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AVOIDING THE SUBJECT

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Sharon P. Rider

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Sharon P. Rider

Avoiding the Subject

A critical inquiry into contemporary theories of subjectivity

Doctoral dissertation in Logic and Metaphysics to be publicly examined in room IX, Universitetshuset, Uppsala University, on October 10, 1998, at 10.15 a.m., for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The examination will be conducted in English.

Abstract

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This dissertation explores certain recurrent problems in modern theories about the nature of the subject. Taking examples from phenomenology, poststructuralism, neopragmatism and feminism, it argues that philosophical theorizing about subjectivity often assumes that the transition from the description of the models of meaning with which they work, to the description of the everyday practices of which they are models, can be achieved *within* the model. There are two aspects of this assumption that are worked out in detail with respect to the specific theory under discussion in each chapter: (i) the supposition that there must be a general description to account for diverse phenomena, and (ii) the presumed primacy of that theoretical re-description.

In examining the selected illustrations from phenomenology, poststructuralism, neopragmatism and feminism, the study sets out to show how the terminology and methods of philosophy, even in dissimilar or even opposing traditions, produce an object of study at a far remove from the reality they are supposed to explain. Specifically, the dissertation takes up five related themes: (i) the conflation of facts about language or thinking with descriptions of working models; (ii) the assumed dichotomy between "the thinking subject" as producer of language or as product of it; (iii) the tendency to misapply the language and thought-forms appropriate to third-person observations about states of affairs to first-person expressions; (iv) the demand that everyday linguistic practice fulfill the conceptual requirements of the theory; and (v) the idea that the truth or facticity of otherwise indubitable facts about the world is somehow compromised if it is not philosophically grounded.

The conceptual difficulties described here are outlined in the introduction. In the following chapters, the problems raised are illustrated and developed by way of examples from modern philosophy, represented by Husserl, Foucault, Derrida, Rorty and Fish, and Gilligan and Benhabib.

Keywords: subject, subjectivity, objectivity, certainty, doubt, phenomenology, poststructuralism, deconstruction, neopragmatism, gender.

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For my family

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Sharon Rider
Uppsala, May 1998

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General Remarks

All references to secondary literature refer to the standard English translation, unless otherwise specified. Where authors are cited or quoted for purposes of exemplification rather than conceptual clarification or discussion, I refer to the standard English edition. Citations from the authors discussed in detail make use of the standard English translations, with the original reference provided in the footnote. The first page reference is to the English, the second to the German or French editions. Thus, for example, CM 23–25/25–26 refers to pages 23–25 in *Cartesian Meditations*, and pages 25–26 in *Cartesianische Meditationen*. Where the translation quoted deviates from the standard English edition, this is also specified in the footnotes. Where the standard translation is quoted, but there is some question as to the appropriateness of the translation of a given term, the original word is placed in brackets in the quote. All references to Ortega y Gasset rely exclusively on the standard English translation from the original Spanish. All translations from Swedish or Danish are my own.

The following abbreviations have been used:

CM	<i>Cartesian Meditations/Cartesianische Meditationen</i>
SP	<i>Speech and Phenomena</i>
VP	<i>La voix et le phénomène</i>
MP	<i>Man and People</i>
OG	<i>Of Grammatology</i>
G	<i>De la grammatologie</i>
DP	<i>Discipline and Punish</i>
SuP	<i>Surveiller et punir</i>
AK	<i>Archeology of Knowledge</i>
AS	<i>Archéologie du savoir</i>
DV	<i>In a Different Voice</i>
SS	<i>Situating the Self</i>

Introduction

This study is concerned with a set of issues within contemporary philosophy that are associated with the so-called problem of subjectivity. Descartes is commonly identified as the father of modern philosophy, by which is meant that he turned our attention away from things, the objects of thinking, to the subject having the thoughts. In a word, it is Descartes who introduced self-consciousness as both the ground for, and as an object of, philosophical reflection. Once the shift from being to knowing was underway, philosophers became engaged in the sorts of problems arising from the dualism suggested by that distinction: how can we have knowledge of our own apparatus for knowing? If the knowing subject is the ground for knowledge, what grounds the knowledge about that knowledge? How can our reflections about our own thinking be immediately present to us, and at the same time, be products of that very activity of reflection? Is the phenomenon of thinking merely an epiphenomenon of physical processes, or is it rather a necessary logical presupposition for there being thoughts? Obviously, one cannot enumerate in detail the sorts of dilemmas arising out of the Cartesian turn without recapitulating the entire history of modern philosophy, but these questions should strike the reader as the most familiar of philosophical formulations.

These questions stem, we argue, from an unreflected prioritizing of theoretical language, or more generally, intellectual discourse, and the concepts borne out of that discourse over and against what we might call "the vernacular". The claim is that a number of these problems arise *only* within the conceptual framework in which they are articulated, and are not problems having to do with ourselves as thinking, experiencing human beings. It should be stated at the outset that our aim is not to refute any particular theory of subjectivity, nor to criticize theorizing about subjectivity in general. In one sense,

the point of the dissertation is not critique at all; the aim is rather to expose to scrutiny a few assumptions that seem to underlie the posing of the problem of subjectivity as a problem within philosophy.

