

1 The Vanishing Subject

The Many Faces of Subjectivity

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Augustine says, “What then is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it, I do not know. And yet I know” (*Confessions*, 11. 14). Augustine introduces his perplexity by noting that though the present is evanescent, and neither time past nor time future exist, he can nevertheless tell the time of day and correct himself if he finds he is mistaken. We can echo Augustine’s dilemma in speaking about subjectivity. And indeed time and subjectivity are connected: if no one asks us, we are confident that our experience is ours. But the moment we try to define subjectivity, the sense of certainty vanishes. If subjectivity is an awareness of oneself, it seems to have no stable content: every moment brings a different “self” to light. As Montaigne says, “Anyone who turns his . . . attention to himself will hardly ever find himself in the same state twice.”¹ If subjective reflection offers proof of the existence of the self, it does not necessarily deliver self-knowledge. Descartes says, “I know that I exist; the question is “What is this ‘I’ that I know? (*Meditations on First Philosophy*, II AT 27) Descartes is rightly puzzled: the greater part of the *Meditations* is a detective story that traces the momentary certainty of the momentary existence of the thinker through a labyrinth of arguments to discover that—grace à Dieu—the self is a particular compound unity of a section of two substances, Mind and Body. (*Meditations* VI, AT 81). Reflecting on Augustine, Montaigne, and Descartes, we see that the concept—and perhaps the experience—of subjectivity is historically laden with philosophical presuppositions and controversies. In grammar and in fact, contemporary conceptions of subjectivity—and our experienced sense of ourselves—serve multiple functions and fuse distinctive archeological layers of meaning.

THE SEMANTICS OF THE SUBJECT

Etymology and grammar help identify and distinguish the strata in the history of the conception of subjectivity. Contemporary English usage emerged as late as the sixteenth century, a crystallization of Old French *sougiēt* and Spanish *sugeto*, both derived from the Latin *subjectum*. These words are relatively literal translations of the Greek *hupokeimenon*—literally, that which stands or is placed underneath, the material of which things are made. The *Oxford English Dictionary* sees the modern notion of subjectivity—“the condition of viewing things through the medium of one’s own mind or individuality . . . dominated by personal feelings, thoughts, concerns”—emerging very late: Coleridge under the influence of Kant.

We can, for the time being, set aside the question of whether our contemporary usages of “subjectivity” designate a family of notions or a genus with distinctive species and varieties. In ordinary speech, “subjectivity” sometimes refers to first-person claims of incorrigible introspective authority. In this sense, it contrasts with objective, corrigible impersonal or neutral descriptions of states of affairs. But “merely” subjective claims of authority can be mistaken: they indicate a local, sometimes idiosyncratic perspective, a voice that requires hearing but that can be rightly overridden by other kinds of authority. Less dramatically, “the subject” is a grammatical term paired with “the predicate,” designating the referent of attribution. More expansively, it denotes an area, a domain of investigation: “The subject of this essay is ‘subjectivity.’” The ordinary verb usage of “subject” designates quite a different domain. The expressions “Tom subjected Tim to a tongue lashing” and “In his childhood, John was subjected to merciless teasing” and “The Midwest is subject to droughts and tornados” refer to conditions or events that mark some passivity in the face of external forces. This sense of *subject* encompasses the legal use, “falling under the jurisdiction of a law”: “Jaywalking is subject to a fine.” It is also allied to the political contrast between subjects of an authoritarian regime and consenting or self-legislating citizens. The *Oxford English Dictionary* chronicles all these senses without priority, distinguishing the logical, psychological, grammatical, metaphysical, and political senses without favor.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE HISTORY OF THE SUBJECT

Our philosophic history begins with Aristotle. Of course his Greek *hupokeimenon* isn’t straightforwardly translatable as “subject.” Grammatically, it is the subject of predication; metaphysically, it is the underlying en-

tity in which attributes or qualities inhere; physically, it is the material of which things are made. None of these senses has a hint of awareness, still less of self-conscious awareness. Aristotle's account of the genesis of self-awareness locates it in perception (*aesthesis*), which has no apparent connection with the subject (*hupokeimenon*) as the "grammatical/logical subject of predication or attribution, the material substratum of objects" (*Metaphysics* 1028B: 35ff.) In the first instance, the immediate direct objects of perception are specific qualities rather than the ego-self or its capacities. Perceptions have direct objects: the mind integrates the colors, sounds, and smells of objects presented by the sense organs. *Aesthesis* is always veridical (*De Anima* 427B: 10ff.): strictly speaking, neither a perceptual illusion of water on the horizon nor the dream of a red chamber is a *perception*. This feature of Aristotle's psychology may stand behind the later-transformed view that subjective reports are by definition authoritative and incorrigible: "If what I claim isn't there, I'm not actually seeing." This construal has the obvious unfortunate ironic consequence of being true at the expense of being empty.

