thought to be permanent or changeless. And the description of changelessness distinguishes a first cause from the ordinary objects of experience that we encounter on a daily basis. Although regarded by many philosophers to be fundamental for understanding reality, some philosophers (notably, Nietzsche, Bergson, Whitehead, and Heidegger) have rejected the concept of changelessness to various degrees; but even these rejections constitute metaphysical statements on the nature of being in their own right. Since one can also speak of a presumed necessary or autonomous being which is another description of a first cause, everything else would be rendered unnecessary and conditioned on this being for its existence. Apart from controversies that relate to a first cause and apart from the Parmenidean position of an eternal being neither coming into being nor perishing, any conditions that relate to an existent, even the most insignificant, would help to verify its existence.

Within the context of being resides the notion of being's becoming, which is a metaphysical way of describing change, and it is this notion that impacts the world we encounter on a daily basis. Since the idea of becoming is more tangible than the notion of being's changelessness, it relates to a reality we can observe and measure. Becoming is not an abstraction, but a concrete basic to reality, and it is within the description of becoming where being is important to us. It signifies a coming to being. Therefore, the being all of us might comprehend, that is, if we allow ourselves to think metaphysically, is the being of everydayness, which is the being that changes, the being that is subject to our choices in a world that is never at rest.[1] Whether we view reality profoundly or superficially, we are all capable of this rudimentary understanding of being because we are all immersed within it.

The becoming of being may be understood as a type of process to which being is subject. Although process has a wide range of applications comprising biology, engineering, statistics, computer science, law, and music, for our analysis it denotes a series of actions directed to some result, or a method for doing something, both of which impact the essence of human reality at its most basic level. Derived from the Latin *processus* from the infinitive *procedere* (to go forth), process anticipates either an end to which something is directed or the means by which it is achieved. Although there might be much discussion philosophically about change as a consistent process, we are interested in the relationship between change and becoming. We should keep in mind that process may be used as a comparison to becoming, but it is not its equivalent. Becoming is indicative of an action that is dynamic. It signifies more than a series of events, each superseded by another, laid out from beginning to end. Although processes and events are not equivalent, events usually refer to individual occurrences, but becoming relates to a metaphysical engagement for the fulfillment of its being.[2] Becoming may be seen as the motivating mechanism for its fulfillment, that is, it is the means by which the will of each individual is directed to its intended tasks, regardless of their consequences.[3] Nevertheless, becoming cannot be undone because it is irreversible, that is, being that is becoming may be changed, and then changed again, but it cannot be erased from the instance of its presence that it held at one time.



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It may be true to conclude that becoming includes some type of process for human life itself, but it is not true to conclude the opposite, which is that process naturally includes becoming. Although we might emphasize a difference of degree rather than of kind when discussing these terms, the similarity between becoming and process should be utilized only as a comparison. The use of process in a discussion of becoming is helpful in so far that change, but not necessarily improvement or advancement, is associated with a procedure or method characteristic of this type of being. Through the act of becoming, change is akin to the struggles and challenges affiliated with choice, anxiety, and doubt.

There is an additional distinction that needs to be emphasized when discussing becoming, especially when referring to means and ends, but process contains a stronger anticipation of ends when compared with means than does becoming. The process of a chemical reaction, or the growth of a plant, or the accumulation of wealth are all directed to some end: they are respectively, the transformation that results from a chemical reaction, the maturity of a plant, or the enjoyment of wealth. On the contrary, becoming emphasizes means over ends. Becoming is posited not so much with results, but with engagement because it concerns actions that elicit manifestations of being as a way by which it presents itself. This is to say that becoming is a way or manner in which being is revealed, since becoming as the means is directed to being as the end.

