

One

Introduction

Simon Critchley and Peter Dews

The central aim of the present collection of essays is to highlight the *variety* of ways in which subjectivity has been interpreted within the Continental philosophical tradition, from post-Kantian idealism (Jacobi, Schelling) to post-Husserlian phenomenology (Heidegger, Levinas), psychoanalysis, Frankfurt Critical Theory, poststructuralism, and more recent developments. However, our title suggests an argument which goes even further than the claim that a certain model of the subject—whether identified as the principle of a totalising reflexivity, as universal ground for epistemic certainty, as self-presence, or as rational self-assertion and mastery—has been allowed, up until quite recently, to dominate the scene even if only by its negation. It implies that, when the full range of what has been thought under the concept of the ‘subject’ comes into view, and when the possibilities of *genuine* alternatives are assessed, then the subject may appear, in many of its guises, to be one of the driving forces behind—rather than the prime defense against—that unravelling of metaphysics which has come to be known, after Derrida, as “deconstruction.” Might it not be the case that the subject appears, disruptive and uncontainable, at the very point of breakdown of the foundational project of philosophical thinking?

If one were to seek the inaugural moment of such a breakdown, then the dramatic interventions of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi into the debates of the 1780s and ‘90s would seem an obvious place to start. Two of the essays in this collection are concerned with exploring the—near or remote—consequences of Jacobi’s path-breaking arguments within the context of German idealism. In his contribution, Andrew Bowie suggests that Heidegger’s generalizations concerning “all philosophizing in the modern period since Descartes,” which he describes as knowing “in advance, or [thinking] it knows, that everything can be proven and grounded in an absolutely strict and pure manner,”¹ overlooks the disruption of this project which begins with

Jacobi's attack on the consequences of the Enlightenment. Furthermore, Bowie argues, Jacobi's contrast between 'truth' and 'the true,' and his celebrated claim that "the greatest achievement of the enquirer is to disclose and to reveal existence (*Dasein*)," point towards Heidegger's own conception of truth as disclosure or unconcealment. In Jacobi's case, of course, this prephilosophical, indeed pretheoretical dwelling in the truth includes an unshakeable sense of ourselves as free and morally responsible beings, a sense which Heidegger—certainly after the *Kehre*—would wish to qualify heavily. At the same time however, what is important for Jacobi in this "subjecthood" is its radical otherness with respect to all worldly entities and relations. As Dieter Henrich puts it: "In grappling with Spinoza's thinking [Jacobi] came to the conviction that in the dimension foundational for acquiring an understanding of ourselves, one must reckon with relations that cannot be mastered in the conceptual structure underlying the knowledge of finite objects . . . once this fact and the reasons for it are appreciated, one is free to give the relation-to-self a constitution hitherto unimaginable, even by those who had recognized the singular, disclosive significance of this relation and the difficulties entangling attempts to master it theoretically."²

Andrew Bowie traces the convoluted path of Schelling's efforts to take up the challenge of Jacobi's thinking, his constant struggle to reconcile the systematic requirements of thinking with an acknowledgment of the *resistance* of the subject to theorization. Schelling's fundamental objection to Jacobi is that his appeal to intuition fails to contest rationalism on its own terrain: "If Jacobi maintains that philosophy cannot grant precisely what is most eagerly desired of it, namely an explanation of what lies beyond the border of common experience, then he is in complete agreement and harmony with rationalism, only differing by the fact that he refers, in relation to everything which ought to be the highest prize of philosophy, to non-philosophy, to non-knowledge—to feeling, to a vague idea, or else, particularly in his earlier writings, to belief . . ."³ At the same time, however, Schelling is profoundly aware of the elusiveness of our fundamental self-understanding. Perhaps most famously, the 1809 treatise *On the Essence of Human Freedom* begins by posing the fundamental question of how our primordial, inarticulate awareness of freedom can be acknowledged without denying the necessary interdependence of conceptual determinations. Here, as throughout the later work of Schelling, freedom functions not as the principle of an objectifying

domination but rather as that groundlessness which ultimately undermines the possibility of a philosophical totalization, whose ineluctable imperative is simultaneously acknowledged. From this standpoint, as Bowie indicates, due consideration of the work of Schelling drastically alters our sense of German idealism as advancing towards the final transfiguration of substance into subject in Hegel.