We do not wish to suggest that theories about subjective experience can never be useful or necessary in a number of contexts. Michel Foucault's theoretically charged denial of the existence of thinking subjects as objects of historical fact, for example, can shed light on the manner in which historical writing may illicitly assume the standpoint of a certain group of actors when describing the motivations and activities of another, perhaps oppressed, group. Similarly, a theory of gender-dependent subjectivity in the spirit of Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* can serve as a pedagogic tool for reminding students of how certain aspects of their lives to which they have never given a moment's reflection can actually form how they see the values that they may otherwise assume to be universally valid. And this kind of self-understanding can indeed be both intellectually and existentially liberating, and may certainly have consequences for political decisions, for instance, in issues involving morally sensitive questions such as those having to do with abortion and euthanasia. Insofar as these theories are intended to serve as pedagogic instruments or as one methodological possibility among others for shedding light on historical events and how we understand them, they are not relevant to the present study. The object of this investigation is rather claims made about subjectivity *in general and as such*, claims that can never be substantiated or falsified one way or the other, since what they describe is actually a product of the discourse in which the claims are made, and therefore say little about who we are or how we think.

We will confine ourselves to the problems raised by the assumption that the subjectivity described by the theoretical discourse of philosophy constitutes a description of what it means to think or to feel in actual life or somehow undergirds what it means to think or to know in general. We mean to show that the attempt to explain how absolute certainty is either possible or impossible leads inexorably to self-contradiction and paradoxes within the theory, and what can only be described as nonsense from outside of the activity of theorizing. These paradoxes arise, we will argue, from a misapplication of demands for evidence and justification onto statements that, due to their non-referential character, are simply not amenable to the

theoretical discourse of certainty and doubt. One of the tools of our investigation will be the distinction between first- and third-person uses of terms such as belief and certainty.

One might suppose that the inclination in European philosophy since Descartes to look for absolute grounds for knowledge arises out of the perception that scepticism and nihilism ensue if there remains the slightest residue of theoretical doubt in cases of what we are otherwise inclined to call "certain knowledge". The idea that there always remains room for doubt seems inspired by something like the following thought: I cannot feel the pain of the fallen toddler as he feels it. The child, in a sense, *owns* his pain. Thus it is impossible for me as observer to *have* his pain. The thought behind looking for objective grounds then is something like this: if I could somehow put myself inside his head, I could see the pain itself, and not merely its external manifestations. It is at this juncture that one is tempted to posit an objective model for "inner states". Such a model, if it is to serve its purpose, must be formulated in objective terms. We will show how this transference of the discourse of objective fact, evidence and justification onto the language of impressions and feelings that is put forward as a model of subjectivity often comes to be taken, within the theory, as a fact about how human beings think, feel, and perceive. One grave problem with such models, as we shall see, is that they make claims about subjectivity that are blatantly interpretations and not descriptions (for example, the notion that we perform an act of inference when we recognize the humanity of another person). More importantly to the purpose of the inquiry, however, we wish to show how the demand for evidence and justification where there can be no question of evidence or justification carries with it the tendency to infer that, in the absence of evidence and justification, or the possibility thereof, our claims to knowledge, even in the most basic sense, are bereft of legitimacy. One important aim of uncovering the unreasonableness of this requirement is to show that the failure to fulfill the requirement does not necessarily jeopardize the objectivity of certain facts about our lives, even if attempts at grounding them theoretically, or philosophically, have failed.

The study is strictly thematic, rather than expository, which means that exegetical issues are addressed only when they can be used to

clarify the problem at hand and the context in which it has been formulated.

We have chosen four highly influential movements in philosophy, in which claims about the nature of the subject have been central and recurring themes: Husserlian phenomenology, French poststructuralism (exemplified in this investigation by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault), American neo-pragmatism (Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish) and feminist theory (Carol Gilligan and Seyla Benhabib). What these thinkers have in common is that they accept the notion that *either* the Cartesian subject is the ground and guarantor of certainty *or* selfhood is, at best, a kind of useful fiction. They are further unified in thinking that it makes sense either to affirm the existence of an over-arching structure of subjectivity as something real, or to deny the existence of that structure. In no case do they call into question the meaningfulness of the philosophical notion of subjectivity as a *picture* of what it is that we do when we think and communicate those thoughts to one another.

To begin with, we will examine Husserl's attempt to find an absolute sense of subjectivity that does not reduce objective truth to subjective understanding and problems involved in that undertaking. Husserl's phenomenology is, of course, quite complex, and Husserl revised and amended many of his ideas throughout the course of his lifetime. No effort will be made to account for all aspects of phenomenology, or to give an account of Husserl's philosophy as a whole. Our interest in Husserl is limited to the consideration of one representative example of his endeavour to work out a notion of subjectivity that would guarantee the certainty of subjective experience while at the same time providing an objective basis for knowledge, this being the collection of lectures published under the title *Cartesian Meditations*. In particular, we wish to underscore the difficulties that necessarily arise out of the attempt to show that the everyday sense of what it means to be certain is somehow dependent upon philosophical foundations.

The questions raised in the first chapter will be repeated in the following chapters. The prioritizing of philosophical notions as somehow implicit in or providing the ground for non-theoretical, pre-philosophical language use and thought, while also present in poststructuralist and feminist philosophy, is less explicit. Yet since one important

aspect of feminist and poststructuralist critiques of the western philosophical tradition is that tradition's "metaphysical" assumptions, it is even more problematic that such assumptions underwrite their projects (however unwittingly).

