

1

Subjectivism and the Transcendental Synthesis

Subjectivism is one of the most dominant and powerful viewpoints or categorical schemes in modern philosophy and culture. Subjectivist categories can be seen in early-modern thinkers as diverse as Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, and Kant, and in twentieth-century philosophers as different as A. J. Ayer and Martin Heidegger. Most of the contemporary attacks on what is commonly called 'subjectivism' are in fact critiques of egoism, egology, voluntarism, and the concept of the subject, and therefore fail to grasp the essence and scope of true subjectivism. Subjectivism is like an old and deep-rooted oak penetrating deep into the soil of modern thought, an oak whose branches many critics correctly attack while failing to grasp the trunk and the roots.¹

Subjectivism is the conviction that the *distinction between subjectivity and non-subjectivity is the most fundamental distinction in an inquiry*. Although subjectivism can take on metaphysical, ethical, or other meanings, it is this methodological or systematic dualism which is most basic to it. Subjectivism is the view that the distinction between the subject and what is disclosed in or apparent to or internally related to the subject, on the one hand, and what is not the subject and/or is not internally related to it—in other words, what exists and is to be understood *independently* of any disclosure in or relation to subjectivity—on

the other hand, is the most fundamental distinction for inquiry. Every attempt at understanding the world systematically, methodically, must start somewhere, must use some concepts and distinctions as its basic tools to understand everything else. For subjectivism, the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity is the most fundamental tool for dividing up what is.

Now, it may appear misleading to term this perspective 'subjectivism', when what defines it is a dualism of subject *and* object or non-subject. Philosophies which are firmly realistic, objectivist, and anti-egological in their orientation, even those which deny metaphysical status to the subject, can be just as subjectivist as any absolute idealism or metaphysics of the subject, if they accept the dichotomy as fundamental for inquiry. Why, then, name this perspective 'subjectivist' rather than 'objectivist', 'dualist', etc.? The reason is that the making of this distinction is actually a selection of one particular type of thing—namely, subjectivity or what belongs to subjectivity—from *which* all other facets of reality are distinguished. In other words, out of the totality of discriminable factors or features of what is, subjectivism takes one particular feature of one particular type of being as fundamentally distinct from all other features of reality—which is to say, it takes the distinction between this feature and all else to be the most fundamental distinction for inquiry. The type of being is human being, and distinctive feature is individual consciousness or subjectivity, along with whatever 'belongs' to, whatever exhibits an internal relation to, or subsists 'within' subjectivity.²

Subjectivity is consciousness. That is to say, subjectivity is that feature or activity of human individuals by which humans have awareness of appearances or phenomena, by which things show themselves or are manifest or present to us; it is the awareness of anything whatsoever, the field or totality of appearances. Subjectivity is conceived in various and sometimes ambiguous ways: as an activity, as a metaphysical substance, as the things which appear, and that which allows them to appear.

The words 'object' and 'objectivity' carry multiple meanings. This is because 'subjectivity' or 'consciousness' has multiple meanings, and 'object' and 'objectivity' are generally the coordinated antitheses of the former terms. In the discussion of subjectivism, objectivity will variously mean: 1) reality, or the nature of existences independent of their appearance to individual subjects; 2) appearances or phenomena, which is to say, what appears to an individual subjectivity only insofar as and in the way that it appears; and, 3) the objective or apparent world, which is to say, that which, on the basis of what appears *as* it appears, is taken to exist independently of subjectivity, despite the fact that its entire existence, or existence *in-itself*, is not apparent. (Kant called these things-in-themselves, representations and appearances, respectively.)

The Pervasiveness of Subjectivism

The tremendous intellectual power and pervasiveness of the subjectivist dichotomy, its massive influence on the thinking of theoreticians and the public alike often goes unnoticed. Its obscurity is a measure of its power, of the degree to which we tend to view it as natural and inevitable. What could be more natural than dividing up all of existence into my own mental experience and thoughts, the inside of me, on the one hand, and the rest of the world, the outside in which I act and which I perceive, on the other? Even materialistic philosophers, who deny the mind's metaphysical difference from matter, generally hold that the *content* of subjective experience subsists in a fundamentally distinct order from that of material reality, although the latter determines the former. Obviously, thoughts and perceptions are not part of the being of things outside the mind; they subsist in subjectivity. Their *esse* is not their *percipi*. Idealists, on the other hand, despite their metaphysical grounding of matter in mind, make the same fundamental distinction between the content of the subject's experience and the objective reality of things outside of the subject, whether the latter are caused by a Berkeleyan God or bracketed by a Husserlian *epochē*.