Manfred Frank's contribution is also concerned with Schelling's thought, although concentrating on the phase of the *Identitätsphilosophie*. Frank seeks to demonstrate that Schelling's concept of identity lies at the heart of an attempt to overcome the model of the world-objectifying subject which is profoundly rooted in the history of Western metaphysics. Schelling's subject does not stand autarkically over against a degraded nature but knows itself part of that to which it finds itself opposed, in a complex structure of identity which does not exclude diremption and difference. Although Schelling will ultimately abandon the *Identitätsphilosophie*, because of its inadequate account of freedom, he will never cease struggling to overcome the model of an originary subject surveying the inertness of an objectified reality from its transcendental fastness. Indeed, as Schelling's thinking develops, the subject increasingly becomes a vortex of conflicting forces, permanently liable to perversion and disruption: "The subject which is at first a subject which is *pure* and not present to itself—in wishing to *have* itself, in becoming object to itself—is tainted with contingency . . . It admittedly wants itself *as* such, but precisely this is impossible in an *immediate* way; in the very wanting itself (*in Wollen selbst*) it already becomes another and distorts itself."⁴

As Bowie mentions, a subterranean link runs from the thought of Schelling to Freudian theory. A number of commentators, Odo Marquard most prominently, have argued that the irreducible *tension* between nature and history, the insistence on a 'ground' which cannot be conceptually sublated, which demarcates Schelling's thought from Hegel's, clearly anticipates themes which will be central to psychoanalysis. Since nature cannot be eliminated as a force independent of, and in many ways resistant to, processes of logical development, whether individual or collective, "it is crucially a matter of guaranteeing—or at least of comprehending—that nature in history can and does work, not 'against' reason and history, but 'in the same sense as' reason, history and human 'culture.' To this end, it must be shown that, and shown how, nature is somehow able to operate rationally and historically. This is the problem of '*reason through un-reason*,' of an

indirect reason.'⁵ This gulf between such a notion of indirect reason and the familiar "postmodernist" target of the rational, autonomous subject can readily be seen from the following remarks of Schelling: "The basis of understanding is therefore madness. Thus madness is a necessary element, which should merely not come to the fore, not be actualized. What we call understanding, if it is effective, living, active understanding, is really nothing other than coordinated madness."⁶

Explicitly psychoanalytical versions of such a perspective on the subject are explored in the essays by Phillippe van Haute and Peter Dews. Van Haute describes the Freudian subject as torn between guilty submission to the transcendent source of authority (in Freud's mythology, the murdered primal father) and an identification with this authority which threatens to produce a totalitarian closure of the social. Not the least valuable feature of Van Haute's contribution is the manner in which it exposes the fantasy of a pure encounter with alterity, the counterpart of a simplifying critique of the subject which powers certain forms of postmodernist discourse. As Van Haute writes, "The incorporating movement has always already started. Consequently, there is no moment when we are confronted with the other in its pure otherness. The process of cannibalistic identification that is directed towards absolute immanence is always already there from the very beginning."⁷ Van Haute concludes that the defense against a repressive closure of the social cannot succeed simply through advocating respect for the other, since without a moment of identification the result would be a complete disintegration of political bonds. In this sense Van Haute redescribes subjectivity itself as a constant oscillation and balancing between alienating, guilt-induced individuation and an equally alienating submersion in the collective.

