*Modern Intellectual History*, 3, 2 (2006), pp. 333–344 © 2006 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S1479244306000795 Printed in the United Kingdom

# FORUM: *THE IDEA OF THE SELF*

JERROLD SEIGEL
Department of History, New York University

I want to begin by thanking all the participants in today's roundtable for their comments and criticisms, and especially those who worked to conceive and arrange it. I am enormously flattered, as I think most people would be, to find myself the subject of sustained attention, however critical, over a whole afternoon, and especially from such thoughtful and insightful colleagues. Too bad for me that I did not have all these critiques before finishing the book, since it would surely have been better for them. It did profit from earlier comments by two of today's panel members, Peter Gordon and Anthony La Vopa; that they have both been willing to add to the discussion in the way they have now is a mark of intellectual and personal generosity that I greatly appreciate. Let me take up each of the four comments in turn.

Aaron Garrett raises important and serious questions, and in certain regards I simply want to accept what he offers. My book has too little to say about war and religious conflict as creating the frame in which early modern concern about the self arose. Giving more attention to such things could have helped put some of the thinkers' concerns and ideas in greater relief. I like and admire Garrett's formulation that Locke's project was to build "a moral identity without a particular confessional commitment—one that does not hold that our ultimate moral value can be fully decided before we were born or in relation to laws we are unaware of or at the whim of a bigoted or irritable God."

I would submit all the same that my dealings with Locke do go a certain way toward seeing him in this light, first because I emphasize his rejection of attempts to comprehend the self as some kind of unchanging substance, god-given or not, and because I suggest a connection between this anti-metaphysical stance and the Puritan heritage he received from his father. Perhaps I was wrong to suppose that the fierceness of the struggles over religion in seventeenth-century Europe could go without saying; Locke's position as a theorist of toleration is of course well known. But religious conflict was not the only reason why people in his time needed to navigate between conflicting moral identities, and I point to another when I suggest that Locke's sense of himself developed in the context



https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306000795 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of an evident tension between the almost groveling subordination he expressed in writing to his patron Alexander Popham, and the more egalitarian kinds of intellectual exchange he experienced with his friends and in correspondence. By emphasizing that Locke was caught up in both such social relations at once, I think I identify a ground of conflicting identities no less important than the one Garrett highlights; its relation to Locke's own case is clear and direct.

But Garrett also asks why I make Locke bulk so large in the story, glancing over Hobbes. One chief reason is that, unlike Hobbes, Locke gave sustained and explicit attention to the self as a problem. As an intellectual historian this seems to me an important difference. Hobbes does in a way have a view about the self, namely that it is bodily; even intellectual differences between individuals he sees as rooted more in temperament or each person's ruling passion than in any separate rational faculty. But the fierce consistency of Hobbes's materialism makes all this an open-and-shut case for him. The interesting question to which Garrett points, how individuals can negotiate the division between a natural self and a conventional self, may be implied by Hobbes's political theory, but it is not one I find him ever directly posing himself. Although on one level he believed that the passions of the natural self persist inside civil society where individuals have renounced the right to give free expression to them, he never seems to ask about how or with what consequences individuals confront these tensions, or how such struggles mark individuals of different sorts. The need for obedience to the sovereign seems to overwhelm these other questions.

Locke, however, considers the issue of personal identity precisely against the background of individual instability and incompleteness. It is just this that his empiricist psychology brought to light, by replacing a view of the person as a permanent substance with one that made individuals subject to the shifting winds of experience. Contemporaries like Bishop Butler decried Locke's view of the self because it established these qualities of fluidity and impermanence at its center. The importance such critics attached to this side of Locke's thinking should remind us that his theory of personal identity did not deny the importance of fissures and fluctuations in the self, but precisely started from them. One of the chief problems he had in view was how an individual can constitute an identifiable person in the face of varied and even contradictory past actions and experiences, including some he or she might wish to renounce in the present. For this reason I think Garrett is wrong to regard Locke's concern about the unity of personality as somehow standing apart from the need to make sense of fluid or multiple identities, and to associate this latter issue solely or mostly with the other figures he names. Locke's theory gave attention to both sides, not just one. That he was not alone in doing so, since Hume, Smith, and other modern thinkers also recognized that identity did not do away with division and fluidity,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306000795 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is a point that I think invalidates many common notions and assertions about the modern self; but that is another story.