What would it mean to deny subjectivism, to refuse to respect the subjectivist dichotomy? It would mean regarding the subject-object dichotomy as no more fundamental than other distinctions that might be made, for example, between appearance and reality, the finite and the infinite, matter and form, or trees and non-trees. It would mean regarding a subjective entity—for example, a thought—as no less relatable to, no more disparate from an objective entity—for example, a physical, public object—than two thoughts in the mind of one person, or two physical objects. This implies that a person's thoughts, ideas about, or perceptions of a natural entity which exists independently of the person may be internally related to the entity, may be actually a part of what the entity is as a natural, physical thing (not as a merely ideal entity or 'intentional' object). For most modern philosophers of any stripe—realists, idealists, analysts, and phenomenologists, and most non-philosophers as well—such a claim would be absurd and fanciful because it violates the almost universally accepted dichotomy between the order of things and the order of experiences, or objectivity and subjectivity. (I will argue in a later chapter, "The Metaphysics of Culture," that this claim is not absurd; rather, it is the subjectivism which rejects it in principle that leads to absurdity.)

There are, as we will see, a wide variety of terminologies and distinctions which are possible within a general subjectivist orientation. Some philosophers who appear to reject the concept of the subject altogether, such as Heidegger, are nevertheless subjectivist. What determines

subjectivism is the acceptance of a fundamental distinction, not the explicit assertion of the primacy of subjectivity in inquiry. Even where the concept of subjectivity as such seems to have been rejected, if the *function* of subjectivity—to disclose, to make apparent—and the distinction between what is related to or taken up by this function and what is *not* taken up by it remains fundamental, then the viewpoint is subjectivist. For subjectivism, what appears (the totality of evidence available for inquiry) appears by virtue of some internal relation to subjectivity, to the disclosive function of human being. What does not have such a relation to subjectivity cannot appear, and thus cannot be considered evidence in the most primary sense. This position has certain immediate consequences.

First, all percepts, feelings, beliefs, and intentions of which I am conscious fall under the same category: they are all internally related to my consciousness. To adopt a subjectivist position automatically implies that ideas, intentions, and sensations, can be treated as members of a single class, at least initially. They can subsequently, of course, be analyzed into different sub-classes.

Second, the subjectivist position necessarily treats the world into which we can inquire as presentations or appearances. Subjectivism takes the world *as-it-is-for* an individual subject. Subjectivism puts out of bounds the possibility of any internal relation of subjectivity and subjective appearances on the one hand, with beings existing independently of any internal relation to subjectivity, on the other. Subjectivist philosophers do often speak of the latter, and often wish to establish an intrinsic relation between the two, but the fundamental distinction constituting subjectivism makes any such relation problematic. To talk of things existing independently of disclosure or subjectivity as constituting, producing, or being intrinsically related to what appears is *prima facie* to step outside of the subjectivist position and into some form of naturalism. Subjectivism and naturalism are antithetical viewpoints. This does not mean that they have not been historically conjoined; indeed, they usually are, resulting in a dualistic metaphysics.

When subjectivism is in force as a *metaphysical* doctrine it is generally characterized by two claims. First, subjectivist metaphysics identifies mind with individual consciousness. Mental events or qualities are events or qualities belonging to subjectivity. Second, nature or world or objectivity, insofar as they are not considered to belong to subjectivity, are defined as material and metaphysically antithetical to mind.

These two claims are simply the result of the translation of subjectivism as a fundamental claim about evidence into the domain of claims about the ultimate nature of things. That is, they are a result of applying to metaphysical inquiry the notion that the most fundamental philosoph-

ical distinction is that between what-is-subjective and what-is-not, thereby affecting the interpretation of various inherited concepts—mind, matter, mental substance, physical substance. Subjectivism in metaphysics is the view that mind and what-is-not-mind are metaphysical opposites.

This notion finds expression in monistic as well as dualistic metaphysical systems. The eighteenth-century idealist Berkeley accepts this principle no less than Descartes: matter and mind cannot be conceived as having anything in common, metaphysically speaking. Though both accept this principle, they derive antithetical conclusions, to be sure. Berkeley claims that consequently there can be no matter, whereas Descartes asserts that matter and mind each represent a different metaphysical substance.