In his essay, Peter Dews looks at the model of intersubjectivity which is implicit in Lacan's rethinking of psychoanalysis and which can be seen as challenging Habermas's conception of the relation between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, as the principles of historically sequential paradigms. In Lacan's thinking, it could be said, each of these principles "deconstructs" the other, revealing a subject of the unconscious which resists and skews the reciprocal structures of intersubjectivity, just as these structures in their turn expose the illusory stability of the "subject" as ego. Focusing on the joker in Habermas's pack of validity-claims, namely, "truthfulness," Dews seeks to show how Lacan's account of a "truth of the subject" which transcends any determinate context parallels the explication of validity-

claims in Habermas, while subverting the latter's attempt to theorize the subject entirely in interactive and communicative terms.

The other major source for contemporary Continental debates on the subject is post-Husserlian phenomenology, especially Heidegger. In their markedly different ways, each of the essays by Rudolf Bernet, Simon Critchley, Ute Guzzoni, Dominique Janicaud, Jean-Luc Marion, and Rudi Visker begin from Heidegger's critique of the subject in *Being and Time*, if only to then proceed to a critique of that critique.

For Heidegger, the opening of the question of Being is intrinsically related to the opening of the question of the Being of being human, in ways which do not rush precipitously into a metaphysical determination of the human being as, for example, one often finds in the philosophical employment of concepts like 'subject,' 'mind,' 'consciousness,' 'ego,' 'person,' or 'agent.' Heidegger pursues this question in *Being and Time* by examining the human being under the title of *Dasein*, understood as that being who is defined by the fact that Being is an issue for it, who has itself in question, who can raise the question of its "who." One might say that *Dasein* is the entity who comes *before* the subject, whose existence precedes the epistemological division of entities into subjects and objects. In its everyday, inauthentic existence, Heidegger claims, *Dasein* is *Mitsein*, it is in the world with others before it is with itself. Although, in its authentic existence—through the experience of angst, death, and conscience—*Dasein* becomes individualized and resolute, that is, it becomes a Self, this conception of authentic selfhood cannot be confused with metaphysical conceptions of subjectivity. Or can it?

Such is the question that animates the contributions of Critchley, Janicaud, Marion, and Visker, namely: is *Dasein*, that is, the conception of the human being that is explicitly opposed to the subject, itself free from the traces of metaphysical subjectivity, or is it one of the last heirs to this metaphysical tradition? As a way of exploring the fate of the subject in the phenomenological tradition, Marion takes the example of *Dasein* and asks, "To what extent does the existential analytic exceed the problematic (and thus also the abolition) of the metaphysical subject?" After a discussion of *Being and Time*, Marion concludes that the Heideggerian claim to anticipatory resoluteness (*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*) as the authentic structure of *Dasein*, and Heidegger's description of the latter in terms of self-constancy (*Selbst-ständigkeit*),⁸

mean that the *Dasein*-analytic rediscovers “the metaphysical avatar of constitutive subjectivity.” Marion continues,

Thus arises the prodigious paradox of 1927: the extasis of care, which radicalizes the destruction of the transcendental subject in Descartes, Kant, and Husserl, nonetheless leads to a miming of the subject by re-establishing an autarky of *Dasein*, identical to itself through itself up to the point where this ipseity stabilizes itself in a self-positing . . . The shadow of the ego falls across *Dasein*.⁹

Similar conclusions are arrived at by Janicaud and Visker. Janicaud critically questions Heidegger’s desire to destroy subjectivity, and, after a discussion of the structure of self-relation or self-reflection that emerges in Heidegger’s analyses of anxiety, death, and conscience, he concludes,

If, therefore, the Self is not erased but stripped of its import as soon as the existential analytic is deployed, one must yield to the observation that subjectivity is neither destroyed nor emptied of content by Heidegger. It is metamorphosed, but nevertheless preserved and even revived through the fundamental role of the *Selbst*.¹⁰