The odd thing about Jacques Derrida's position is that it seems to deny the meaningfulness of the Cartesian idea of subjectivity, while at the same time insisting that we are incapable of thinking without it. This is due, we argue, to Derrida's inheritance of a philosophical terminology that he takes to be intrinsically meaningful, an inheritance that preempts the careful examination of the sense or senses in which it *could* be meaningful. For Derrida, all claims to certainty must smuggle in the Cartesian cogito, without which knowledge is impossible. In the case of philosophical discourse, one might say that Derrida's critique is both relevant and correct. The difficulty with his position is that he makes positive claims about what is possible or impossible in non-theoretical life on the basis of what is possible or impossible within philosophy. With respect to the problem of what it means for a person to know something, it is clear that Derrida identifies the "self" with the philosophical doctrine of subjectivity. Thus, having deconstructed the philosophical doctrine of the cogito, he believes himself thereby to have dismantled the everyday notions of selfhood and certainty. Similarly, despite visceral protestations to the contrary, Michel Foucault's claim that the subject is a construction reveals a structuralist bias as to what is meant by the term "subject". It is one thing to claim that theories of subjectivity within the human sciences and the theoretical underpinnings of certain forms of medical or penal practice are discursive productions, but quite another to say that human beings are everywhere and always formed by disciplinary and institutional forces. That Foucault sees the step from the one to the other as unproblematic betrays his faith in the very discursive practices that he is subjecting to critique.

It has often been pointed out that feminism as a theoretical strategy is so variegated as to render the singular abstract noun a misnomer; many feminists speak instead of "feminisms". It falls outside the limits of this dissertation to account for the vast differences between different schools of feminism, even with regard to questions of "gendered subjectivity" and "embodied knowledge", both of which are clearly

relevant to an examination of feminist thinking upon the questions raised here. We have chosen Seyla Benhabib as our main example because, while she is reasonably representative of feminist thinking on these issues, she is particularly thoughtful in her attempt to formulate a philosophical position that takes into account the sorts of objections and issues that are relevant to feminist theory both from within feminism and from without. In her ambition to make feminism both useful and relevant to larger philosophical issues, Benhabib treats the demand for a "situated" notion of selfhood as if it were a demand for a more precise determination of the traditional philosophical notion of subjectivity. The move from the transcendental ego to an I constituted by "narrative unity", we argue, is merely a modification of an otherwise traditional abstract notion of subjective experience that, as abstraction, continues to falsify that experience. Once again, this abstraction conflates certainty with immediacy, a result of the misapplication of the requirements of theoretical accounts onto the experience that it is intended to describe. We will not examine the moral theory upon which this account of the self is built. It is rather the philosophical claims made about the nature of selfhood and knowledge that are the focus of our interest. We will take up other feminist writers where the issues raised by Benhabib's account make excursions into other discussions desirable or necessary. In particular, Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* will play a central role in our discussion, for two reasons. Gilligan's critique of the presuppositions behind theorizing in developmental psychology has long been considered groundbreaking for feminist theory in general. At the same time, Gilligan serves as an excellent illustration of how critical insights are transformed into highly problematic positive doctrines as long as we remain enthralled by the promise of a general theory of human nature.

The discussion of Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish is extremely condensed, and is intended to serve a single purpose, namely, to distinguish the arguments offered here from what may seem like similar arguments offered by neo-pragmatists. We argue that both Fish and Rorty remain firmly within the grips of theory, even when explicitly espousing an anti-theoretical stance. One consequence of their failure to recognize their own intellectual presuppositions is that they tacitly accept a picture of language as interchangeable

with actual language. In Fish's case, the depiction of language as "rhetoric", and in Rorty's, the portrayal of language as "noises and marks on paper", toward which he encourages us to take an "ironic" stance, function as redescription of human life which, in almost any context (outside of the academy), are misplaced. We will show how such characterizations do not succeed in capturing the nature of human speech and thinking any more than the idealist or materialist doctrines that they are intended to correct.

These four approaches to the problem of subjectivity (the phenomenological, the poststructuralist, the neo-pragmatist and the feminist) are intended to serve as illustrations of the kind of theoretical view of subjectivity that we wish to call into question. The assumptions that I claim undergird their respective projects are assumptions that they share with numerous other schools and traditions. The critique that is offered here, however, is not itself intended to illustrate the superiority of some other model of subjectivity within another school. While affinities with the work of the later Wittgenstein and the philosophical tradition inspired by him may be evident, they are not in themselves crucial to the project as envisioned.¹ We will advance no theory of subjectivity of our own since one of the most important aims in the writing of this book has been to show that, in its most common formulations, theories about subjectivity rely on the posing of what we take to be inappropriate questions.

¹ It may strike the reader, for example, that the comparison of first-person and third-person uses of certain words together with the claim that this comparison has epistemological consequences is what one might call a "Wittgensteinian" move. While it is clear that much of what is said here is inspired by Wittgenstein, especially *On Certainty*, eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, transl. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (New York, 1972), the present study makes no exegetical claims with regard to Wittgenstein. The extent to which the train of thought developed here diverges from Wittgenstein's own, therefore, is not directly relevant to the argument. While there is abundant literature concerning the question of certainty, there is not very much in the way of application of the insights drawn from Wittgenstein onto the problem of subjectivity as articulated in other traditions. Thus only secondary literature directly relevant to the themes taken up has been consulted. Finally, it seems fair to say that the Wittgenstein's idea of comparing first- and third- person perspectives when investigating the philosophical use of psychological terms has, like Kant's "transcendental unity of apperception" or Hume's "impressions", become part of the public domain.