Aristotle's leading idea is that the initial reflexive experience of the perceiving self occurs along with particular perceptions.² Aristotle remarks "In perceiving, we perceive that we perceive" (*Nichomachean Ethics* [NE]1170a: 28ff.). This realization establishes only that every act of perception also involves reflective activity. It does not by itself deliver an immediate, continuous perception of the ego-self as a spatiotemporally unified entity. Recognizing that acts of perception are moments in the continuing life of a person involves a much more complicated reflection. The virtuous become aware of themselves—their lives—as well formed and unified through the reflective contemplative mirroring of true friendship (*NE* 1169b30–1170a4). Sharing their lives in deliberation and practical activity, such friends mirror one another's lives as "other selves" (*NE* 1170b6). Only by contemplating (*theorein*) the lives of their friends, their "other selves" do the virtuous come to realize that the sequence of their particular perceptions and actions constitutes *a life*, a well-formed whole.³ For Aristotle, then, self-consciousness emerges from a special kind of intersubjectivity. But this view has a stringent condition: the content of (what we would call) a subjective sense of the self emerges from the mutual contemplation that occurs in friendship among the virtuous (*NE* 1170b1–14). Through friendship among the virtuous is revealed the role of subjectivity in forming genuine self-knowledge.⁴ Aristotle's view may seem harsh and elitist to those of our contemporaries who link subjectivity to epistemic egalitarianism and

who believe that—whatever the genuinely veridical objective truth may be—each person is the ultimate authority on the subjective character of his experience.

Augustine's *Confessions* marks a dramatic change in the conception of the subject. His acute introspective awareness, his questions and preoccupations, are quite different from those of Aristotle or even from those of the Stoics. Although the *Confessions* presents a brilliant example of the phenomenology of self-awareness, the book is not a philosophical analysis of subjectivity. It follows an errant mind's way to faith by reflecting on what that journey reveals about divine benevolence. Augustine's explicit account of self-knowledge emerges in the course of a philosophical argument against skepticism. He uses the capacity for unmediated self-reflection as a star example of something we know with certainty. "Without any illusion or fantasy, I am certain that I am, [and] that I know that I am" (*City of God*[CG] XI.26) We exist because if we doubted that we did, a doubter would exist. Moreover we know that we know at least one thing, because—supposedly without depending on religious faith or philosophical assumptions—we just proved that we do. With similar certainty, Augustine adds with the same certainty: "I know that I love to exist and that I love to know" (CG XI.27). Although Augustine doesn't present an argument in this passage for this additional claim, we can speculate on its Platonic turn: we know that we love knowledge because we persisted in inquiring into whether we exist. And if we know we love knowledge, we know that we love; and if we persisted in inquiring about whether we exist, then we care that we exist. Although the defeat of skepticism brings a generalized epistemological assurance, it does not underwrite the truth of first-person psychological reports that go beyond the moment's proof for the ego's existence at that moment. Nothing follows about what else we know or what else we may be. Nor does Augustine's introspective argument by itself ensure that all moments of self-reflection refer to the same entity. An additional argument would be necessary to show that the self whose existence is proven by its capacity to doubt is identical to the person who admires Ambrose, loves his son Adeodatus, and is anguished about his inability to have faith in God's love.

Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* provides a template practical regimen—a set of stages—to bring a person to his true self, to truthful self-knowledge.⁵ For Loyola, the faith—and the transformation of the self—that Augustine thought could only be a gift of divine grace is the objective aim of a series of exercises that anyone can undertake for the sake of his immortal soul.

Loyola articulates ideas implicit in the views of some of the early church fathers: in man's fallen condition, his subjective self-perception, his reflective desires, his sense of self are false and corrupt.⁶ To achieve genuine self-knowledge—true selfhood—a person must undergo a painful process of catharsis and reidentification. He must subjectively appropriate—subjectively internalize and experience—each sensory moment of Christ's passion.⁷

Loyola's ego psychology remains latent in some contemporary conceptions of subjectivity, such as the idea that an empathic identification that internalizes the psychological experience of an exemplary figure is necessary to develop a fully reflective ego. The empathic imagination in the service of developing an authentic self is fully sensory: Loyola's penitent must take on the burden, the weight of the cross; he is not only to imagine but to feel the pain of the crown of thorns. "Ask for grief with Christ suffering, a broken heart with Christ heartbroken, tears, and deep suffering . . . of the great suffering that Christ endured for me."⁸ Moreover, the character of the empathic experience, which is physically and psychologically painful, is a mark of its transformative power, of the authenticity of the emergent spiritual self. As Ignatius's penitent experiences Christ's suffering as his own, Freud's therapeutic patient reexperiences his childhood traumatic sufferings and—by claiming them as his own—ideally achieves self-knowledge and selfhood. Like Loyola, Freud thinks that an intellectualized recognition of trauma is insufficient to achieve an authentic ego. The psychological-emotional expression of the recovered traumatic wound is also essential.