Yet, if the conception of self possessed by *Dasein* does not free itself so easily from the confines of metaphysical subjectivity, and indeed might even remain a prisoner of metaphysical language, then Janicaud does not content himself with passing judgement on Heidegger but rather sketches an alternative approach to subjectivity, as what he calls a *diaphanous* subjectivity. The latter is a conception of the self as a transparent openness to both its own being-in-the-world and that of others, which is prefigured, Janicaud intriguingly suggests, in Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Such a diaphanous subjectivity would avoid what Janicaud sees as the *reactivity* (in Nietzsche’s sense) of Heidegger’s discourse on the subject, in which one must choose between either a metaphysical subject or an ecstatical opening to the truth of Being. As such, diaphanous thought might be “liberated from all reactive gestures with respect to metaphysical *theoria*” and might respond to the “practico-existential radicalism of *Being and Time*.”¹¹

Is everydayness necessarily inauthentic? Is Heidegger’s discourse on *das Man* as the ‘self’ of inauthentic everydayness, necessarily part

of a moralizing critique of the public realm (Arendt) with the instrument of a "jargon of authenticity" (Adorno)? Is what Heidegger says of the falling or "dropping" (*verfallen*) of *Dasein* into *das Man* still subject to the metaphysics of subjectivity, or does it already move beyond it? In his contribution, Visker pursues these questions by investigating the link between Heidegger's discourse on the subject and the themes of authenticity and inauthenticity. He shows convincingly both that *ambiguity* is what Heidegger fears most (it is one of the defining characteristics of *das Man*), and yet ambiguity is what haunts the analysis of *Being and Time* at every turn. In this way, a subtle fissure opens up between the ambiguous structures of Heidegger's text and Heidegger's desire to eliminate ambiguity. The fact that Heidegger fails to keep to his promise of an everydayness that would not be necessarily inauthentic, or the fact that existentials like falling or "dropping" disappear from the existential analytic, follow not, Visker claims, from the logic of Heidegger's analytic, but rather from a *decision* imposed upon that analytic, where everydayness and falling are judged to be inauthentic. The intriguing question that Visker raises for the future reading of Heidegger's early work is whether we could keep the richness and ambiguity of Heidegger's existential analytic and do without his decision to reduce ambiguity.

So, if *Dasein* represents less a break with the tradition of the metaphysics of subjectivity than the latest heir to that tradition, is this also true of Heidegger's work after the *Kehre*, where the call to which *Dasein* responds is not its own voice of conscience but the call of Being itself, the *Anspruch des Seins*? What is the nature of this call? And what is the nature of the being who is called? Such are the questions taken up by Marion in the later sections of his contribution. Although broadly sympathetic to the ambition of the later Heidegger, Marion criticizes him for failing to provide an analytic of the being to whom the call is made, what Heidegger calls simply (perhaps too simply), *Mensch*. Marion gives an original phenomenological analysis of the call and the one called, whom he calls *l'interloqué*, "the interlocuted." The latter is analyzed under four headings—convocation, surprise, interlocution, and facticity—and on the basis of this analysis Marion claims that the selfhood of the being who is called is not autarkically given but received from a call or appeal that gives me to myself. In a claim that is not too distant from the spirit of Visker's analysis, Marion argues for an originary inauthenticity insofar as what is most my own and most proper to me derives from a call that is not mine, that is

im-proper; he writes, "Authenticity, far from opening upon an untained origin or leading back to such an origin, dissimulates after the fact the originally inauthentic movement of the gift."¹²