Transcendental Subjectivity

Introduction

Kant is credited with articulating the so-called problem of subjectivity as a problem in itself, and not merely as a byproduct of a new method for resolving a classical problem, such as Descartes' effort to repulse the specter of scepticism.¹ Given the methodological boundaries of the project as presented in the introduction, we have chosen to bypass the instigators of the subjective turn in philosophy, and turn directly to Edmund Husserl, the most recent modern philosopher to have explicitly associated himself with this tradition, and whose influence on contemporary philosophy, whether acknowledged or not, is still eminently palpable. More precisely, Husserl's attempt at formulating a doctrine of transcendental subjectivity in the *Cartesian Meditations* will serve as perhaps the best recent example of such a project.

The aim here is not to present an exegesis, or even an interpretation, of the whole of his thinking, nor to compare or relate Husserl to other philosophers or philosophical traditions.² Rather, the text was chosen due to its status as a "classic"; it is widely recognized as providing one of the most careful elaborations of the problem under discussion. The questions raised, therefore, are not meant to reveal some failing on Husserl's part regarding a technical distinction or to find a flaw in his argumentation, nor are they intended as

¹ It has been argued that recent scholarship has distorted the meaning and purpose of the *Meditations* by concentrating too restrictively on the epistemological issues of truth and certainty. Emily R. Grosholz, for example, emphasizes the broader role of Descartes' method in his studies in mathematics and physics. Grosholz, *Cartesian Method and the Problem of Reduction* (Oxford, 1991).

² For an attempt to elucidate Husserl's phenomenological method in terms of the concepts and methods of the Anglo-Saxon philosophical tradition, and show how the former can solve difficulties in the latter, see Richard Cobb-Stevens, *Husserl and Analytic Philosophy* (Dordrecht, etc., 1990).

a new way of reading or understanding Husserl;³ rather they are meant to indicate certain necessary consequences of his manner of proceeding. These consequences are not peculiar to Husserl since certain crucial aspects of his procedure are shared by the philosophical tradition commonly called "Cartesianism", but also, as we will show, with the tradition arising out of its acknowledged failure. Thus the purpose of this section is not to discredit Husserl or phenomenology, nor to criticize the text as such, nor to provide a new approach to the interpretation of Husserl. Husserl's interest in the *Meditations* was not so much a critique or modification of Descartes' project or doctrines as a fresh attempt to deal with the same sorts of problems and questions that inspired Descartes' writing.⁴ A guiding assumption of the present study is that this form of conceptual investigation is feasible even at a more modest level.

Using the *Cartesian Meditations* as our point of departure, we will be paying attention to how Husserl understands the terms in which he formulates his phenomenology. One of the most characteristic traits of Husserl's thinking, from *Philosophie der Arithmetik* onwards, is that he takes philosophy to be a *science*. In this respect, Husserl falls firmly within the rationalist tradition. More specifically, Husserl sees philosophy as: (i) an *a priori* science, and (ii) as a self-grounding, self-contained discipline.⁵ In classical terms, Husserl views philosophy as an autonomous activity. The self-regulating, self-validating ideal is thought by Husserl to guarantee both absolute clarity, on the one hand, and absolute certainty (apodicticity),

³ To the contrary, as critique, the exposition and analysis given here can be found elsewhere in different forms. References to some of these are made in the appropriate context. The point of taking up Husserl at all is rather as a kind of prolegomena to the conceptual problems arising out of the project of phenomenological description.

⁴ It has been pointed out that the medievals' concern with the relationship between God's willing and thinking was, if not a direct source of the Cartesian turn toward subjectivity, at least an important backdrop to the sorts of problems Descartes was dealing with. See Frank B. Farrel, *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 1–15. While tracing the roots of the Cartesian notion of selfhood is of historical and even philosophical interest in its own right, it is not directly germane to the discussion that follows.

⁵ By science, Husserl means a self-contained and well-defined discipline with established *modus operandi*, criteria of classification and so forth, that is, science in the sense of *Lehre* or *Wissenschaft*, not merely in the sense of natural science.

on the other. While this was the explicit assumption of nineteenth-century idealist philosophy, there have been few philosophers in this century who have taken this ideal seriously. For the most part, philosophers in our day regard philosophy as one specialized discipline among others, and the demands placed on it are no greater than those placed on any other discipline calling itself a science. But this means that there can be no one correct and true philosophy; whether one likes it or not, without absolute demands made on it, philosophy becomes a discipline divided against itself. Or to put the matter less laconically, the infighting between various schools of philosophy seems itself to constitute a demonstration of the thesis of philosophical relativism. Husserl would find such a consequence unacceptable, and would presumably have some sympathy with Kant's view that

inasmuch as there can be only one human reason, so likewise there cannot be many philosophies; that is, only one true system of philosophy based on principles is possible, however variously and often contradictorily men may have philosophized over one and the same proposition.⁶