Despite apparently echoing Augustine's cogito and Loyola's meditative spiritual exercises, Descartes' introspective reflection delivers a radically different kind of subjectivity, a radically different ego-self. Instead of being a soul in quest of faith in God, the ego of the *Meditations* is a mind in quest of mathematical/scientific knowledge. The cogito reveals a thinking mind that is capable of unmediated introspective reflection. But no evidence is available that this self exists continuously or is individuated; and the self is unified only in containing—consisting in—a unified system of ideas. Like Augustine, Descartes offers the cogito as an answer to the radical skeptic. He has undergone the skeptical purgation: he has doubted he has a body, doubted he exists over time, and doubted whether any of his ideas are reliable, let alone true. He knows that as long as the mind is engaged in thinking, there is a thinking thing. So, he asks, in what does thinking consist? At this point in his analysis, thinking consists of episodes of perceiving, imagining, inferring, believing, and doubting. These activities supposedly tell us something about the powers and the faculties of a thinking being. Descartes'

answer to the question “What is this thing which thinks?” depends on his memory: he must remember that he perceived, imagined, and so on. But the reliability of his memory is still in doubt, as is the trustworthiness, let alone the truth, of perceptual experience. Quite the contrary. All we know is that the thinker is a “perceiver,” a believer.

When Descartes follows the rigorous model of demonstration set by the cogito, he recovers/discovers necessary, indubitable truths. Perceptions, memories, ideas of the imagination—contingent ideas that might have been different or illusory—are not a necessary part of the mind: the ego-mind would remain identical had these elements been different (*Meditations* VI. AT 73–74). The more Descartes holds fast to his existence as a reflective thinker, the less essential are perceptual experience and memory to his identity. The structure of the *Meditations* follows the Platonic ascent of the mind from the apparent contradictions of sensory claims to the light of intellectual insight.⁹ The mind is contingently individuated only by its perceptions and memories. But if the ego’s essential identity as a thinker consists of necessary truths, all minds providentially contain the same ideas. If all Cartesian thinking egos are, strictly speaking, identical, the mind whose existence was proven at one moment will be the same as that of all others. For necessary ideas—the clear and distinct ideas of mathematics—the problem of how to understand “other minds” vanishes.¹⁰ The ideas that compose the essence of any mind are identical to those that compose all others. True self-knowledge cannot rely on the contingent and fallible perceptual ideas that are not essential to one’s true self. The only place that Descartes provides anything like an individuated mind is *Meditation* VI, after God has been shown to guarantee/underwrite the truth of clear and distinct ideas. Only then do we tentatively trust the senses as highly fallible clues to the mathematically demonstrable truths of physics.

Descartes also tells a story that locates subjectivity in the passions of the soul. Like all that appears within the soul, the passions of wonder/amazement, sadness, joy, desire, love, hatred are *ideas* (*Passions of the Soul*, 1.27–29). The ego is aware of the conditions of “its” body only through the mediation of passion-ideas. These passion-ideas are functional but fallible indications of what endangers or sustains the compound union of mind and body (1.40). The insistence of the passions marks both their utility and their danger. The passions signal a need to correct an imbalance or discomfort. In a sense, such ideas are immediately and veridically accessible to the mind. (The angry mind has an unmediated awareness of its passion.) Yet passions can be highly misleading because they do not directly represent their causes or objects. (The angry mind may be mistaken about the sources and direc-

tions of its anger.) Considerable knowledge is required to understand—to decipher—the code messages of passion-ideas.¹¹

For Descartes, the love of knowledge that Plato and Augustine considered the essence of the soul's experience of itself—its essential drive toward the Good—is an exogenous passion-idea. Like pain and hunger, wonder and desire prompt the mind-body to activities that can sustain that unity but that can also mislead the mind. They are by-products of the *embodied* mind's interactions with Extension (*Passions*, 1. 34–37). The reflective ego is individuated only as an embodied being, which is subject to unreliable passions. The subjective reflection that delivers certain knowledge delivers only mathematical science. The subjective reflections of passion-ideas deliver fallible indicators of the individuated mind-body; and these indicators are only as trustworthy as the individual's grasp of the scientific laws that seek to interpret the confusing information afforded by the passions.