This conception of mind and matter as metaphysically antithetical is, of course, not peculiarly modern, but the identification of mind, *nous* or *psychē* with subjectivity or personal consciousness is characteristically modern (post-Cartesian). It is in the context of this identification that the dualism of mind and matter becomes subjectivist. This identification makes the interaction of mind and the non-mental virtually inconceivable. For, in this context, the non-mental includes not just matter, but anything that is not or does not belong to an individual consciousness, for example, all of nature, social reality, and cultural artifacts. Furthermore, in this context, to be 'mental' a quality or event must be or belong to both consciousness and to an individual, since consciousness is individual. This view severely restricts the kinds of interrelation or the modes of interaction that can be asserted to exist between the mental-subjective and anything else we wish to talk about.

In metaphysics, ethics, epistemology or any field of inquiry, subjectivism invokes the relative distinction 'subjective-objective' and a whole set of roughly equivalent derivatives. In general these distinctions divide whatever phenomena are under investigation into two categories according to their degree of relatedness to the thinking subject as opposed to the non-subjective world. Now, distinctions between the subjective and objective are not inherently subjectivist: they are made subjectivist by their use, by their centrality in a particular inquiry. If they are made central, then, in effect, without necessarily asserting a metaphysical dualism of subject-substance and physical-substance, the inquiry in question has adopted the opposition 'thinking subject vs. world' as the basis for its orientation toward features of reality, and will inevitably divide those features along subjectivist lines. For example, in his inquiry into human knowledge, Hume divides all knowledge into two categories: that which is based on "relations of ideas" and that based on "matters of fact." Such a doctrine is subjectivist wherever it suggests, is based on, or

coheres with—as it usually does—the division of human thought and knowledge into an order of necessary thought and an order of objective experience. Paraphrasing Quine, the former is usually taken as a purely internal order, under-determined by contact with the external world, and is therefore non-empirical, while the latter is treated as the order of the periphery where mind contacts and is determined by the external world, and therefore has empirical content.³ This model and this manner of description, often characteristic of allegedly scientifically-oriented philosophies, is as rife with subjectivist implications as is any subjectivist metaphysical doctrine.

Subjectivism can serve as the partial basis for valuative and ethical inquiry. For example, within a subjectivist framework it is more or less inevitable that nature and physical reality have no *inherent* value, and that subjectivity be taken as possessing greater inherent or moral value than nature. Insofar as nature is material and devoid of spiritual, mental, or subjective properties, very hypothetical conditions or *ad hoc* doctrines would have to be invoked in order to grant a natural object inherent value. In general, subjectivism implies that the individual thinking subject is the only intrinsically valuable worldly entity, and consequently the center of all value within the bounds of the finite world.

Furthermore, in a subjectivist framework moral and psychological integrity requires the differentiation and consolidation of subjectivity over against the non-subjective. Human integrity is meant as both a moral and a psychological concept, which generally refers to the cognitive-practical-moral wholeness and directedness of the human person, a dimension of moral being that is coincident with the psychic-personal qualities of coherence of personality and strength of character. Subjectivist morality and psychology tend to find nature and the non-subjective world corrosive to personal integrity. Psychic and moral wholeness must be established and maintained by an active process of differentiating the truly subjective from the influences and incursions of the non-subject. For subjectivism, integrity tends to mean independence, non-affectedness, being in control in a variety of senses, not being subject to nature.

The moral-psychological value placed on integrity is not a defining character of subjectivism. The value placed on being “true to oneself,” “*Eigentlichkeit*,” becoming “what you are” has roots in Stoicism and in the Christian emphasis on the independent value of the individual soul. What is of concern here is the subjectivist interpretation of this integrity, and hence the definition of part of the subjectivist moral project. If the self is identified with the thinking subject, with personal consciousness, then the problem of the relation of the subject and the external world characteristic of subjectivist epistemology tends to reappear in subjectivist ethics, with, of course, specifically ethical connotations.

Subjectivism notwithstanding, consciousness or subjectivity must be conceived as a feature or characteristic of human being or human activity; it may or may not be a feature of other kinds of being or activity. The choice of making this particular feature the basis or primary region of evidence for philosophic inquiry has specific philosophic consequences due to the nature of this particular characteristic of human being. Subjectivism focuses philosophic inquiry on a specific kind of order, the order of what appears to or belongs to an individual consciousness.⁴ Consequently, the special characteristics of this kind of order have determinative consequences for subjectivism.