Marion's thesis of an originary inauthenticity produces a picture of the self as radically divided or differentiated within itself, where "authentic" selfhood would be nothing other than the capacity for an inauthentic loss of self—self-experience is self-loss. It is this theme that also motivates Bernet's original phenomenological account of self-experience, where it is claimed that "*Affectivity*, or better, *the possibility of being touched and moved* is the privileged place for such an experience of self." However, such an experience of the affective loss of self does not entail the traumatic annihilation of the self but, rather, "maintains and reveals the self to the self as a tense, changing and vulnerable self."¹³ Bernet pursues this theme of self-experience as division in three moments. First, in moral self-experience, the phenomenon of conscience is precisely that of a division of the self, where the voice of conscience is both that which transcends the self and which is immanent to the self, a claim that Bernet makes good in a discussion of conscience in *Being and Time*. Second, in psychoanalysis, the division of the self is acknowledged in Freud's late notion of *Ichspaltung*, which is elaborated by Lacan as a division that takes place at the level of language itself in terms of the distinction between the speaking subject (*sujet de l'énonciation*) and the subject spoken about (*sujet de l'énoncé*). Third, in relation to Derrida, far from declaring the so-called death of the subject, one can find in Derrida's work an implicit acknowledgement of the differential structure of self-experience, "There exists no interior self-consciousness without an exterior appearance of the subject in pronouncements, gestures, activities, and so on."¹⁴ However, for Bernet, the most fundamental characteristic of self-experience is its affectivity, a feeling of oneself, an affectivity that is not reducible to the spectre of auto-affection (should such a thing ever be possible) but is rather an experience of self as loss of self. This thesis is then pursued through a discussion of co-affectivity or feeling together, the most powerful example of which is sexuality, that strange dialectic of self-gain and self-loss that characterizes the libidinal body.

This account of the divided self constituted in affectivity presents striking parallels with the account of the subject in Emmanuel Levinas's work, as it is presented in Simon Critchley's contribution. Although subjectivity has been a constant theme in Levinas's work, Critchley focuses on the presentation of the subject in Levinas's sec-

ond major book, *Otherwise than Being; or, Beyond Essence*,¹⁵ where Levinas explicitly situates his work as a response to the poststructuralist and antihumanist critique of the subject. For Levinas, the subject is constituted not at the level of intentionality or consciousness—such, for Levinas, is Husserl’s persistent intellectualism—but rather at the level of sensibility of simple sensing (*le sentir*), what Levinas also calls *life*. Life, for Levinas, is love of life and love of what life lives from: the sensible, material world. Levinas’s work offers what, with Michel Henry, we might call a *material phenomenology* of subjective life.¹⁶ For Levinas—and this is what is persistently misunderstood about his work—ethics is not an obligation at the level of consciousness, where my responsibility to the other is mediated through rationality, the universalization of maxims, good conscience, or some formal-procedural conception of justice; rather, ethics is *lived* in the sensibility and corporeality of a relation to alterity. In a continuation of Marion’s and Bernet’s arguments (and also, as Critchley shows, with elements of Lacan and the later Merleau-Ponty), the Levinasian subject is shown to be originally inauthentic, that is, the identity of the subject is not available to consciousness or to reflection and is structured intersubjectively in a relation to alterity. The ethical subject experiences itself as a divergence from self, an experience that Levinas describes as trauma, and which, for him, describes the responsible structure of the psyche. As such, the Levinasian conception of the subject does not react conservatively to the poststructuralist or antihumanist critique of the subject by nostalgically trying to restore the primacy of the free, autonomous ego. On the contrary, it is precisely because the discourses of antihumanism and poststructuralism have deposed the subject from its position of sovereignty that what Levinas calls the sanctity (*la sainteté*) of the human can be delineated.

In a final move, Critchley parallels Levinas’s conception of the subject with certain of Derrida’s remarks from a conversation with Jean-Luc Nancy.¹⁷ After an intriguing, if ambiguous, allusion to the possibility of “post-deconstructive” determinations of the responsibility of the subject,¹⁸ Derrida remarks, “In order to recast, if not rigorously refound a discourse on the ‘subject’ . . . one has to go through the experience of a deconstruction.” He continues,