Locke again dramatically and radically shifts the perspective on subjectivity. His analysis of personal identity is that of a physician and a legal theorist. His primary question is not "Who or what am I?" but rather "What are the origins and meaning of the idea of the person? What are the role and function of that idea in ordinary practice?" Locke, not Descartes, gives an account of a self whose individuated subjectivity is fixed by its consciousness, its memory of "its" sense experience. Distinguishing the criteria for the identity of the same *body*, the same *individual* human being and the same *person*, he found the focus of the idea of the "same individual man" in the continuity of consciousness. "It [is] the same consciousness that makes a man be himself to himself. . . . It is by consciousness that . . . the personal self has of its present thoughts and actions, that it is self to itself now, and so will be the same self, as far as the same consciousness can extend to actions past or to come."¹² Consciousness ensures the continued identity of an individual only as long as the content of that consciousness remains the same. But because the contents of consciousness change with time, consciousness cannot by itself deliver the idea of a person responsible for any past actions of which "it" is not conscious. The forensic idea of a *person* responsible for its *own* past actions depends on the continuity of conscious memory. If memory is the criterion of continuing personal identity, a person can be responsible only for those actions that have left memory traces (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II.27.26). There are two possible interpretations of Locke's criterion for the continued identity of a person. If the forensic identity of a person rests on *conscious* (and articulable) memory, his analysis of the conditions for moral and legal responsibility are dramatically stringent.¹³ If Locke intends to analyze and preserve the com-

mon practices of liability, he must expand “conscious memory” to include experiences that leave unarticulated but in principle potentially recoverable psychological traces. On this interpretation of Locke’s view, a combat veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is identical to the soldier who has experienced a battle trauma, even if he could in principle recover his memory or if his memory consists in the conscious experience of his PTSD symptoms and the .

In the name of common sense (“things are what they are, and not another thing”), Bishop Butler argues that Locke’s criterion for personal identity presupposes—and thus cannot provide—what it seeks to establish. The person who reports—or evinces—his memories already has a conception of himself as the proper claimant of those memories. “Living and remembering can make no alternation in the truth of past matter of fact.”¹⁴ Butler argues that one might doubt whether an idea is a bona fide memory trace (rather than a fantasy), both the doubt and its resolution presuppose the establishment of a continuous personal identity.

Butler’s critique of Locke brings us to their predecessor Montaigne and to their successor Hume. Montaigne, almost as if he were trying to follow Locke’s dictum, attempts to find his constancy, his continued identity. Searingly honest man that he is, he confesses failure. Reflecting on himself, Montaigne finds no essence and no identity or continuity. Reflection brings constantly shifting ideas and moods: he is now merry, now serious, now bilious, now light-headed. Butler would ask, *Who* is remembering all this? In his skeptical mode, Montaigne responds, “There is no existence that is constant, either of our being or of objects. And we, in our judgment, and all mortal things go on flowing and rolling unceasingly. Thus nothing certain can be established about one thing by another, both the judging and the judged being in continual change and motion.”¹⁵ Arguing from a wealth of erudition, Montaigne ironically mocks the pretention to knowledge and to self-knowledge. “Whom shall we believe when he talks about himself?” (*Essays*, II.17–18) As Montaigne’s *Essays* unfold, even his philosophical beliefs shift. Ironist throughout, he is now Stoic, now Skeptic, now Epicurean, just as in his early *Essays*, he was now complaisant, now suspicious, now calm.

Hume develops this reflective exchange further. Like Locke, he attempts to trace the source of the idea of personal identity in the content of experience—that is, in the sequence of impressions and ideas. Like Montaigne, he finds that introspection does not deliver a Self. There is only red here, loud here, discomfort here, pride here. “There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different. . . . The mind is nothing more than a

bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity." It is the imagination, rather than memory that constructs the idea of the identity of a person, "The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one. . . . It proceed[s] from a[n] operation of the imagination."¹⁶

Hume faces a dilemma: if the self is nothing but a system or train of different perceptions, the idea of the self as a responsible agent is a non-sensical metaphysical fiction. But if the common ideas and practices of agency and responsible agency make sense, we must find their origins in the impressions of experience. Hume resolves his doubts: like Descartes, he projects *two* ideas of the self. Descartes' two egos are the self as mind and the self as the union of mind and body. Hume distinguishes the self "as regards imagination and the sequence of ideas" and the self "as regards the passions and the interest we take in ourselves": in short, the self as a thinker and the self who reflects—and acts—on his passions and preferences.¹⁷ The self as a thinker has—*is*—only the habitual association of ideas. The thinker's reflections on the patterns of his passions—particularly those of pride and humility, love and hatred—reveal his idea of himself as an agent, who, in the nature of the case, projects the continuity of "his" preferences from the past to the future. Hume's agent-self remains a reflective thinker, whose agency consists in the associative and projective activities of the imagination.