Consciousness is in fact a property of individuals; it is purely personal or individual. The objects or contents of consciousness, naturalistically conceived, are not personal; they are common to an indefinite number of subjects. The consciousnesses of diverse human individuals are similar. But each consciousness uniquely belongs to a particular individual, just as does the individual's body. The 'having' of presentations or experience is purely personal.

If consciousness or subjectivity is made the basis for philosophic inquiry into the nature of things, then the things under consideration can only be understood or investigated in their being-for an individual consciousness, that is, in their status, configuration, or position within a personal, individual order of consciousness. Any other sense, meaning, or status of the things in question is excluded from consideration, as long as the subjectivist viewpoint is unambiguously in force.

Now, consciousness taken in this way as the primary realm of evidence is fundamentally *private*. Individual consciousness *in vivo* is not private; it is, as a property of a living human beings, in continual interaction with the natural and social world. But the theoretical consideration of the field of consciousness as an entity or realm of evidence, considered independently from worldly things as they exist in their own independence makes individual consciousness, thus construed, private. The exclusion of any other senses or meanings of, for example, perceived objects from the being of those objects *for* an individual consciousness is the very definition of privacy.

To say that the subjectivist notion of consciousness is privatistic does not mean that the field of consciousness is unchanging or empty. It remains the case that everything knowingly perceived or thought or felt is internally related to an individual consciousness in some way. But the assertion that the primordial evidences for philosophic inquiry are the totality of what appears to and belongs to an individual subjectivity, that the being-for-subjectivity of worldly things is the only or most basic feature of such things available for philosophic inquiry into their existence and nature, obscures the status of consciousness as a part of the natural and social world, as a feature of certain beings within that world,

vulnerable to, affected by, and interacting with that world. The notion of a private consciousness does not necessarily signify a consciousness which has no content or which creates its own content; it signifies rather a subjectivity that cannot be conceived as interacting with an independently existing world. The status of subjectivity as an interactive member of an independent world which affects it is thereby relegated to a derivative, secondary position within philosophies constructed on a subjectivist basis.

Subjectivism is pervasive in modern and contemporary philosophy. From Descartes to Ayer, modern rationalism and empiricism, however much they are opposed, agree that the analysis of human knowledge of the world, and therefore the general characteristics of the known or knowable world, must begin with an analysis of the contents of the individual human mind or consciousness; or, differently put, an analysis of evidence *which is evidence at all* only because it has an internal relation to subjectivity. This priority of the subjective is not merely a matter of a rhetorical order of presentation. It reflects the beliefs that the contents or structure of mind are known most immediately, directly or certainly—in the order of knowledge they are logically, and perhaps temporally, prior to the world that is known through them—and, that the features of the world *that we can know* are all represented in mental contents, they are ‘written’ into consciousness, by whatever means.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century empiricists and rationalists differ over how this writing is accomplished, over the nature of mental contents, over the epistemic value of different categories of mental contents and the manner in which or means by which these differing types represent or reveal realities that exist independently of individual minds. They nevertheless agree that philosophic inquiry into human being and the knowable world is rooted in the totality of what is present to an individual human consciousness, in what the individual mind thinks, feels, and experiences, as the primary sphere of philosophic evidence, regardless of whether their particular philosophic system gives privilege to “sense impressions,” “intuitions,” or the “transcendental unity” of consciousness. Descartes’ *Meditations*, Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume’s *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Berkeley’s *Dialogue Between Hylas and Philonous*, Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and Husserl’s *Ideas* all share this conviction, that individual mind is the foundation-stone of philosophic inquiry, however much they wish then to go beyond that beginning point.

Beyond this initial identification of mind with subjectivity, a modern philosopher may, like Hegel, wish to demonstrate ultimately that individual consciousness is, upon philosophic analysis, identified with

an absolute or universal mind; nevertheless, the first realm of evidence is what appears to an individual consciousness (for example, in Hegel's phase of "sense certainty"). Moreover, the individuality of the subjectivity that is this first realm of evidence does not mean that this subjectivity is presumed by those who adopt it to be unique or solipsistic. Quite the contrary, the philosophers in question usually presume and undertake to prove just the opposite. That is, they presume that their own analysis and description of the contents of consciousness can be repeated and confirmed by any other thinker or reader who engages in the same project, and they undertake to prove that the thought or experience of the individual subject reveals the traits of a common and objective world.

