

Elliott Stegall

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Dr. Martinez

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Evolution of Subjectivity

I've overcome the blow
I've learned to take it well
I only wish my words could just convince myself
That it just wasn't real
But that's not the way it feels
Jim Croce "Operator"

Musician Jim Croce's bittersweet song of 1974 captures the romantic pain felt by the individual who, in this case, has loved and has been loved, but due to one of life's myriad reversals, has lost that love, unlike, say, Goethe's Young Werther, whose romantic feelings are illusory, if not delusional; the object of his love does not love him in return. There is no *reason* for his love. Nevertheless, his feelings, the subjective apprehension of his world, are real, at least for him. Driven to bitterness at life itself, Young Werther commits suicide, the obligatory act of the tragic romantic. In the case of Don Quixote's fixation, Dulcinea does not actually exist except within the hidalgo's mind. While others may doubt the epistemological evidence of certain experience since Descartes' theory was expressed, modern expression as subjectivity seeks validation for the individual experience of the mind, spirit, and heart. Individual consciousness is affected by modernity in its interactions with and reactions to class dynamics, the rise of technology and nationalism, and a loss of meaningful human activity and connection to one another as well as to nature. In his major work, *Concerning the Principles of Human*

Knowledge, Berkeley argued against the distinction between primary and secondary qualities that are all equally "ideas existing only in the mind." Ronald de Sousa's presentation in San Sebastian, Spain in 1999, "Twelve Varieties of Subjectivity: Dividing in Hopes of Conquest," later published in *Knowledge, Language, and Representation* (2002), seeks to divide and conquer the notions of subjectivity as a theoretical construct by defining subjectivity into at least a dozen subsets. While it is beyond the scope of this essay here to reiterate each, maintaining a sense of balance by including the following argument may prove useful:

The subjectivity of secondary qualities, in the sense of their relativity to the observer's mind, can be shown to attach equally to primary qualities. If we resist the idealist conclusion, we can re-interpret this remark as implying that the perception of all qualities depends on the interaction between the external world and state of the subject's sense-organs. This assumes that if the appearances of things are *relative* to the sensory and conceptual apparatus of the perceiver, this entails that their attribution to the outside world is mere *projection*, with no objective correlates beyond themselves. The argument conflates *phenomenology* -- the quality of experience -- *relativity* to an observer, and *projection* -- the attribution of a property to the outside world which is actually entirely resident in or manufactured by the observer. This conflation is plausible in the extreme case in which some quality attributed by an observer to a target depends totally on the perceiver and not at all on the target. For there is then nothing to the property in question except the observer's experience of it,

and relativity collapses into projection. But no lesser degree of relativity can effect this collapse. At most, Berkeley's arguments show that the conflation of these different senses of subjectivity leads to idealism. This is not what the modern champions of subjectivity intend, but it may turn out to be the logical consequence of their strategy nevertheless. To some of us, this is reason enough for avoiding the conflation. (DeSousa)

Subjectivity hereafter is defined as the personal views, experience, or background of an individual, arising out of or identified by means of one's perception of one's own states and processes. In a lecture on 25 February 2008, Dr. Martinez defined subjectivity as the “content of thought that gives a particular identity to an individual or a group of individuals (i.e., a society) within a discrete historical time.” Rather than attempt a defense or assault on subjectivity, this present work seeks merely to examine the evolution of subjectivity in modernity in the following paragraphs.

From Descartes' *Metaphysical Meditations* (1641) arises the epistemological thesis of doubt, particularly in and of the self, reality itself, and the “substantiality of the surrounding world ... putting into question the soundness and reliability of the workings of [the] mind” (Martinez). As the intellect becomes its own subject, literature takes on a new face. The writer's willingness to investigate phenomenon becomes concomitant with self-discovery and self-referentiality. For Descartes, doubt is the foundational beginning of a transcendental discovery that God exists. Descartes' formulation, a variation on the ontological argument for God's existence, is predicated on the notion that because he can imagine a perfect God, God must, therefore, exist. While it is true that nothing can come from nothing, it does not necessarily follow that what one can imagine

must necessarily exist. If Anselm or Descartes were correct, virtually anything could exist, even *numerous* “perfect” deities. Pure reason would conclude that the idea of God is not innate but invented. In either case, though, mankind believes what mankind finds appealing to believe. Consciousness of existence is fearful enough without dwelling on the fallibility of faith.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, too, suffered from intense subjective analysis of existence, and like Descartes, expressed himself in his maturity in a singularly personal work, the *Confessions* (1782). Rousseau argues that the progression of the sciences and arts has caused the corruption of virtue and morality, though his social contract theory suggests that mankind is in need of strict governance. His devotion to nature and basic goodness of mankind is well known, but difficult to square with his own life. He may be history’s most infamous dead-beat dad. Ultimately, his romantic delusions resulted in a decline in his mental health and paranoid fantasies about plots against him involving David Hume, among others. And

herein lays the fundamental tension in the *Confessions*. Rousseau is at the same time trying both to justify his actions to the public so that he might gain its approval, but also to affirm his own uniqueness as a critic of that same public. It is clear from this book that Rousseau saw the *Confessions* as an opportunity to justify himself against what he perceived as unfair attacks on his character and misunderstandings of his philosophical thought” (iep).

