PART IV

SUBJECTIVITY
INTRODUCTION TO PART IV

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The parable of Jonah’s resistance to God’s mission and his desire to assert his will in determining how God metes out justice against those who have sinned is a great example of man’s affirmation of his selfhood, his interpretation of the world around him, and understanding of God’s nature and power. While it is, foremost, a tale of God’s compassion and might, it is a narrative of human subjectivity and subjective needs. In acknowledging to the sailors in his company his responsibility for the storm that is about to wreck their lives, Jonah declines his ethnic and religious identities as a Hebrew and a worshiper of the Lord. After numerous trials and tribulations, in the belly of the whale, it is with the first-person subject “I,” immediate and noninferential, that he relates his experience in the raging sea and acknowledges God’s ultimate power and compassionate nature. Despite the centrality of Jonah’s subjectivity, the ultimate moral of this parable and Jonah’s prayer is man’s submission to the will of a compassionate God who in the end is knower of our fate and destiny, for, as Jonah acknowledges, “[s]alvation comes from the Lord” (Jonah 2.12). Yet, this submission is possible solely when man understands God’s nature through his own human experience and subject perspective. Indeed, to understand God’s compassion for Nineveh, Jonah had to experience concern for a vine.

It is this parable, reflecting my personal resistance to respond to a call to travel, that my mother used to convince me of the necessity to immigrate to America at a time when I feared growth and yearned for the stability of home, the Democratic Republic of Congo. As an individual who had already experienced life at the periphery during my graduate studies, I understood all too well the marginality and alienation of the immigrant. Yet, according to my mother, I, like Jonah, had to submit to the will of God in accomplishing my existential mission and seeing what lay behind the doors. This biblical excerpt, delineating my personal dilemma and articulating my existential angst, informed my decision to journey to America, and it is only one example, among many other biblical narratives, that shapes and informs our perception of reality and our actions. Biblical narratives reflect our self-questionings about