But becoming should not be confused with either development or evolution, both terms of which are more general than the more specific term: becoming. Although similar to some extent, becoming does not develop or evolve from one stage to another. The difference between becoming and development and/or evolution concerns the difference between a totality and the potential phases of it. Becoming denotes an entity that already has a presence, but not in reference to the completion of choices taken or the amount of time it may need. It is affected less by choice and time, and more as a consequence of them. Becoming does not develop or evolve because it already contains a potency or inherent capacity for improvement definable as its purpose that is different from the external factors that may or may not lead to development and/or evolution, culturally or biologically derived.[4] It emphasizes potentiality on the way to actuality. Regardless of the type of change associated with becoming, it always relates to and is directed toward the innate quality of its being. Its principal concern is action, and through action, it attains an essence.

It should be apparent that the most significant feature of becoming concerns the concept of change that challenges the ancient Greek notion of changelessness. Since the becoming of being must change, it cannot be explained by a constant. Change entails a transformation that does not so much influence the essence or basis of what changes, but the way in which it is played out in the world. It may add or subtract to an essence, but it does not remove the ground of its being. As it has been said many times before, if the nature of being were not innate to itself, then each of us would be a different person from the one we acquired at birth. If this phenomenon were not true, then none of us would be responsible for anything, since we could come up with the argument that since some of the cells of our bodies have been replaced with new ones over time, we are different from whom we were the day before. The becoming of being does not pertain to the passing of time from one day to the next, nor to any variant of time at all, but with a transformation internal within the nature of being.[5] It profits from the awareness of each person being present within one's own presence.

Although we believe in our own continuity, we also know that our materiality is constantly changing through growth, disease, or decay. Apart from a denial of self-transcendence, there must be something innate within our being that forms the basis of it. The transformation that we undergo by means of change does not replace the nature of our being, but influences how our being is manifested in the world. Even when cajoled, induced, or compelled, we are the agents of this transformation. As already noted, the becoming of being is not posited with its results, but with the engagement of them that reveals the way or manner by which it is presented to the world.

## II. Discussion

As we said above, the becoming of being is a metaphysical description of the idea of change. And because of change, the becoming of being signifies an underlying imperfection that is evident not only within the world, of which we are its creators, but also within ourselves. As a characteristic of becoming, change relates to everything we do. In fact, history may be described as a record of change created by factors predominantly motivated by human choice that indicates how human behavior is a reflection of its being. It indicates that change is connected to choice just as choice is connected to change. Inclusively, change is a widely ranging concept that entails certainty and doubt, maturity and decay, hope and despair, achievement and failure, love and hate, that is, conflicting circumstances that define human existence which itself is always in the act of becoming. And existence as illustrated by history is encased in its own imperfections that are denuded of structure unless we make it, devoid of purpose unless we provide it, and absent of logic unless we use reason with it. It is characterized by an openness, not only within ourselves, but also within every conceivable undertaking because

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human existence and the reality based on it are built on the meaning we give it. Before the being of any one of us can be, there first must be becoming. For us at least, *esse in potentia* must preexist *esse in actio*. When expressed practically, we may say that we strive to become the change we wish to be, since we contain within ourselves the being we wish to become. As a result, change is determined by an understanding of who we were because the success or failure that we experience reinforces the necessity of change that then projects itself into more becoming.[6]

Despite the influence that history has on the present (often misconstrued as an equivalent of the past, rather than its interpretation), we should be aware that the world is not only characterized by becoming by way of emotions, but also by things, which enable us to reify the world.[7] In many ways, things predominate over emotions. We feel closer to them because they confer an affinity to what we really hold dear. And because we perceive that the world is largely made up of things, usually equated with objects and the apparatus that accompanies them, we easily assimilate our being with them. If our being seems to be consumed by things that threaten a practical or logical assessment of reality, then the material world becomes the reality we wish to pursue. More than Platonism and its distortion of reality, the world of things is capable of creating a greater misrepresentation.[8]