It is equally clear that by the seventeenth century, even serious philosophers were acutely aware of themselves as persons capable of subjective doubt, and such intense inward

gazing was subject to mental disturbance. Rousseau's other late work, often referred to simply as the *Dialogues* (1770), is his most subjective, as it places himself as subject in conversation as the author "Jean-Jacques," who is the actual historical Rousseau. This somewhat confusing arrangement serves the purpose of Rousseau judging his own career. The character "Rousseau," therefore, represents Rousseau had he not written his collected works but instead had discovered them as if they were written by someone else.

Cervantes famously has his characters recognize themselves as fictional characters, subverting any notion of detachment the reader may have enjoyed. Like Frankenstein's monster, the author/creator is conscious of his creator and self as created conscious being. In the case of both Don Quixote and Frankenstein's monster, subjective consciousness of existence without proper recognition by others devours their existence. While Don Quixote searches for a world of make believe at odds with the normative world, the "creature" seeks admission to the extent world from which he has been excluded. Ultimately, it is subjective feelings that matter most.

Charles Darwin struggled, too, with deciphering what is real and what is imagined via biology in his 1871 book *The Descent of Man*. Can science answer the riddles of subjectivity? Are we merely complex amoebas responding to stimuli in a vast Petri dish, or are we unique individuals, significantly distinct from one another with legitimate self-consciousness? While it is clear that man is a natural animal, prone to tactics that ostensibly perpetuate his species, the relation to other mammals is equally open to doubt. Humans are not so rational as to be limited to clear survival mechanics, as in the desire to produce music and write poetry that express ineffable feelings of longing and love. Darwin was not immune to fears that his readers would doubt that humans might be the

evolutionary offspring of apes: “Man differs so greatly from all other animals, there must be some error in this conclusion” (Zimmer 98). Aristotle may have declared that man is a rational animal, but rationality is neither unique to mankind (researchers have reported that monkeys were almost as good as college students at arithmetic involving adding dots to a screen) nor consistent in human behavior. Science may identify oxytocin and other feel-good molecules to explain a biological response to attraction, but will it explain romantic feelings, shame, guilt, jealousy, color, taste, memory or any of a host of subjective experiences that are objectively intransigent?

Thomas Kuhn’s essay “The Nature and Necessity of Scientific Revolutions,” chapter IX of his work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, notes, as Darwin’s theories clearly suggest, that when “...existing institutions have ceased adequately to meet the problems posed by an environment” which is in part self-created (political systems, for example), other revolutions occur from this “sense of malfunction.” While Kuhn’s metaphor is designed to express scientific inquiry as benefiting from revolutionary thought, it is evident that subjective thought is at the heart of any new paradigm, whether political, scientific, or artistic. For example, poet and literary theorist T. S. Eliot recognizes the place of the individual within the larger environment and the process of artistic evolution thus:

Artistic creation is always a *complicated turning inside out of old forms* [emphasis mine], under the influence of new stimuli which originate outside art. In this large sense of the word, art is a handmaiden. It is not a disembodied element feeding on itself, but a function of social man

indissolubly tied to his life and environment. (*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*)

Virginia Woolf, whose commitment to the subjective and its occasional, perhaps frequent, correlation to madness (Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Rousseau, Nietzsche's "Madman;" Nietzsche himself; virtually any character of Poe, Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein as well as his creature, etc.) is well known, argues that a greater understanding of existence must come from within:

Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? ... It is, at any rate, in some fashion as this that we seek to define the quality which distinguishes the work of several young writers, among whom Mr. James Joyce is the most notable, from that of their predecessors. They attempt to come closer to life and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them, even if to do so they must *discard most of the conventions* [emphasis mine] which are commonly observed by the novelist. Let us recall the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and *incoherent in appearance* [emphasis mine], which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. Let us not take for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than what is commonly thought small. "Modern Fiction", *The Common Reader* (1925).