It is against this background that one ought to read the introduction to *Cartesian Meditations*, where Husserl expressly refers to the state of philosophical decline of the period, in which the common quest for truth is replaced by "a pseudo-reporting and a pseudo-criticizing", and complains that "the spirit that characterizes radicalness of philosophical self-responsibility has been lost".⁷ On the other hand, it is obviously not the case that Husserl wished to revive the metaphysics of pre-Kantian philosophy. Husserl's criticism of Kantian and neo-Kantian philosophy, as well as of pre-critical metaphysics, was not that they made absolutist claims for philosophy, but that they failed to live up to these. The purpose of phenomenology as a

⁶ Immanuel Kant, Preface to "The Metaphysical Principles of Right", in *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, transl. James Ellington (New York, 1964), p. 5. Immanuel Kant, Vorrede zu *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, Werkausgabe, Band VIII, hrsg. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt am Main, 1968), p. 311: "aber, da es doch, objektiv betrachtet, nur Eine menschliche Vernunft geben kann: so kann es auch nicht viel Philosophien geben, d.i. es ist nur Ein wahres System derselben aus Prinzipien möglich, so mannigfaltig und oft widerstreitend man auch über einen und denselben Satz philosophiert haben mag."

⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, transl. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht, 1960), §2, pp. 5f. *Cartesianische Meditationen* (Hamburg, 1977), §2, pp. 7f.

philosophical science was to make good on the classical philosophical ideals.

Husserl's phenomenology may be seen as an attempt to make the idealist ideal of autonomy both more comprehensible and more useful, that is, to make it something concrete. In order to achieve the goal of a presuppositionless philosophy, phenomenology must begin with and observe "the given as it is given to a consciousness". In addition to his goal of refining critical philosophy so that it could live up to its ideal purpose, one of Husserl's main objectives in *Cartesian Meditations* is to criticize and correct the naturalist view of psychological phenomena, which was seen as the only major alternative to neo-Kantianism at the time. With the aid of the phenomenological method, Husserl hopes to found a new science, a psychology which would treat psychological phenomena as psychological phenomena, and not as the physical or physiological data of empirical psychology. In *Cartesian Meditations*, this new science is called "intentional psychology". Indeed, as we shall see in the discussion that follows, it is the notion of *intention*, and the attendant notion of *evidence*, which together form the axis on which the project of a transcendental psychology turns.

1. Evidence and intention

The notion of evidence is crucial for Husserl because, in the rationalist tradition from which he takes his bearings, absolute certainty was equated with complete demonstrability. This, according to Husserl, leads inevitably to the dualism and dogmatism that was the concern of post-Kantian critical philosophy; since certain kinds of absolutely certain knowledge simply do not allow for complete demonstration, one is forced to posit two separate spheres, with two corresponding notions of what counts as evidence. We will work out in more detail why this is so as the discussion proceeds, but what is to be noted here is simply that the notion of evidence is inseparable from the notion of certainty, and certainty is the aim and purpose of Husserl's transcendental subjectivity.

To begin with, Husserl draws a distinction between science as it has been and is conducted, that is, the historical fact of science, and

science "in the true and genuine sense".⁸ He leaves open the question of whether the first and the second senses are in agreement with one another. The goal is an absolute foundation for science through an intentional analysis of the scientific endeavor *as such*. As "radically beginning philosophers", we are not to take our bearings from the *de facto* sciences, and the validity or legitimacy of their theories and methods (or lack thereof), since what is being aimed at is the very question of what the "general final idea" of science, "genuine science" is. The "natural attitude" of the working scientist, that is, the scientist in the first sense of "science", is to come up with theories and obtain objective results. For him, the validity or correctness of the actual theories and methods of his discipline are essential to his understanding of his science. Husserl's *intentional* analysis is about the second sense of science: scientific endeavor as a *noematic phenomenon*, that is, as an intentional object. Another way of stating Husserl's purpose here is to say that he is trying to see what scientific endeavor would look like if it conformed to its own ideal; he is asking the question, "what should be the meaning and purpose of scientific endeavor as an ideal human activity?" It is important to remember that Husserl believes it to be entirely possible to examine actual science in this respect, that is, as an intentional phenomenon, without taking a stand as to whether or not it has realized its ideal purpose.⁹

Husserl poses two questions concerning the ideal of scientific endeavor: (i) What does scientific endeavor, as intentional phenomenon, presuppose? Or better, what are the conditions for the possibility of scientific endeavor? And (ii) how is scientific endeavor, as such, achieved? Again, since his reflections are of an intentional nature rather than that of the natural attitude of empirical investigation, he cannot simply look at the sciences as they are conducted, from the outside, as it were. Rather, Husserl is concerned with what it *must mean* to conduct science. One might (in a very restricted sense, of course) compare the difference between the natural attitude of science and Husserl's "method" here with the difference between someone reading and understanding the bible as a book of

⁸ CM, §4, p. 9/11.

⁹ CM, §3 and §4, pp. 7-11/8-12.

What should be noticed here is Husserl's formulation in describing this kind of judgement as a "mental seeing". It is clear enough that, in one respect, each consciousness must recognize for itself that A is longer than B. If I cannot see the two lines for myself, due to some visual impairment, for instance, I may rely on the authority of someone who can see, but this is not the same thing as recognizing A as longer than B. Does this mean that the validity of the judgement that A is longer than B is something "mental" or subjective? If this were the case, then the validity of the judgement may be reduced to a subjective experience, and one is forced, as Husserl is, to construct a new sense of subjectivity that is not psychological or relative. Yet the problem may lay in the notion of evidence itself.