And what is now associated with things, in addition to the underlying organizations and methods affiliated with their use, is technology, which is the manner how things are made and used, augmented by a culture dominated by a technological artifice. If it is true to say that technology has the potential to oppress humanity, then it is also true to say that it has become the means for humanity's obsessive subjectification.[9] The issue is not whether humans have been completely objectified, but rather how things have become the only reality, or at least the only reality worth pursuing that facilitates how humanity reveals its being. Since reality means the totality of being, it is composed not only of the inner domain of the mind as well as the body and the behavior associated with it (a person), but also of everything else, including other people's minds and bodies. It is upon all of the above that the presence of technology is revealed, reaching out to individuals, societies, and nature. And this observation is true even apart from a dualistic interpretation that infers that mental states are caused by physical states or events. Although people may be considered to be material objects made up of flesh and blood with or without any marginalization by technology, it is more important to consider how the process of objectification, both as a mode and manifestation of its being, has an influence on humanity's subjectification. And the latter would have little or no meaning if technology was either weakened or absent.[10]

Since we are free within the perimeters of the choices we make, we determine what the world will be, and by the world we mean the social context applicable within a cultural structure fashioned by free choice.[11] The world is a general description for the social and cultural conditions humanity creates, even if the world is shaped by contradictions molded by beliefs that are constantly changing. Although some people reject the world when it presents itself, most people accept the world they confront, despite its shortcomings and prejudices. And the world we are now most comfortable with is dominated by artificialities, which like culture itself are configurations of reality. An honest assessment of the world reveals much artificiality, and perhaps the greatest artificiality is society itself because it is the effect of a method that organizes the structure of interpersonal relationships. Since all methods are technologies, we should acknowledge that any technology is an imposition upon reality.

As we said above, the dominant motivator of the world today is technology, which through its embodiment of objectivity promotes an obsessive subjectivity. Although originally used as an aid to well-being, technology has been transformed into the meaning of being itself. Technology has become the greatest aid to human existence because it is the basis of our understanding of the world.

Now so commonplace, we need to emphasize that the being of humanity is equated with the being of technology, and the way in which this transformation takes place is through being's becoming. It is not solely because we find objects everywhere from tools to machines, that is, technical artifacts of all descriptions in the world, but also because these things collectively, when joined with the methods and procedures associated with them, represent our understanding of being. Becoming is now objectified through things. Since we project our being externally, the becoming of being may be attributed to external causes because we have externalized the integral parts of our being, that is, we tend to project the subject into the object. Or another way to express this relationship is to say that the object becomes the subject projected. Our being becomes sublimated to and through objectified things, and then re-emerges as the embodiment of them.[12] So much so we may conclude that self-awareness has intensified the more we pursue an overwhelmingly technological existence. And apart from any threat posed by technology as enumerated by its various critics, humanity's objectification is the means to its subjectification. More than an agent to action, objectification is the mirror in which we see ourselves. Even in our investigation of nature, we have eliminated the desire to study it in itself unless we can somehow connect its meaning to ourselves.[13] And because we now encounter only ourselves, the whole world has become



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anthropomorphized, a tendency that increases the more we utilize technology.

In the true sense of the word, a subject is not a thing, but a dynamic entity of openness (or nothingness) that constantly changes by influencing and being influenced by other entities.[14] It is a being that acts and reacts with everything else. And it is because we assimilate ourselves with things and their technological apparatus that we may become estranged from other people, that is, things may foster the means for self-estrangement, and ultimately, self-alienation.

Comparatively, Heidegger has said that the object disappears into objectlessness,[15] but this description is incorrect since it falls to define its meaning clearly either because it ignores the importance of the subject, or sublimates it. Heidegger's interpretation also makes no mention of the becoming of being. Although his description of standing-reserve (*Bestand* in German) is presumed to be dominant within being, and is his equivalent for anything that is ready to be used, whether a river, a mountain range, or a person, it would be more accurate to say that standing-reserve is simply a description for potentiality, either natural or artificial. *Bestand* in which everything comes into a presence can overwhelm humans even though humanity controls technology. We may conclude that objects do not disappear into objectlessness, but have an appearance because of "subjectness."

Potentiality is always evident within technology when its being becomes, even when its being is transformed through objects as a means for our being. Since the becoming of being is not posited with results, but with the engagement of them, the result would be obvious because everything sooner or later would be swept up by the great wave of change brought about by means of an advancing technology. We can always offer the defense, although questionable, that if something goes wrong with our use of technology, it could not possibly be our fault because we followed it to the letter.