Aaron Garrett is surely right that Locke, like Mandeville, Hume, and Smith, was interested in the self first of all from the angle of morality and of moral identity. The same was true of Rousseau. But I would argue that only certain thinkers went on from these starting-points to concentrate specifically on the way selves, as moral agents, are formed, once they can no longer be conceived as permanent substantive entities, and to ask what sort of contribution individuals themselves make to their formation. Locke led the way in doing this. He was followed by others who made consciousness less central to personal identity than he did: Mandeville, who focused in a surprisingly modern way on how personalities are shaped by our conscious and unconscious attempts to resolve the tensions between passion and sociability, and Hume and Smith, who each in his way looked to the mix of self-interested and sympathetic interaction with others as the medium through which we become the individuals we are. All these thinkers, like Rousseau in their time and others later, took a kind of psychic turn within the frame of their concern about moral identity, giving thinking about the self a recognizably modern cast, and justifying the attention I give to them.

Turning to Tony La Vopa's interesting comments, I want to begin as I did with Aaron Garrett, thanking him for suggestions that would indeed have made my book better had I been able to make them myself. Greater attention to the theme of labor would have added depth to some of the book's discussions. Even had I given this attention, however, I would not have been able to identify the very interesting problematic of female intellectual power resting so strongly on effortless grace that it excluded what Tony elegantly calls the "channeled diligence" that makes professional success possible. For that we will have to wait for his own next book. Where I do want to reply to Tony's comments today is in regard to the problematic of the national frames I use to organize and in part to understand the history I try to write. I have time only to consider the issues he raises in regard to my dealings with German thinkers.

First there is the question of whether there is a contradiction between Humboldt's aristocratic cosmopolitanism and his sympathy with what I call the "locally based, still small-scale social life still prevalent in Germany" (p. 346). I do not think there is, although perhaps I did not explain very well why not in my book. The reason is that Germany possessed an unusual mix of cosmopolitanism and localism in the eighteenth century, resting on the peculiar political structure of the Holy Roman Empire. The empire claimed authority in a wide expanse of German lands, and in an ideal sense even beyond, but it ruled effectively in very few of them; in fact, for centuries emperors had granted to princes, towns, and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306000795 Published online by Cambridge University Press

even knights concessions that gave them considerable independence, in exchange for letting the emperors pursue their ambitions outside Germany. From the middle of the seventeenth century many small political authorities there were able to maintain their independence by playing one larger neighbor off against another, often with help from the imperial court. This is the situation Mack Walker has in view when he describes the empire as the "incubator" of German localism. The empire, as David Blackbourn has recently written, "protected the particular in the name of the universal."[1] This connection between localism and cosmopolitanism was focused and strengthened by the university education a number of states provided for their bureaucrats, basing administration on universal principles. The spread of Enlightenment ideas in Germany added a layer to this mix because it took place through local reading societies, where nationally circulated journals modeled on English examples were read and discussed by people determined to improve the quality of their local life. There were, to be sure, tensions between the humanistic ideals of both German education and this new culture on the one side, and the actual operations of states on the other, and Tony La Vopa has analyzed these tensions with much insight.[2] But I think that this mix of localism and cosmopolitanism in German culture suggests not just how Humboldt could combine them, but also that his doing so had something particularly German about it.

Tony's other worry is that my notion about the prevalence in Germany of a mode of thinking that made self and world "isomorphic" or "homologous" gives an idealist cast to thinking about politics that leaves no room for the recognition found in many Germans, including Humboldt, that the state was a kind of machine, and an oppressive one. I could object that I do not entirely ignore such things, but Tony is right that I do not give them much attention. The question, however, is whether, as he maintains, it is my emphasis on the isomorphism of self and world in German thinking that keeps me from doing this.

The reason I think not is that the isomorphism precisely does not diminish the materiality of either the physical or the social world, but even allows for greater emphasis on it. It matters little how powerfully people are driven by self-interest, or how mechanical state procedures may be, if they can be subsumed or sublated, *aufgehoben*, into the progress of a self-reflective subject. The point is relevant not just to Hegel, but also to Kant and Fichte, even in some moods to Schelling, all of whom describe the materiality of the moral and social worlds

1 David Blackbourn, *History of Germay, 1780–1918: the Long Nineteenth Century (*2nd ed., Malden, Mass., and Oxford, 2003), 14.