Husserl's use of the term evidence is not what we today normally mean by evidence: an indication that something is or is not the case, a sign of something, an element in a chain of argument in a court of law, etc. It will be recalled that, for Husserl, the very point of evidence is that it is itself present at the moment of judgement. Neither is Husserl using the term in the psychological sense of "obvious", in which something is evident if it gives us a sense or feeling of conviction or certainty; in this sense, $1+1=2$ is more "evident" than $259+378=637$. What counts as evidence for a judgement, according to Husserl, is determined by the principles that constitute intentionality in the act of judging. These principles must say *how the intention is realized* as evidence for the judgement. Husserl would consider psychological evidence as belonging to the "relative evidences" typical of everyday life, which correspond to a relative concept of truth.¹⁵ Husserl's interest, however, is in what he calls "*perfect evidence*", and its correlate, "*pure and genuine truth*", which are "given as ideas lodged in the striving for knowledge, for fulfilment of one's meaning intention".¹⁶

However much Husserl exerts himself to stave off psychologizing the grounds for truth, we will argue, he winds up with a view of evidence that fails to make a sufficiently clear distinction between the *grounds* for the truth of a statement and the *recognition* of the

¹⁵ CM, §5, p. 12/13.

¹⁶ CM, §5, p. 12/13: "Vollkommene Evidenz und ihr Korrelat, reine und echte Wahrheit, ist gegeben als eine dem Streben nach Erkenntnis, nach Erfüllung der meinenden Intention innewohnende bzw. durch Einleben in solches Streben zu entnehmende Idee."

validity of those grounds. Taking our comparison of two lines again, Husserl would take the "experience" or "mental seeing" of the relative lengths of A and B to be the ground for the veracity of the statement, "Line A is longer than line B". And, once again, it certainly is the case that I must be able to see the truth of that statement for myself if we should be able to say that I genuinely see that, beyond a shadow of a doubt, line A is longer than line B. But is the actual validity of the statement, "Line A is longer than line B" likewise dependent upon a mental grasping, or dependent on some correspondence with "reality"? It is not obvious that these are the only choices. One could say that the statement, "Line A is longer than line B", in the context described above, is *grammatically* objective, that is, *the terms are put together in the only way that makes sense*. One could hardly imagine circumstances in which someone might sit and scratch his head, and after an hour's figuring, announce: "Well, I checked it over and over, and it's right. Line A is longer than line B."

In the comparison of the two line-segments A and B described, there is something strange about saying "I believe that A is longer than B", or even "I am certain that A is longer than B". The strangeness resides in the inappropriateness of using words such as "belief" and "certainty", and working out what is to count as evidence, in a case in which there can be no question of doubt. Another way of putting the point is to say that the validity of that statement could never really be called into question, since the state of affairs is present in the statement. The validity of the statement is already part of its sense; it is impossible to understand it without knowing it to be true. Any justification or grounds provided are ancillary to the fact of the validity of the statement and, therefore, can hardly be called "grounds" at all. This is a crucial point, because it is here that, in looking for evidence where there simply can be no question of evidence, Husserl tries to formulate a use of the notion of subjectivity that would not lead to subjectivism or relativism. Husserl is compelled, as we shall see, to objectify subjectivity (although, unlike Descartes, whom he criticizes for just that, Husserl's objectified subjectivity is transcendental rather than empirical). Husserl subjects subjectivity to objectification in a dual sense: he reifies subjectivity, that is, he treats it as an *object* of knowledge, and in so doing, he

believes that he can give an *objective* account of its constitution. Yet it is crucial for Husserl, as for Descartes, that knowledge be “grounded” in the subject itself, and not in some object, if we are to achieve certainty: “Everything that makes a philosophical beginning possible we must first acquire by ourselves.”¹⁷ In what follows, we will not so much investigate the extent to which this goal is feasible as ask to what extent it is even comprehensible.¹⁸

In order to understand Husserl’s project, it is important to see that he took Cartesian rationalism to be fatally mistaken in its understanding of the concept of evidence. The notion of evidence requires a careful and detailed examination, according to Husserl, due to the “instability and ambiguity of common language and its much too great complacency [Genügsamkeit] about completeness of expression”.¹⁹ In the section just mentioned, Husserl goes on to explain what philosophical completion and correction of the sloppiness and incompleteness of language entails in the case in point. Not only everyday language, but also the language of science is altogether too sloppy, as regards its conception of evidence. Here Husserl breaks with the classical rationalist tradition, which equated apodicticity with adequacy of evidence, that is, perfect or complete demonstrability, usually with mathematical demonstration as the ideal. In thinking that perfect knowledge required complete demonstrability, something which is simply impossible in the case of the experience of the senses, Descartes was forced to posit two substances, *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, the latter being the source of the absolute, indubitable knowledge that he was after.²⁰ The demand for perfect evidence

¹⁷ CM, §5, pp. 13f./14: “Wir müssen uns alles, was ein philosophisches Anfangen ermöglicht, allererst selbst erwerben.”

¹⁸ The importance of the distinction discussed above was brought to my attention by Sören Stenlund. See Stenlund *Kommentarer till problem i logikens filosofi* (Uppsala, 1987), pp. 34–37.