The passions of pride and humility are natural and irreducible passions; both give rise to the idea of self as their object. "To this emotion [pride], . . . nature has assigned a certain idea, that of the self, which it never fails to produce." We feel pride or humility; those passions produce the idea of their object, which is the self of which we are proud or humble. Hume distinguishes the object or content of pride from its cause. "A hundred different things" can be the immediate cause of pride: ancestry and descendants, looks and bearing, property, achievements, and virtues. But these things produce the passion of pride only when they are related to the self, when they are thought of as *my* ancestors, *my* achievements. The idea of the self as an entity derives from the pleasurable pride of possession. Further, this pleasurable pride, the idea of what is properly *mine*—*my* ancestors, *my* son—is derived by comparison to others and by the social practices of respect and esteem. Pride requires comparison to others: we take pleasure in possessions that are relatively rare and that are "discernible and obvious, not only to myself, but to others also." Where Aristotle finds self-recognition through the mutual mirroring of virtuous friends, Hume charts the construction of the idea of self in social practices associated with property and

propriety. Whereas Hume focuses on the role of pleasurable pride in producing the idea of self as admired for his property, the analysis can be extended to account for the origins of the idea of self as a moral person through the pleasurable pride of being recognized as just and virtuous.¹⁸ With these arguments, Hume dramatically transforms sinful pride into the morally neutral source of all reflective motivation.¹⁹

Despite sometimes being advertised as the father of subjectivity, Rousseau delivers at least three distinct layers of the reflective self: the presumptive self, the self “in nature,” the biological self as it might exist apart from the influence of family or society. This “natural man” has not yet become what nature intends him to become. He has *amour de soi*, the sentiment of his own existence, an instinctual nonreflective sense of his existence and his active well-being.²⁰ Free, self-reliant, prelinguistic, and preconceptual, natural man does not see himself as an object. He is neither social nor antisocial. A geological or geographical accident—an earthquake, a volcano—brings men into contact with one another. Also by accident, human beings discover the benefits of fire, the pleasures of expressive song, and the kind of minimal cooperation that prompts rudimentary communication. As they form families and societies, they become increasingly dependent on one another. But dependency changes the sense of self: men become self-conscious of themselves as objects, seeing themselves through the eyes of those on whose goodwill and esteem their survival and welfare depend (*Second Discourse* I.1–38). *Amour de soi* gives way to *amour propre*: prereflective subjectivity becomes conscious and is mediated by the judgment of others. The social self is a subject to others and a subject to himself only through others (II.1–30). To regain and fulfill its nature, the self must become rationally self-legislating. Experiencing himself as a citizen, man freely wills actions that accord with the general will. In nature, subjectivity is instinctual; in society, it is emotional; in political citizenship, it is rational and universal (II.31–58).

Fichte’s version of transcendental idealism locates the unity of theoretical and practical reason in self-positing, self-constructing subjective reflection.²¹ “What was I before I came to self-consciousness? . . . I did not exist at all, for I was not an ‘I.’ The ‘I’ exists only insofar as it is conscious of itself. . . . The self posits itself, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it exists.”²² Through the subjective awareness of its own activity, the Ego comes to recognize others and to acknowledge their moral claims on him. Fichte argues that the subjectivity that pervades all conscious experience is coordinate with—and limited by—the realization of the freedom of others. A conception of justice is, he maintains, implicit in the activities of self-

awareness: the recognition of a universally binding morality follows from the rational reflection of a free, self-positing, and self-constructing Ego, who recognizes that he is a subject to himself only because he is also a subject/object to others.²³

Sartre sees the subjectivity of the ego-self as inescapably inauthentic.²⁴ "I am not what I am; I am what I am not."²⁵ What individuals regard as their core self is a projection of bad faith, fleeing the realization of its nonbeing. Like Montaigne and Hume, Sartre holds that the content of consciousness is always in flux. Indeed, like them, he thinks that consciousness has no essential structure or content. It is, so to speak, a mirror—a reflection—of whatever contingent content presents itself. Sartre's ego is a surprising combination of Hume's fictitious idea of the self and Fichte's self-positing "I." The content of subjective self-ascriptions ("I am a melancholy Albanian waitress") stands some distance from the ego that claims them. Even the ascription "I am an ego who chooses to describe herself as a melancholy Albanian waitress" does not capture the arbitrariness of the radical choice of self-identification. An indefinite regress of selves stands behind any choice or act of self-ascription. The denial of any contingent self-ascription—"I am not really an Albanian waitress because I could choose an indefinite number of other self-identifying ascriptions"—is equally inauthentic. After all, the person may, in fact, be an Albanian waitress. The claims and expressions of subjectivity are, and are not, trustworthy. Like Hume and Fichte, Sartre also sees the act of self-constitution as embedded in social recognition.²⁶ "The problem for me [in constituting myself] is to make myself be by acquiring the possibility of taking the Other's point of view on myself."²⁷ This stance generates a set of dialectical conflicts in which the mutual mirroring self and Other construct a "we."²⁸