2 See his article, "Specialists against Specialization: Hellenism as Professional Ideology in German Classical Studies," in *German Professions, 1800–1950,* ed. Geoffrey Cocks and Konrad H. Jarausch (New York and Oxford, 1990), 27–45.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306000795 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with a kind of gusto, born up by their belief that on a deeper level this materiality inheres in structures of purposiveness and reflective intentionality. Although it is hardly news these days, I note that Hegel, in his writings and lectures, gave detailed attention to the ways modern life created "unprecedented problems of poverty, social antagonism, and alienation" (p. 415). This of course was precisely why he regarded demonstrating the rationality of the state as the most difficult task philosophy could set for itself, the one for which he invoked the classical challenge *Hic Rhodus! Hic Salta!* But since he believed himself to be in possession of the key to meeting that dare, he was able to portray contemporary social and political relations in terms that could be very dark indeed. Thus it seems to me that recognizing the mechanical nature of state institutions is not at all incompatible with a way of thinking that posits an isomorphism of world and self.

Judith Surkis worries that I read both Durkheim and Foucault too rigidly. Her own remarks exhibit an admirable subtlety, in harmony with the spirit she attributes to both of them, and she calls attention to important questions in each case. I admit all the same that I still resist her answers. I think she is correct that Durkheim, in discussing marriage and divorce, for instance, saw dependence on society not as a barrier to individual liberty but as "a source of greater autonomy." In her eyes, however, his holding such a view means that I go too far when I read him as saying that individuals were wholly dependent on society for whatever autonomy they achieved. This issue requires some clarification.

Professor Surkis sees social dependence as a source of the autonomy individuals possess in Durkheim's world; so do I. This is not where we differ. But she reads this interaction between dependence and autonomy as allowing for a more flexible relationship between individuals and society than I assert. Now, in order for her to be correct, one would have to show that Durkheim found sources of autonomy in individuals independently of what society makes of them; that is, he would have to have regarded individual nature as at least a partial source of autonomy and reflectivity, able to cooperate with society in generating it. Only on such a basis could the flexibility and mutuality Surkis speaks about really exist. Did Durkheim in fact do this?

The answer I give in my book, and to which I still hold, is that he did, at least in part, in some early works, but not in his later ones. This evolution, I believe, is the product of the tension we find in him from very early on, between a desire to affirm the moral validity of individual difference, and a felt need to make society the source both of all moral value and of individuality itself. In his first book, *The Division of Labor*, he wrote,

> To be a person is to be an autonomous source of action. Man acquires this quality only in so far as there is something in him which is his alone and which individualizes him, as

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306000795 Published online by Cambridge University Press

he is something more than the simple incarnation of the genetic type of his race and his group.[3]

Here autonomy requires individuality, the difference between one person and another. But it is social development, the growth of the division of labor, that makes such differentiation of individuals possible, rather than anything in individual nature. In a letter of this period Durkheim wrote that "our personality is made up of great part of loans," and in his book he named the creditor: "Because the individual is not sufficient unto himself, it is from society that he receives everything necessary to him."

I cannot take time here to rehearse the social experience that I think lay behind Durkheim's need to affirm these discrepant, if not wholly irreconcilable, views at the same time, but it seems to me clear enough that as the years went on he resolved the tension between them by giving ever greater weight to what all individuals equally derive from society, rather than to anything that distinguishes them from each other. It seems to me extremely significant in this regard that he seldom or never portrayed society as the field of interaction between individuals, depicting it instead as an actual being *sui generis*, with its own special nature. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* he attributed to it "a unique intelligence, where all others meet each other, and after a fashion, come to nourish themselves." Such nourishment was essential in his view, because social being was the source of every stable form of logical thinking; for this reason the representations society creates "have within themselves a sort of force or moral ascendency, in virtue of which they impose themselves upon individual minds."[4] To be sure, individuals were empowered by these social benefits; Judith Surkis and I do not disagree about this. But such views left no room for a reconciliation of individual and social sources of rational autonomy because they allowed for no significant individual ones; the transaction was a one-way street.