In this discussion, we need to be emphatic when we say that humanity and technology use the same metaphysical means for change that are derivable from the becoming of being, since both of them are tied together in what seems to be an inexorable cycle of dependency. Since the becoming of being emphasizes means over ends, the pursuit of technology may be an attempt at perfection, but it is performed at our expense. As a result, we diminish our own being when promoting the being of technology that then in turn is projected as the way in which we promote our being.[16] This cycle of dependency characterizes the world we know. We reduce our subjectivity in order to promote technology's objectivity that then is played back upon humanity to augment its subjectivity. Because this cycle is repeated endlessly, it seems to be primordial. It may have originated on a rudimentary level with our hominid predecessors, evolved to Homo sapiens, and intensified with the Neolithic, scientific, and industrial revolutions, but how hard should we push this idea? It is commonly said that technology objectifies us, but how often is it said that this objectification is the means to humanity's subjectification? Regardless of any alleged marginalization of subjectivity as discussed by Foucault,[17] the subject must in some way remain predominant; otherwise, technology, society, and the world would not exist. Even when manipulated, we remain in control because without technology, humans would not exist. Nevertheless, the social order nestled within technology's artifice is based on a belief in human reason that is methodical, predictable, and manageable, and this belief is pursued apart from the denials of the norms of rationality by some thinkers.[18] In reference to technology, we should acknowledge the premise that we are dependent upon an entity of our own creation.

The notion of imperfection that we mentioned above that is derivable from being's becoming may not prohibit the introduction of unreality, since we are powerless to prevent the cultivation of illusion. Because imperfection may lead to the falsification of being, it may result in economic manipulation, or political radicalism, or mystical subjectivism, all of which deny a meaningful understanding of the world. Indeed, when looking into the digital mirror that we hold in our hand, we may fool ourselves in regard to the much larger picture of reality because we can easily get lost in a flood of pixels. Even when resident within the context of a technological artifice, imperfection, or in philosophy we may speak of the necessity of errors, may impact conflicting circumstances as described above that define human existence. Although we often settle for what we think is good for ourselves, we rarely settle for what is best. Nevertheless, we all have the ability to improve and can even attempt some semblance of perfection, but this perfection does not apply to technology because it does not and cannot mature.[19] At least in this sense, humanity and technology, which use the same metaphysical means for change, are distinguishable from each other.

## References Références Referencias


1. Becoming does not mean coming into being as much as it means change, a conclusion that Plato made in his *Timaeus* 27d3-28a2. See *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, including the Letters,* eds. Edith Hamilton & Huntington Cairns, with Introduction and Prefatory Notes, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961, p. 1161. Also see Michael Frede, "Being and Becoming in Plato," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy,* supplementary volume, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, pp. 38-39.
2. If every existent is an event, then event loses its meaning, since it is a term applicable to everything, everywhere, every time. Because an event refers to




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an individual occurrence, an empirical investigation would be necessary to assess if it involves change, a position discussed in Kathleen Gill, "On the Metaphysical Distinction Between Processes and Events," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* 23 (1993), 365-384, esp. 379, rpt. in *Events,* eds. Roberto Casati and Achille C. Varzi, Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Co., 1996, pp. 477-496, esp. p. 491. Nevertheless, events that initiate change may or may not relate to physical objects, which is an interpretation denied by Lawrence Brian Lombard, *Events: A metaphysical study,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, p. 178.