Before turning to some contemporary uses of the concept of subjectivity, let us reconstruct and systematize its history. Our history reveals several distinctive strands in conceptions of subjectivity: it was constituted as a (1) first-person, (2) individuated, (3) self-referential, (4) authoritative veridical report (or expression) of an (5) occurrent (6) mental state (sensation, emotion, thought). These distinctive markers of subjectivity can occur independently of one another; indeed, they demarcate radically different conceptions. The "I" need not be individuated (Descartes and Fichte). The referent of the indexical "I" may have no specific determinate content that remains constant over an individual's biological life (Montaigne and Hume). The report/expression of an occurrent sensory experience need not be veridical (Descartes). Self-positing consciousness may be a condition for experience. (Fichte). The choice of the content of self-awareness may be

transformative or performatively constitutive (Loyola and Sartre). In some usages, subjective reports claim validity; in others, they are fallible. In some usages, subjectivity is contrasted with objectivity; in others, it is a self-constituting performance. In some usages, subjective reflection is individuated; in others, it reveals the structure of any and every mind's necessarily self-validating ideas. These radically distinctive conceptions of subjectivity have dramatically different roles in the phenomenology of reflective experience.

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE ETHICS OF METHODOLOGY

Although no consensus exists about the proper way to analyze subjectivity, there is a marked contemporary revival of interest in—and legitimation of—the deliverances of subjective reflection. Among those who have recently accorded authority to the first person are cultural anthropologists who consider themselves under a moral obligation to respect and preserve the voices of indigenous people.²⁹ Concerned that fieldwork in the third world is the continuation of colonialism by anthropological means, these activist anthropologists attempt to preserve the voices, the practices, and the economic integrity of second and third world societies by forming organizations like Cultural Survival.³⁰

Other anthropologists—let's call them *methodological purists*—privilege the first-person viewpoint of their subjects, attempting to understand them in their own terms. While continuing to chart kinship structures and exchange systems, purists accord indigenous informants ethnographic authority on the meaning of these relations, without imposing or projecting the psychological categories or explanatory theories of their own cultures onto those of the Other. Instead of interpreting the subjective psychology of their informants in Western terms, they analyze the semantic patterns of indigenous self-representing discourse. Using only minimally interpretive translations, they distinguish and analyze the distinctive self-constituting discourse of men and women, elders, priests and warriors, the powerful and the marginalized.³¹

Philosophically minded anthropologists hold that semantic and pragmatic distinctions—between truth claims and expressive utterances, between literal and figurative expressions, and between beliefs and practices or rituals—do not designate or describe distinct psychological or linguistic categories. They argue that because such distinctions are philosophically theory bound, they distort explanations of indigenous practices.³² Others

join postmodern literary theorists in questioning the assumptions of essentialist “master narratives.”³³ For didactic and expository reasons—because they are, after all, addressing culturally Anglophone readers—these anthropologists nevertheless freely speak of “subjectivity,” recognizing that such a category may be incomprehensible to many indigenous peoples.³⁴

Other anthropologists, influenced by philosophic analyses of problems of the indeterminacy of translation, criticize the purist quest as a hopeless project.³⁵ These anthropologists—let’s call them *ironists*—see purist attempts to recover indigenous subjectivity as naive and exploitable.³⁶ Recognizing that their indigenous informants often engage in the power politics of self-transformation, they attempt to let their subjects—representative members of ethnicities, religions, genders, and classes—speak for themselves, according them the final authority of self-interpretation.³⁷ Sensitivity to the ways in which participant observers affect social practices and the dynamics of indigenous power struggles prompted research into the political ramifications of cultural intrusion.³⁸ Concerned about the deflections of the anthropological presence, many purists drift to the ironic view that there are no politically innocent ethnographies. Rather than taking indigenous self-identifying and self-ascribing characterizations at face value, they interpret these self-characterizations as rhetorically pragmatic and often political in intent.³⁹ Other ironists accuse purist ethnographers of either serving the ideology of their own cultures or using their ethnographies as thinly disguised criticism of their own cultures.⁴⁰ Ironically minded anthropologists chart the ways in which indigenous people actively become their own ethnographers, constructing “essentialist” cultural identities as a strategy in an internal power struggle or as artifacts for consumption in the politics of the global economy.⁴¹ They argue that any vital sociopolitical group is internally subdivided, with no stable nonperspectival identity markers and with multiple group-specific linguistic practices that shift dynamically across subgroup associations.⁴² Because individuals are members of cross-cutting and often conflicting associations, subjective identity characterizations shift widely between multiple perspectives.

While admiring the purism of clean hands and clear heads, ironists make a virtue of necessity: they see their anthropological intrusions as negligible in comparison to the mutually predatory raids of indigenous peoples, the dynamics of their internal power struggles, and the transformative effects of the global economy. Ironic autobioethnographies openly and frankly include reflective narratives of their personal and politically charged interactions and negotiations with indigenous peoples.⁴³ What started as a method-

ological respect for the subjectivity of indigenous peoples sometimes ends as a rhetorical trope in postcolonial and anticolonial politics and sometimes as a confessional moment in anthropological autobiographies. Attempting to bypass the politically charged dialectic of subjectivity, philosophers like Habermas analyze the “logical” preconditions for interpretation and communication, arguing that these preconditions establish the ethics as well as the method of intersubjective understanding.⁴⁴

MEDICAL PRACTICE AND THE VOICE OF THE SUBJECT

The agenda of the recent focus on subjectivity and on “the subject” of medical practice focuses primarily on therapeutic and moral as well as epistemic and methodological concerns.⁴⁵ A number of distinctive strands conjoin to give authority to the testimony of subjective experience.