It is true, as Judith Surkis reminds us, that Durkheim did not regard the determining power of society as so rigid that it left no margin for individual difference. To do so one would have to deny the existence of deviance, crime, and criticism, all of which Durkheim recognized—how could he not? In addition, social change, such as was evident in nineteenth-century Europe, undermined old beliefs and attitudes, weakening society's hold still further. No one who valued progress, as Durkheim did, could regret all this. But it has little to do with whether individuals possessed resources of their own for becoming reflective and rational, and the work Professor Surkis appeals to for finding a different configuration in Durkheim's thinking, *Rules of Sociological Method*, does not really argue that they

3 I give the source of this extract and the quotes below in *The Idea of the Self*, 487–88.

4 *Ibid.*, 482–83.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306000795 Published online by Cambridge University Press

do. Here as elsewhere he saw the aim of moral education as bringing individuals to recognize their overwhelming debts to society and accept their subordination to it. The social force, he said there, was natural, not merely conventional, and it "lay at the heart of reality itself." To induce the individual freely to submit to it,

> it is sufficient to make him aware of his natural state of dependence and inferiority . . . Reflection which causes man to understand how much richer or more complex and permanent the social being is than the individual being, can only reveal to him reasons to make comprehensible the subordination which is required of him.[5]

Note that in this formulation the subjection of individuals is required whether they understand the reasons for it or not, although it is better if they do. It seems to me that the space created here for mutual interaction and reconciliation is very narrow at best. I note in my book that Durkheim's insistence that society was the source of whatever was moral and rational in individuals led him into one characteristic dilemma. In the first years of the twentieth century he argued that, since selfishness and narrow-mindedness diminish in the degree that one passes from individuals to local groups to national ones and then to the new international sociability he saw developing, the perspective that was freest of subjective prejudice was the most cosmopolitan one, bringing new and higher levels of morality and objectivity. But when he disapproved of working-class groups who appealed to progressive internationalism as a basis for disobeying some national laws, Durkheim was forced to retreat from the more general society to a less general one, arguing that something he called *la patrie in abstracto* bore a moral consciousness superior to that of socialist internationalism. What he here admitted against his will, as Bergson later recognized about him, was that society could never be the kind of actual being he imagined it to be, one with the capacity to think, and thus to provide individuals with the logical and moral categories necessary for rationality and autonomy.

Judith Surkis's objections to my reading of Foucault are, as she notes, akin to her remarks on Durkheim. Against my taking seriously and literally Foucault's declarations that the subject is "not the vis-à-vis of power, but one of its prime effects,"[6] and thus colonized by it, she finds in him an interest in "normative regulation" whose power leaves room for flexibility and criticism.

Foucault was a complex thinker and there are many passages in his writings that are difficult to interpret. But I do not see how a reading of him in terms of regulation and flexibility can make sense of the notion of *assujetissement* that

5 *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. W. D. Halls, ed. Steven Lukes (New York, 1982), 143–44.

6 Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *idem, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–77*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York, 1980), 98.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306000795 Published online by Cambridge University Press

lies at the center of his classic and most famous works, such as *Madness and Civilization* and *Discipline and Punish*. *Assujetissement* is the operation by which individuals are made subjects in two senses, given an awareness of themselves as free agents, and simultaneously subjected to the directing conditions within which their belief in their freedom arises. In the frame this notion creates it does not matter that individuals are declared to be free, since that freedom is already understood as the vehicle of their subjection. Thus the sentence from "The Subject and Power" Professor Surkis cites simply does not have the meaning she wishes to find in it; this is why the word "free" appears twice inside quotation marks. The prisoner inside the panopticon is free in just this way, able to choose between becoming a responsible worker and citizen or not. This freedom is created by the imprisonment to which power subjects him; he would not have regarded submission to the law as a form of freedom outside it. To accept it as such now is to equate his freedom with subjection to the gaze he feels to be upon him even when the guardian is absent. This is *assujetissement*, the discovery by individuals of their subjectivity inside contexts that infuse their agency with the structures of choice that power creates.

That a certain margin of non-determined behavior can remain here, as in Durkheim, may be true but it is beside the point. Only by leaving this margin open can *assujetissement* do its work, giving individuals the sense that the choices they make are free. Exercising such choices brings no significant kind of autonomy, however, no escape from the coils of power. This is one reason why, in these works, Foucault appeals to modes of liberation he regarded as more genuine, precisely because they can find no place inside the prison-house of modernity, namely those that derive from madness or deviancy or suicide, from Nietzschean and Heideggerian transcendence, or from Bataille's tortured notion of sovereign violence against the self and the world that forms it.

Peter Gordon offers many interesting and provocative observations. I only wish I could deal with them all. Let me say in passing that I do not regard one-dimensional views of the self as "flat"; quite the contrary, if I may turn the metaphor a bit, they are often notably bubbly and effervescent. That is just their problem, since they may induce a kind of high that encourages us to think our powers are much greater than they are, alongside lows with the opposite effect.