The Subjectivist—Transcendental Synthesis

The great philosophers of the seventeenth century, Galileo, Locke, Leibniz, Spinoza, and most of all, Descartes, made subjectivism a dominant force in early modern philosophy. They did so, however, in a way characteristic of their time, by *combining* the subjectivist perspective with ideas and doctrines that both served the philosophical aims of their age and mitigated the inherent limitations and difficulties of subjectivism. There are a variety of such difficulties, which will be explored in the course of the following chapters; but a particularly pernicious one, for which Descartes, to take one example, has been repeatedly criticized, is the problem of the relation between subject and non-subject. It is this problem in particular, to which subjectivism *per se* can *in principle* have no answer, that was mitigated by combining subjectivism with other doctrines or ideas. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries these ideas were characteristically 'transcendental' ones.

By transcendental I mean neither transcendental metaphysical notions nor Kantian conditions of possible experience, but simply the elements of otherwise subjectivist philosophical systems that transcend the subject-object dichotomy of those systems, and which serve as the conditions for the possibility of the interrelation of subjective and objective factors. Transcendental refers to a *function* that ideas may serve within subjectivist philosophy. In the seventeenth century, as we will see, the concept of God filled this function; in the eighteenth century the concept of reason, transcendently construed, frequently served the same purpose.

Now, the transcendental elements incorporated into the basically subjectivist philosophies of early modernity were inherently incompatible with the underlying subjectivist categories. By definition, if the subjectivist categories are strictly and universally applied, there can be no sense in asserting the existence of factors which transcend the dichot-

omy. Indeed, twentieth-century criticism of the early-modern philosophers tends to focus on just this incompatibility. Nevertheless, despite this inconsistency, the transcendental elements were indispensable for making subjectivism work, and the systems formed by the synthesis of the basic subjectivist categories and transcendental factors were powerful, original, and world-shaping intellectual creations. Like most important philosophical systems throughout history, they were not *absolutely* consistent, but only *relatively* consistent. Like all philosophies, they were aimed at accomplishing certain intellectual purposes, aimed at understanding certain problematic areas of human thought about the world, and their adherents found their difficulties and inconsistencies less worrisome and significant than what they seemed to adequately interpret. The synthesis of the subjectivist perspective with non- and even anti-subjectivist transcendental elements, elements whose assertion implicitly denies the universal applicability of subjectivism, became the most powerful interpretive weapon in the intellectual arsenal of early modernity and permanently altered the intellectual *Weltanschauung* of the Western world.

The subjectivist-transcendental synthesis is basic to many of the great philosophical systems of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In Descartes' system, as will be seen in the following chapter, God and the light of reason make the subject's cognitive relation to material reality or *res extensa* possible. For Leibniz, the perceptions and ideas of individual subjective monads, which cannot influence or be influenced by any outside substance directly, are able to correspond to each other only because God provides their correspondence and relation. Likewise for Spinoza, God is the cause of all ideas and only through God can the human mind know the existence of any external body. In the philosophy of the empiricist Berkeley, perceptions, unlike mere ideas, are directly caused by God, thus assuring a common reality in a world without matter. And, as will be seen in Chapter 3, the synthetic, imaginative power of reason provides the glue to hold subjective experience and objective reality together in Kant's critical philosophy.

Nevertheless, despite the tremendous success of the subjectivist synthesis, the subjectivist philosophical systems could only be relatively coherent; there remained a tension between subjectivist and transcendental elements. The synthesis was tenuous and, generally, the persisting philosophic problems of these systems were centered on the fault line of this tenuous synthesis. The tension had to persist because the two factors in tension were ultimately, inherently incompatible.

The dynamics of subjectivist systems in modern philosophy involve the interrelation of three different factors or viewpoints: subjectivist, transcendental, and naturalist. The three stand in a definite relation.

Naturalism asserts that whatever is, exists within the order of na-

ture. Thus, for naturalism, subjectivity exists within the natural order. Subjectivism, by adopting consciousness as the primary realm of evidence, is *prima facie* antithetical to naturalism, since subjectivism requires that the primary order for inquiry be the order of consciousness, within which nature must be located.

A consistent subjectivist philosophy, or, more accurately, an inquiry remaining completely faithful to its foundations in subjectivist categories, cannot make any positive claims about what exists independently of, what does not belong to, an individual subjectivity; such as nature, other subjects, and culture. If it speculates on their existence, and gives them a name—for example, things-in-themselves—it still cannot make positive claims about their nature or character. This is because there can be no relations between subjectivity and non-subjectivity in a consistent subjectivist system, and any claims about the non-subjective would in practice involve or imply some relationship between what belongs to a subject and what exists independently of any particular subject.