1) Diagnostic and therapeutic reasons exist for granting epistemic validity to patients’ illness narratives without automatically overriding them with the presumed objective deliverances of medical authorities.⁴⁶ Patients’ individual beliefs—sometimes culturally encoded, sometimes idiosyncratic—about their constitutions, diets, occupations, and family circumstances influence their medical conditions. Their interpretations of the sources and symptomatic expressions of illness are experientially as well as diagnostically relevant.⁴⁷ Fine-grain details of patients’ medical conditions are affected by their perceptions of power, class, gender, family and occupational responsibilities, ethnoculture, and age. Medical practitioners increasingly depend on patients’ subjective phenomenological reports, seeing these reports as an essential part of successful diagnosis and therapy.⁴⁸

2) Sensitivity to the experience of pain and suffering conjoin diagnostic considerations in pressing for patients’ active participation in the therapeutic process. Some medical ethicists argue that an “I-Thou” dialogic sensibility that responds to the voice of the subject evokes a constructive partnership in healing: it elicits attentiveness, engagement, and sensitivity from medical practitioners and active cooperation by patients.⁴⁹ Because patients benefit most from alert participation in their therapeutic regimen, they need to understand that process in their own terms. Uniting the methodological concerns of anthropologists with the practical concerns of physicians, medical anthropologists track the logic and logistics of treating patients as partners rather than as the subject-objects of the work of healing.⁵⁰

3) Many medical ethicists base their arguments for legitimizing the authority of patient autonomy on a liberal political theory that accords individuals fundamental inalienable rights of rational self-determination, espe-

cially in matters of life and death.⁵¹ Nevertheless, morally and politically committed to respecting patient subjectivity, these theorists typically also offer specific normative and regulative principles to guide “rational choice” in medical contexts. Minimally, and perhaps less nobly, the informed consent of the patient has become a pressing legal matter as well as a moral one.

Concern about preserving the authority of phenomenological patient-subjects in medical theory and practice surprisingly reproduces and echoes distinctive strands in the transformative history of the conception of subjectivity. Conceptions of subjectivity over time—the power that Augustine accords to confessional expression, the authenticity that Loyola accords to the unmediated experience of pain and suffering, the epistemic privilege that Descartes accords to introspective reflection, the role that Hume assigns to the social origins of the fictional idea of the self, the egalitarian direction of Rousseau’s analysis of the rights of individual autonomy, the dialogical “we” that emerges from the Fichtean and Sartrean self-positing “I”—all reappear in the rationale of contemporary anthropological theory and medical practice. The distinctive moments in the history of subjectivity are still alive and well—and as multifaceted as ever. Despite the transformative history of conceptions of subjectivity—despite the fact that the appears to have no core meaning—the various themes of subjectivity continue to reappear: the repressed subject returns.

NOTES

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1. Michel de Montaigne, “Of the Inconsistency of Our Actions,” in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, ed. Donald Frame (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), II.1.

2. See Aryeh Kosman, “Perceiving that We Perceive: DA 3.2,” *Philosophical Review*, 1975.

3. See Amélie Rorty, “The Place of Contemplation in Aristotle’s Ethics,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), esp. 338–91.