Some might say, quite rightly: but what we call “subject” is not the absolute origin, pure will, identity to self, or presence to self of consciousness but precisely this non-coincidence with self. This

is a riposte to which we'll have to return. By what right do we call this "subject"? By what right, conversely, can we be forbidden from calling this "subject"? I am thinking of those today who would try to reconstruct a discourse on the subject that would not be pre-deconstructive, around a subject that would no longer include the figure of mastery of self, of adequation to self, center and origin of the world, etc. . . . but which would define the subject rather as the finite experience of non-identity to self, as the underivable interpellation inasmuch as it comes from the other, from the trace of the other.¹⁹

Setting aside the obvious Levinasian echoes this passage evokes and noting Derrida's refreshing openness to the possibility of new discourses of subjectivity, phrases like "non-coincidence with self," "finite experience of non-identity to self," and "the interpellation inasmuch as it comes from the other," find resonance with many of the contributions to this book, whether they approach the question of the subject from the context of German idealism, phenomenology, or psychoanalysis. Indeed, as one surveys the entire volume, one is struck by the surprising similarity of convictions and concerns that span such divergent approaches and traditions:

1. There is a need (at once existential, ethical, and political) to maintain discourses on the subject in the face of a cross-traditional consensus that wants to bring about their overcoming.
2. Such discourses on subjectivity are by no means condemned to be conservative or reactive attempts to refound the subject as a stable identity or substantiality, nor are they attempts to find an Archimedean point from which to relaunch the project of metaphysics.
3. Such discourses on subjectivity need not represent a naive return to a pre-deconstructive, pre-Heideggerian, or, indeed, pre-Kantian position.
4. The subject continues in its deconstruction, and is perhaps first truly glimpsed *as* its deconstruction, in the abyssal fountaining of the claims of traditional metaphysics. As Derrida puts it, the recasting of the subject can be achieved only by going through the experience of deconstruction.

5. Deconstruction has a history, that is, it is a name (there might be others, for example, philosophical modernism) for a period in the history of philosophy that is at least two centuries old and which is traversed by a subterranean stream that covertly crosses and connects the diverse landscapes of German idealism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and postmodernism. Deconstruction cannot but be challenged and deepened by a relation to its own (pre)history.

Perhaps it is proper for the last word to go to Ute Guzzoni: "Do we still want to be subjects?" That is, if modern subjectivity consists in a constant struggle against its own self-hypostatization, against a withdrawal into autarky which leads to nihilism, might it not be better if we sought to change terrain and to leave this apparently interminable conflict behind? After a discussion where every word of Guzzoni's initial question is analyzed in terms of the history and possible future of the subject, and a confrontation with the social and impact of subjectivity as a mode of self-relation, she concludes,

Do we still want to be subjects? In my view, no. As subjects Europeans discovered and colonized foreign continents, Christians converted other peoples, men disciplined their wives, and husbands and wives disciplined their children. As subjects individuals have suppressed their own inclinations and needs, while generalities have excluded those elements which could not be incorporated. I believe that we can no longer want to be subjects. But this does not mean that we can renounce questioning ourselves and asking what things would be like, were we to learn to accept ourselves as fallible and not all-determining mortals.²⁰

However, can we rest content with a mere acceptance of fallibility and finitude, without stifling the impulse to philosophical reflection, and thus never raising the deepest issues concerning who we are? How is the appropriate balance to be struck between interrogation and affirmation? Whatever our answer to these questions, the poststructuralist critique, deconstruction or genealogy of the subject, or the Habermasian attempt to displace the subject paradigm with an intersubjective model, must not be allowed to become a headlong flight from the standpoint of the experiencing self, with all its conflicts and paradoxes, including

the temptation of this flight itself. Wherever possible, the insights of these modes of thinking should be mobilized to render the "subject" more worldly, more concrete, more pluralistic, more differentiated. This is no easy task, of course. For as our title, *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, suggests, there will always remain a simultaneous complicity and tension between philosophical reflection, with its potentially de-worlding and dismantling effects, and the traces of singular experience which are both indelible and yet always being written over, erased by their inevitable interpretation.