Peter objects to my account of Heidegger because he thinks it insufficiently informed by the philosopher's conviction that *Dasein* can never escape its condition of thrownness. Even authenticity is only a modification of this condition, which attaches *Dasein* forever to what he calls "its worldly and practical involvements over time," and therefore to "such involvements and the inherited norms of social existence that gave them their meaning." Whatever authenticity *Dasein* achieves comes about inside these connections and therefore its dependency on them can never be altered.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306000795 Published online by Cambridge University Press

I think I understand the attractions of this kind of communitarian reading of Heidegger, but it seems to me sufficiently attentive neither to the drama of *Dasein* Heidegger stages nor to the kind of community in relation to which it unfolds. Yes, *Dasein* first encounters itself as thrown, but in doing so it comes upon a still more primordial condition of its existence, namely its temporality. Discovering itself inside a condition it never willed, *Dasein* is filled with wonder at this situation; thus it enters into the tension between feeling no responsibility for its condition, and the deeper sense of accountability that bubbles up when it asks how it came to be there. It always already projects itself beyond the condition for which it is not responsible, and thus displays the temporality that distinguishes itself from all the forms of being it finds around it. Heidegger analyzes this temporality as consisting in *Dasein*'s simultaneous inherence in three separate states, the "ec-stases" of past, present, and future. This projective temporality is the ground for other defining features of *Dasein*'s way of being, and critically, for Heidegger, what he calls its "factical transcendence." As "factical" *Dasein* exists in a material form that makes it resemble stones and plants and animals, but it simultaneously differs radically from them because it is never fully enclosed in any given mode of being, never subject to objective determination in a persisting present. It is always what it is not yet, it always projects itself beyond its present mode of being. Its thrownness participates in this condition.

It is precisely this temporality that, in Heidegger's thinking, occupies the place Kant assigned to transcendental subjectivity, giving to the world the form that it has in human consciousness. For Heidegger, however, this form is not characterized by material objectivity, but by the appearance of things first of all as "ready to hand," that is, in contexts of purpose and use. This makes *Dasein* communal and cultural, to be sure, but for Heidegger there is a further crucial reason why *Dasein* reveals the world to itself in this way, namely that its doing so prepares the full recognition of its own purposiveness that will come later on. This it achieves in authenticity, the state in which *Dasein* becomes resolutely purposeful, taking upon itself the full responsibility for the world in which it finds itself that it has implicitly born all along, and acting so as to make this world adequate to the transcendent being it discovers itself to be.

To read *Being and Time* as Peter Gordon proposes, making it above all a call to recognize and examine the social involvements that constitute *Dasein*'s life as thrown being, strips the Heideggerian analytic of the intense and portentous drama that animates it from beginning to end. This drama pushes forward toward the culminating moment when *Dasein* discovers and realizes the meaning of the sense of responsibility for its own being that has been pullulating in its consciousness from the start. To Heidegger it is of great moment that this responsibility include *Dasein*'s role as author of the condition of fallenness and inauthenticity that seems to reduce it to the condition of an object determined by

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306000795 Published online by Cambridge University Press

conditions outside itself. This is the state of retreat or abandonment of personal being to *das Man*, the "one" or "they." Peter objects to my characterizing this state as one of radical determination by relational conditions, but in doing so he fails to confront the things Heidegger says about it, namely that in it every individual denies any accountability for his or her condition, locating it wholly in its relations to the nameless others who equally cede responsibility to the same faceless relations. I do not see how a self in this state can be characterized other than as wholly constituted by its relationality; recognizing this does not depend on translating *das Man* only as "they" rather than as "one." The German *das Man* can mean both things, and the difference between them recedes in the face of the descriptions Heidegger gives.