¹⁹ CM, §5, p. 14/15: “Bei der Flüssigkeit, Vieldeutigkeit und der hinsichtlich der Vollständigkeit des Ausdrucks allzugroßen Genügsamkeit der allgemeinen Sprache bedarf es, selbst wo ihre Ausdrucksmittel benützt werden, einer Neubegründung an den Bedeutungen durch ursprüngliche Orientierung an den wissenschaftlich erwachsenen Einsichten und ihrer Festmachung in diesen Bedeutungen.”

²⁰ No matter of fact or empirical datum can ever be demonstrated with the absolute universal certainty sought because, for example, some future experience or experiment might call the demonstration into question. On the other hand, it will be recalled, Descartes could doubt everything except the fact that he perceived

forces one to hypostasize that of which one has apodictic evidence. Apodictic evidence, for Husserl, is *a priori* impervious to doubt: it simply cannot be called into question. To understand an apodictic judgement is to know it to be true. Thus complete demonstrability is simply unnecessary. There can exist indubitable, i.e., apodictic evidence, which is not fully demonstrable: “adequacy and apodicticity of evidence need *not go hand in hand*.”²¹ Husserl’s criticism of Descartes is not only that the demand for complete demonstrability is unreasonable, but that it is a consequence of not being sufficiently radical in his method.

Cartesian universal doubt is a universal “holding to be false” that leads to seeing everything as false. Husserl’s objection is that “holding something to be false” in fact presupposes the possibility that it could be true. In simple terms, one can only hold something to be false provided that one already knows what it would mean for it to be true. The very possibility that it could be otherwise is, for Husserl, excluded from the outset: to attempt to doubt a statement that is apodictic simply leads to nonsense. This distinction between what we could call intentional meaning and the real, or the factual, is crucial for Husserl throughout, so it is worth repeating and illustrating often. One could say that Husserl criticizes Descartes for failing to see that knowledge of factual states of affairs presupposes knowledge of meaning intentions, the latter being the sort of knowledge which allows for apodicticity in Husserl’s sense. This inattention to meaning intentions is what leads Descartes to distinguish between factual and mental reality, and therewith, to posit two different kinds of facticity.²²

Our interest in Husserl’s criticism of Cartesian doubt is perhaps best illustrated by an example. Let us say that, driving through the prairie in the middle of the night, I think I saw a farmhouse burning down. Cartesian doubt, which is substantial doubt, asks: was that really a

clearly and distinctly that it was he who was thinking. Descartes can thus be certain of his existence as a thinking thing even while doubting that he has a body. Even if he does indeed have a body, it must be *really* distinct from himself. There is a great deal of literature on the merits and deficiencies of this argument, but these are not germane to the theme of our discussion.

²¹ CM, §9, p. 22/24: “daß Adäquation und Apodiktizität einer Evidenz nicht Hand in Hand gehen müssen [...]”

²² CM, §10, pp. 23–25/25–26.

farmhouse I saw burning? Was it just the light from another car reflecting off the windshield into my tired eyes? Could it perhaps have been an hallucination brought on by too many hours at the wheel, too little sleep and an empty stomach? All these are conceivable possibilities, just as much as that it was a farmhouse burning down. But if I ask the question: "Did I have the impression of seeing something burning?", then I can not even get started on the substantial doubts, for they presuppose the fact of my impression. Thus Descartes was not sufficiently radical in his doubt, one could say, since the certainty of intentional meaning is unquestioned in his universal doubt. But one can push the limits even further. In so doing, according to Husserl, one arrives inevitably at transcendental subjectivity.

Husserl's idea of a reduction, or *epoché*, amounts to this: everything which is the case about the world is simply not taken into consideration. This "bracketing" of everything one knows to be the case is not the same thing as Descartes' doubt. While Descartes' doubt requires of him that he take all that he has known to be the case to be false, Husserl's *epoché* is a suspension of judgement one way or the other. The transcendental I simply "refrains", as Husserl says, from using what it knows about the world in the natural attitude. It becomes a "*disinterested onlooker*" ("uninteressierter Zuschauer").²³ What remains after the reduction is that which simply cannot be called into question: "the transcendental realm", that is, everything that has to do with the intentionality of consciousness and its judgements. What remains of the facts about the world are possible states of affairs, the potentiality of the world. The transcendental ego, as distinct from the psychological or empirical ego, is not a part of the world. It has nothing to do with being human in the world: hoping, desiring, caring, believing, having a past and a future, being part of a particular society, etc. In the transcendental attitude, the ego stands outside of all this life, and with a definite purpose: to be able to distinguish the accidental from the necessary and unconditioned.²⁴ The question arises almost as soon as one has formulated the goal: is this possible? Does this not presuppose that one can have a purely intellectual relation to everything that makes us a

²³ CM, §15, p. 35/37.