Terry Eagleton, more modern yet, expresses a concern with the potential for self-indulgence in adhering to intense subjectivity:

If objects and events in the real world are experienced as lifeless and alienated, if history seems to have lost direction and lapsed into chaos, it is always possible to put all of this “in brackets” ... and take words as your object instead. Writing turns in on itself in a profound act of narcissism, but always troubled and over-shadowed by the social guilt of its own uselessness. (Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory*. 1990)

Kuhn’s use of the term revolutionary, thus, cannot be overestimated. The shift from a geocentric to heliocentric explanation of earth’s position in the universe devastated thousands of years of practiced “truth,” at least to Europeans who considered such observations novel and/or meaningful. Perspective, though, is still subjective. To the human standing on the surface of planet earth, the sun most certainly rotates around him, for he cannot perceive his own motion in a grander scale of measurement. It may not be a stone’s “nature,” as Aristotle would argue, to return to earth from the sky, but it does seem to be the human’s nature to consider his place in the universe. Down this path, relativism lies. Attributed to Protagoras is the famous saying: "Man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not." Plato ascribes relativism to Protagoras and uses his predecessor's teachings as a foil for his own commitment to objective and transcendent realities and values. Plato also ascribes to Protagoras an early form of phenomenism, in which what is or appears for a single individual is true or real for that individual. Regardless of one’s frustrations with

Cartesian solipsism, credit is due to Protagoras for bravely refuting the previous historical paradigm, one that remains to this day: religion. Writers from Cervantes to Dostoevsky to Nietzsche and Kafka have dared to reconsider the ludicrous nature of *faith in an orderly world* and the individual's struggle to make sense of it. Don Quixote's faith is presented as both ridiculous and admirable; Ivan Ilyich is presented as recognizing salvation only after having suffered an ignoble and lengthy death; Nietzsche infamously proclaims that "God is dead," in a parable of the town madman; and Gregor Samsa is denied any spiritual respite from his utterly dehumanized existence despite of or because of his intense self-awareness. It is not necessary to insist on linearity in these examples, but precedence exists. Protagoras was a proponent of agnosticism. In his work, *On the Gods*, he wrote: "Concerning the gods, I have no means of knowing whether they exist or not or of what sort they may be, because of the obscurity of the subject, and the brevity of human life" (iep). This last phrase, "...and the brevity of human life," is perhaps inadvertently amusing, suggesting that had he world enough and time, Protagoras would determine by sheer dint of his own mind and experience whether the gods existed or not. Also remaining today: male hubris.

A final example: Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa includes in *Rashomon* (1950) flashbacks that are both true and false. True, in that they present an accurate portrait of what each witness to a crime thinks happened; false, because as Kurosawa observes in his autobiography, "Human beings are unable to be honest with themselves about themselves. They cannot talk about themselves without embellishing" (Ebert). Film critic Roger Ebert notes that "Film cameras are admirably literal, and faithfully record everything they are pointed at." Because they are usually pointed at real things, we

usually think we can believe what we see. The message of "Rashomon" is that we should suspect even what we think we have seen. This insight is central to Kurosawa's philosophy. If we can doubt what our senses provide us, we then must doubt what our machinery captures for us. The camera "sees" only what we see, or what we *think* we see. Years of frustrations with how the world *seemed* to me and how it *seemed* different to others culminated in a curious thought: "Perception is the devil's mirror." Perhaps I may lay claim to that aphorism, though, given my sense of self, I doubt its originality. It may be the deceivers' influence, but that's not the way it feels.

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“This is micro evolution in modern humans and the median artery is a perfect example of how we’re still evolving because people born more recently have a higher prevalence of this artery when compared to humans from previous generations.” We’ve collected all the data published in anatomical literature and continued to dissect cadavers donated for studies in Adelaide and we found about one third of Australians have the median artery in their forearm and everyone will have it by the end of the century if this process continues. 8. The precursors of the modern human being1 Humans appeared late in Earth’s history The earliest ancestors of humans (hominids) diverged from apes about 8 million years ago. First Europeans: approx. 780,000 years ago 9. 9. THEORIES OF HUMAN EVOLUTION 1. Theory Of Special Creation:- (Father Suarez 1548-1671) “ Living organisms on the earth were created by divine power “ He believed that universe was created in 6days “ Purely a mythological belief followed until middle of 19th century. The genus is estimated to be about 2.3 to 2.4 million years old evolving from australopithecine ancestors with the appearance of Homo habilis. All species of the genus except Homo sapiens (modern humans) are extinct. 37. “Evolution makes its appeal to reason, but its acceptance does not mean the abasement, let alone the denial, of emotion, faith, and religion.” The working biologists use evolution all the time as a guide in their work, a determinant of their point of view and method of study, a proved and accepted fundamental fact and principle in the science of living things. Hence the biologist in his relation to evolution is as likely to be interested in the evolution of plants, or in a single group of plants, as in the evolution of animals, or even in the evolution of man “ though even biologists are human, and it seems an attribute of humanness to have a prime interest in human beings.