To be sure, authentic *Dasein* never breaks wholly free of the world where it has experienced this subjection.[7] To say, as Peter does, that authenticity is, for Heidegger, a modification of thrownness, or at least of everydayness, is indeed correct. But modification is a vague word, and the modification here is no mere altered coloration, it requires a radical break. To see how radical, we need to remember what kind of community Heidegger has in mind when he imagines this modification, namely the German *Volksgemeinschaft*. The special qualities Heidegger saw in this set of norms and involvements are not yet clear in his text of 1927, but they are in his speeches and writings between 1933 and 1935. Here what made this community the proper setting for understanding the modification of everydayness was that it was prepared to sacrifice its current mode of existence in obedience to the primordial transcendence of its being. Like *Dasein* confronting its own inauthentic mode of existence in the face of death, Germans embarking on the great adventure into which they entered in 1933 were particularly characterized by "courage," "hardness," "severity," and the willingness to assume the danger of self-destruction on behalf of recovering the authentic meaning of their existence. The common readiness of members of this heroic community to sacrifice themselves in the cause of self-transcendence made the discovery of authenticity in the face of death at once an individual and a social project. Participating in this project involved a certain continuity

7 All the same, the claim that my account, which I have just summarized, and in particular the part of it that describes *Dasein* as separating itself from the kind of selfhood characteristic of *das Man*, is without textual basis in *Being and Time* is clearly wrong. Heidegger writes: "To what is one called when one is thus appealed to? To one *own Self*. Not to what *Dasein* counts for, can do, or concerns itself with in being with one another publicly, nor to what it has taken hold of, set about, or let itself be carried along with. The sort of *Dasein* which is understood after the manner of the world both for Others and for itself, gets *passed over* in this appeal. . . . And because only the *Self* of the they-self gets appealed to and brought to bear, the "*they*" collapses." Quoted from *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York and San Franciso, 1962), 317; see *The Idea of the Self*, 576.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306000795 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with the condition of absorption inside *das Man*, in that here too all individuals accepted their subjection to a great anonymous power, now the power of death. But here subjection has become the source of authenticity, in contrast to the earlier fallenness, and since some individuals arrive at this point more rapidly than those around them, these few were justified in becoming "the conscience of others." In the early 1930s Heidegger clearly ascribed this role to participants in the Nazi revolution, such as himself. To me this remains a remarkable example of the coming together of a radically self-reflective view of selfhood with a radically relational one: *Dasein* effects its self-transformation wholly from within, recognizing in itself the power to take responsibility for both its personal being and its "situation," while simultaneously inserting itself more deeply into the community that undergoes a parallel upheaval.

Much as I would like to reply to Peter's detailed comments on Derrida, I think it better to use the remaining time to consider some of the more general considerations he raises at the end. Peter is worried by my resistance to the social ontology of thinkers such as Heidegger and Derrida, and in particular to their view "that relationality itself gives us what we need to be individuals." Indeed I do resist such claims, and on the ground that not only does relationality not give us what we need to be individuals, but more importantly it does not give us what we need to be the kind of social creatures we are. The reasons it does not have to do with the intricacy and complexity of human cultures and languages, participation in which requires an active engagement by beings with an independent capacity for subjective judgment and inventiveness. The case has been argued very well, I think, by figures I cite, including Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Hollis, and earlier Michel Bréal, the linguist who invited Saussure to Paris. Like Saussure himself Bréal understood that language requires active subjects to navigate its obscure places and give it life. If language is rightly called the educator of humanity, he wrote, the reason is not that it imparts its structures to us, but that its many gaps and anomalies leave us so much work to do in order to communicate and to think with the tools it offers. In the end I think Derrida's transactions with language only end up, much against his will, demonstrating exactly this; precisely because of the uncertainties and traps he so ingeniously uncovers in language, only creatures with a subjectivity that is not wholly formed by it could employ it. That languages exist at all is testimony to how much our relationality must be animated by a reflectivity of which social relations are not the sole author.

I do not believe it to be true, as Peter suggests, that my taking this position means I give a kind of hidden primacy to the reflective dimension. Reflectivity is necessary to human beings precisely because they are simultaneously bodily and cultural creatures, that is, because they exist in both the other two dimensions. Since they do, they must possess some power that resists their full absorption

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306000795 Published online by Cambridge University Press

into either one or the other, even as it guides them in responding to the demands each of the other dimensions makes. (That reflectivity bears this relationship to the other dimensions may be why it is sometimes nurtured and sometimes threatened by the tension between them.) For these reasons I think the social ontologies of thinkers such as Heidegger and Derrida remain insufficient guides both to human selves and to their cultural relations. Three-dimensionality is not just a rhetorical slogan that provides a sly advantage over those who think relationality can be everything; it refers to evident features of the self that one-dimensional theories ignore or distort. I freely admit that showing this to be the case has been one of my major aims in trying to revisit the history of thinking about the self.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306000795 Published online by Cambridge University Press