4. See Aryeh Kosman, “Aristotle on the Desirability of Friends,” *Ancient Philosophy*, 2004.

5. St. Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, ed. and trans. Louis Puhl (New York: Vintage, 2000).

6. Loyola, "First Week: The Examination of Conscience," *Spiritual Exercises*.
7. Loyola, "Third Week: The Events of the Passion," *Spiritual Exercises*.
8. *Ibid.*
9. See Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. II.6.A, 367–70.
10. See Amélie Rorty, "The Structure of Descartes' Meditations," in *Essays on Descartes' Meditations*, ed. A. O. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
11. See Amélie Rorty, "Descartes on Thinking with the Body," in *Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
12. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1844), II.27.10.
13. For an extended discussion of interpretations of Locke's criteria for personal identity see J. L. Mackie, *Problems from Locke*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), ch. 6.
14. Joseph Butler, "Of Personal Identity," *Dissertations*, Dissertation I.
15. Montaigne, "Apology for Raymond Sebond," *Complete Essays*, II. 12.
16. David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.4.6.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, 2.1.5–6, 2.1.2, 2.1.5–6, 1.6, III.3.1.
19. See A. O. Rorty, "The Structure of Hume's *Treatise*," in *Essays on Hume's 'Treatise'*, ed. Donald Ainslie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
20. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality Among Men," in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), n. 15.
21. J. G. Fichte, "Wissenschaftslehre, 1.1," *Introductions to Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. David Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994).
22. Fichte, "Second Introduction, 9," *Introductions to Wissenschaftslehre*.
23. See Stephen Darwall, "Fichte and the Second Person Standpoint," *International Yearbook for German Idealism, 2005*"; and "Respect and the Second Person Standpoint," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 2004.
24. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), II.1.1 and 5.
25. *Ibid.*, III.3.3
26. *Ibid.*, II.1.2, III.3.3.
27. *Ibid.*, III.1.1
28. *Ibid.*, III.3.3
29. See Arthur Kleinman, *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); and Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock, eds., *Social Suffering*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). See especially the papers by Paul Farmer, Allen Young, and Talal Asad.
30. See *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, a journal that has, for thirty years, covered issues of concern to indigenous peoples.
31. See, for example, Sherry Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, 1984; and N. B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry Ortner, eds., *Culture/Power/History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

32. See Byron Good, *Medicine, Rationality and Experience: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

33. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *Language, Memory and Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980); Kevin Dwyer, *Moroccan Dialogues* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Dennis Tedlock, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); Sherry Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties"; Michael Fischer with Mehdi Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogue in Post-Modernity and Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); and James Boon, *Other Tribes, Other Scribes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

34. See, for example, Michelle Rosaldo, *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); and Catherine Lutz and Leila Abu-Lughod, eds., *Language and the Politics of Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

35. For the most influential formulation of the problem of indeterminacy in translations that led ironist anthropologists to become suspicious of purist ethnography, see W. v. O Quine, "Ontological Relativity," *Journal of Philosophy*, 1968; and "On the Reason for Indeterminacy of Translation," *Journal of Philosophy*, 1970. See also Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); and Ernest Lepore, ed., *Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

36. I shall, for convenience, speak of *purists* and *ironists* as though they were committed to different anthropological methods and perspectives. Of course, most anthropologists attempt to combine these perspectives, sometimes self-consciously and sometimes apparently unaware of the shifts in their perspectives. See Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988); Vincent Crapanzano, *Hermes' Dilemma and Hamlet's Desire: On the Epistemology of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993); James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). See especially the essays by George Marcus, Michael Fischer, Paul Rabinow, and James Clifford in this anthology.

37. See, for example, Marcel Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemmeli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); Leila Ahmed, *A Border Passage* (New York, 2000); Lila Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, *Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village* (New York: Doubleday-Anchor, 1965).

38. See Clifford Geertz, "From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self and Emotion*, ed. Richard Shweder and Robert A. Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

39. See, for example, Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London, 1973); Ernest Gellner, *Anthropology and Politics: Revolutions in the Sacred Grove* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); John Hall and J. C. Jarvie, *Transition to Modernity: Essays on Power, Wealth and Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Sherry Ortner, *Making Gender: The Politics and Eros of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

40. See George Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); George Marcus, *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

41. For example, see Kay Warren and Jean Jackson, eds., *Indigenous Movements, Self-Representation and the State in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

42. See, for example, Amélie Rorty, "The Hidden Politics of Multi-Culturalism," *Political Theory*, 1994.

43. See, for example, Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); and *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

44. See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," in *Contemporary Hermeneutics*, ed. Josef Bleicher (Routledge, 1980).

45. See, for example, Dan Brock, *Life and Death: Philosophical Essays on Bio-medical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Kleinman, *Patients and Healers*; Allen Buchanan and Dan Brock, *Deciding for Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989); E. D. Pellegrino and D. C. Thomasma, *The Virtues in Medical Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); T. L. Beauchamp and J. F. Childress, *Principles of Bio-Medical Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Miles Little, *Humane Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Kleinman, Das, and Lock, *Social Suffering*. See especially the essays by Paul Farmer, Allan Young, and Talal Asad.

46. See, for example, Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good, Paul E. Brodwin, Byron J. Good, and Arthur Kleinman, eds., *Pain as Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

47. Alan Radley, ed., *Worlds of Illness: Biographical and Cultural Perspectives on Health and Disease* (London: Routledge, 1993); and his *Making Sense of Illness* (London: Sage, 1994).

48. Mark Zborowski, *People in Pain* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969); Jay Katz, ed., *Experimentation with Human Beings: The Authority of the Investigator and Subject* (New York: Russell Sage, 1972); and his *Silent World of Doctor and Patient* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2002); S. K. Toombs, *The Meaning of Illness: A Phenomenological Account of the Different Perspectives of Physician and Patient* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992).

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50. See Kleinman, *Patients and Healers*.

51. Tom Beauchamp and Seymour Perlin, *Ethical Issues in Death and Dying* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1978); Brock, *Life and Death*; Buchanan and Brock, *Deciding for Others*.