A consistent subjectivism would certainly be an impoverished philosophy. In fact, modern subjectivist philosophies were never and could not have been content with such a restriction. Modern philosophers like Descartes turned to subjectivist categories in order to forge what they considered to be a more adequate approach to crucial philosophical problems concerning the relation of mind to world, God, and society. They had no intention of cutting off the possibility of addressing such questions by giving up claims about what exists independently of individual minds.

In order to make claims about the nature of things independent of the subject, in order to establish the possibility of a relation or relations between subject and non-subject, a philosophy adopting a subjectivist foundation has two options, transcendentalist and naturalist. The transcendentalist option is to affirm the existence of characteristics, faculties or activities of or belonging to the subject which transcend the subject-object dichotomy, thereby establishing a relation between what-belongs-to-subjectivity and the nature of things that exist independently of any particular subjectivity. An example is Descartes' 'natural light'. The naturalist option is to introduce, however inconsistently, naturalist claims; for example, to claim that certain contents of subjectivity are caused by non-subjective existences. This involves a shift from the language of the order of consciousness to the language of the order of nature. Kant's use of the concept of sensation (sensations being, says Kant, the effect of the object on the mind) is an example of this.

The subjectivist philosophical systems of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are in fact syntheses of subjectivist, transcendental, and naturalist elements. It was only through combining transcendental and naturalist claims with the subjectivist viewpoint that the latter was made

workable; without them, it is pure solipsism. While the naturalist claims are indeed important in the history of modern subjectivism, it is the transcendental notions that will be the concern of the present study, for it is the relation of the subjectivist categories with their accompanying transcendental ideas that is determinative for the historical dynamic of subjectivism.

It should be emphasized that the transcendental notions evident in the work of early modern philosophers did not serve as a mere *deus ex machina*, a device brought in to bandage up otherwise faultily constructed subjectivist systems. Historically, the relationship was more organic. Descartes, for example, clearly saw his transcendentalism and his subjectivism as part of one harmonious philosophical conception. Nevertheless, we can logically distinguish the two elements, just as Descartes implicitly distinguished them in his order of presentation in the *Meditations*. The history of modern philosophy has come rigorously to distinguish what Descartes saw as intrinsically connected, an historical process of distinction which correctly recognized the incompatibility at the heart of Descartes' position. This is not to say that the systems based on that recognition are superior to that of Descartes; it is only to say that they are more consistent in their subjectivism.

In the course of the development of modern philosophy, as we will see, the integral and synthetic relationship between subjectivist and transcendental ideas characteristic of early modern philosophy inevitably crumbled, and this crumbling is one of the factors that differentiates philosophy since the mid-nineteenth century from philosophy before that time and since Descartes. The cause of this crumbling is that, in the general competition between ideas that constitutes the philosophical tradition, at a certain time in history the historico-philosophical motivations and reasons for maintaining the transcendental doctrines became less important than the motivations and reasons that supported subjectivism. That is, because of their ultimate incompatibility, and because the two sets of ideas were in competition for the assent of philosophers, the synthesis could be maintained only as long as both sets of ideas were roughly equivalent in importance to philosophers. At a certain point, subjectivism's hold on the philosophical imagination significantly superceded that of the non-subjectivist elements of earlier philosophies. At that point, their incompatibility dictated that the latter be jettisoned.

The result of this process was a general breakdown of the subjectivist-transcendental synthesis, which became apparent beginning with the last decades of the nineteenth century. What had appeared in the centuries of Descartes and Kant as a plausible synthesis increasingly came to be seen as implausible. There ensued a general *delegitimation of the transcendental* as incompatible with the still-in-force subjectivist cat-

egories that continued to provide the underlying basis for much of philosophy. Subjectivism thus became radicalized, purified, and more universally applied.

But the most momentous fact about this process of radicalization remained generally unnoticed, even in the work of most of its twentieth-century proponents: the rejection of the transcendental radically *changed the subjectivist categories themselves*. These categories had been adopted by Descartes and others within a transcendental context and the loss of this context drastically altered the relations that could be conceived to hold between subject and non-subject, and this alteration of relations implicitly changed the conceivable nature of the subject and non-subject as well. Radicalized, non-transcendental subjectivism transformed the nature and relations of subjectivity and objectivity, turning them into something quite foreign to the work of their early modern proponents.

Before we can examine this transformation, however, we must explore the early phase of the historical dynamic of subject and object in the work of two of its classical authors, Descartes and Kant.