3. A similar conclusion is also evident in Harry G. Frankfurt, *The importance of what we care about: Philosophical essays,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 83.
4. Inherent within the theory of evolution is the possibility of a potential result, while lacking an intended purpose. See David L. Hull, *The Metaphysics of Evolution,* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 72.
5. D.J.B. Hawkins, *Being and Becoming: An Essay Towards a Critical Metaphysic,* London: Sheed and Ward, 1954, pp. 98-99.
6. Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling, Repetition,* ed. and trans. with Introduction and Notes by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983, pp. 379-380, n. 14.
7. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, pp. 95-96.
8. The world of objects cannot guarantee that reality will always be affirmed because it could also apply to imaginary (or ideological) conceptions that deny reality itself. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination,* trans. Bernard Frechtman, New York: Philosophical Library, 1948; rpt. Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1972, p. 164. To which we should add that the becoming of being includes both being real and being unreal. Therefore, becoming does not exclude fantasy where anything is possible, and where self-identity and the awareness of reality are jeopardized.
9. Arnold Gehlen, *Man in the Age of Technology, trans.* Patricia Lipscomb, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, pp. 75-84.
10. Subjectification, not subjectivisation, more accurately describes the concepts and processes that relate to subjectivity. However, see the arguments in Dieter Stein, "Subjective meanings and the history of inversion in English," in *Subjectivity and subjectivisation: Linguistic perspectives,* eds. Dieter Stein and Susan Wright, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 130, where subjectivisation, not subjectification, is described as a term that relates to the notion of subjectivity within the mind of the speaker.
11. Underlying free choice may reside pre-rational tendencies. Although the cultural matrix and its process are tied to rationality, its content or substance may not. We may all agree that we are free, but freedom is defined by conditions, many of which are beyond our control. See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity,* Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 159-168.
12. Eric Dardel, *L'Histoire Science du concret,* Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1946, p. 11 ("Le préjugé moderne qui ne tient pour réel que l'objectif se traduit en histoire par une hypertrophie des modes les plus extérieurs du devenir."). Although Dardel may be criticized for his disregard of the importance of historical facts and their necessity in understanding history, nevertheless, his understanding of becoming should be seriously considered. Also see G.J. Renier, *History: Its Purpose and Method,* London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950, p. 42, who seems to offer a fair assessment of Dardel's interpretation, to which we should add that no fact intrinsically possesses a meaning, but lays dormant waiting for one. These ideas are similar to the conclusions of Hermann Meyer, who understood that human existence is manifested externally because everything has become objectified. See Hermann J. Meyer, *Die Technisierung der Welt: Herkunft, Wesen und Gefahren,* Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1961, pp. 199-206.
13. Werner Heisenberg, *The Physicist's Conception of Nature,* trans. Arnold J. Pomerans, London: Hutchinson, 1958, p. 24.
14. The word "subject" has been variously interpreted, from the materialist Hobbes and the idealist Rousseau who concluded that the subject is innately free and precedes civil society, and therefore contains political and cultural attributes on the one hand, to Marxists and postmodernists who inverted this conclusion on the other. Despite these conflicting views, we should agree that a subject remains indeterminate because it possesses unfulfilled and unrecognized possibilities. For our purposes, a subject may simply be equated with an individual, a self, or a person, although of these three equivalents, self may be less encumbered. Since a person becomes a self by being knowledgeable about whom he or she is, a self can be described as an object of self-knowledge. Such an understanding takes us back to Socrates and his expression "Know thyself," but the object of self-knowledge in this sense is useful only as a means for expressing the dynamic importance of a self. So we have gone full circle back to the definition of a person becoming a self by being knowledgeable about him or herself, and this knowledge is



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accessible in reference to the world. We should conclude that we are significant, or find significance, when we are affiliated with some type of world, that is, it is when we are important to something or someone else that we acquire meaning.

15. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays,* trans. and with an Introduction by William Lovitt, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, p. 19.
16. Iain Thomson, "Understanding Technology Onto-theologically, or: The Danger and the Promise of Heidegger, an American Perspective," In *New Waves in Philosophy of Technology,* ed. Jan Kyrre Berg Olsen, et al., Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 154-155.
17. Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-82,* ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 16-19.
18. Notably, Marx, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Foucault. In general, see Robert Nola, *Rescuing Reason: A Critique of Anti-Rationalist Views of Science and Knowledge,* Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, 230, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003.
19. Friedrich Georg Jünger, *The Failure of Technology: Perfection without Purpose,* trans. F.D. Wieck, Hinsdale: Henry Regnery Co., 1949, p. 124. And this interpretation is valid despite Jünger's view that humanity is lost when confounded by technology.



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