²⁴ CM, §15, pp. 33–37/35–39.

part of the world? Can I, by sheer force of will, put myself in this frame of mind?²⁵

One could say that this question expresses one of the main motivations behind Heidegger's modification of Husserlian phenomenology in *Being and Time*. Heidegger does not reject the idea of attempting to get at the necessary conceptual attributes of things, but the idea that one can treat the ego as a thing in this respect without distorting its meaning. It is meaningful to say, for example, that all trees must have certain qualities, some length, weight, color and texture, regardless of whether or not there exists a tree which is eighteen meters tall, weighing approximately one ton, with a rough bark and long yellowish leaves. But is this also true of the thinking subject, the "I"? If we take seriously Husserl's requirement that a phenomenological description take into account what is given in direct experience, then we cannot fail to notice the impossibility of the ego simply ignoring, or refraining from taking into account, its own existence. While the tree has no internal relation to its weight or the color of its leaves, the ego or thinking subject is what it is due to its relation to its different ways of being in the world, its history, the language that it speaks, the actions that it performs. What makes the ego what it is, the defining characteristic of its existence, to speak in quasi-Heideggerian terms, is that it is a being whose being resides in its relation to its being; this means that its history, its present concrete situation and surroundings, its intercourse with others cannot be irrelevant to what it is in and for itself.²⁶

²⁵ Some commentators, such as John Drummond and Dan Zahavi, argue that it is a mistake to read Husserl as aiming toward an abstention from ontological commitments, "as if phenomenology only had to do with a clarification of the sphere of sense and meaning (as something separate from being)". Dan Zahavi, "Beyond Realism and Idealism: Husserl's Late Concept of Constitution", in *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy*, Vol. 29 (1994), p. 45. See also John J. Drummond, *Husserlian Intentionality and Non-Foundational Realism* (Dordrecht, etc., 1990). While it is beyond the scope of the present work to meet their arguments, it may be stated at the outset that neither author takes up the sorts of problems (having to do with the relationship between the notion of evidence and the possibility of doubt) that form the axis around which our discussion of Husserl turns. To the contrary, with Husserl, they assume the intrinsic meaningfulness of the concept of subjectivity as traditionally understood, even if they wish to correct and clarify certain aspects of that concept. In any event, the purpose of the discussion is precisely to work out this conceptual relationship, using a fairly common reading of Husserl as an illustration, and not to defend a particular reading of Husserl.

²⁶ See Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen, 1986), p. 42. Compare also

Husserl cannot accept such an "embedded" ego without losing his object, namely, a notion of subjectivity which, while possessing the primacy and indubitability of the first-person perspective (the "I" who cannot doubt that he is thinking something), nonetheless guarantees the objectivity of the third-person perspective, the intersubjectively certain. In other words, accepting a notion of subjectivity that incorporates the variability and complexity of actual lived experience would entail giving up the hope of philosophy as an autonomous, self-grounding activity, and therewith, giving up the hope of apodictic certainty in epistemological issues. In what follows, we will examine the extent to which Husserl's objectified subjectivity actually serves the function it is intended to serve, and indeed, if that notion or anything similar to it is actually necessary in order to achieve certainty. It will be shown that the entire question hangs on what is meant by *certainty*.

In view of the foregoing, we can say this: Husserl wants to show that there is a kind of perfect certainty that is not amenable to complete demonstrability. By doing so, he believes that he can repair the damage done to our epistemic confidence by the failure of the great systems to deliver what they had promised, namely, absolute grounds for our judgements. Husserl's idea of a grounded judgement has resorted to a notion of evidence as a kind of mental event. Having assumed that evidence is some sort of subjective experience, the only way that he can achieve the kind of universality that would ground scientific judgements, is to posit a kind of subjectivity that is not "merely" subjective, but also, in a sense, objective. Furthermore, what is to count as subjective evidence need not meet the requirements of demonstrability that we place on judgments about factual states of affairs, since those requirements lead to the impasses of the Cartesian dualism. As we saw, Husserl argues that judgments about factual states of affairs presuppose judgments about meaning intentions. What Husserl tries to show is that *all* judgements ultimately rest on the certainty of meaning intentions. By exposing these to

with pp. 114–118, 125–130, and 318–323. For an analysis of Heidegger's debt to, and divergence from, Husserl's teaching about the subject, see Jacques Taminiaux, "Heidegger and Husserl's *Logical Investigations*", in *Dialectic and Difference: Finitude in Modern Thought*, transl. and eds. Robert Crease and James T. Decker (Atlantic Highlands, 1985).

scrutiny, Husserl thinks that he can stave off the relativism that ensues if we are left without absolute grounds for knowledge.

Thus when Husserl speaks of philosophical certainty, he means something *primary* and, as such, extraordinary. At the same time, he seems to be aware that without the ordinary, everyday experience of certainty, without knowing what it is to be certain in everyday life, the philosophical conception of apodicticity is incomprehensible. Husserl must therefore reverse the order of experience by positing a transcendental subjectivity which is itself presupposed by the mundane experience of certainty.²⁷ That is, our subjective or private experiences of certainty must be shown to depend on an "objective", logically primary certainty if our philosophical statements are to have objective validity. This is the "great reversal" ("die grosse Umwendung"), as Husserl calls it, that leads to the *ego cogito* as "the ultimate and apodictically certain basis for judgements, the basis on which any radical philosophy must be grounded".²⁸

2. *The transcendental ego*

One consequence of the move towards transcendental subjectivity, says Husserl, is that the world is considered merely as something that claims being, rather than as something given to us, which naturally affects our relationship to other egos, so that "rightly we should no longer speak communicatively, in the plural".²⁹ In other words, Husserl says more or less explicitly that when we are in the mode of transcendental subjectivity, we have only a private language. Since I cannot take for granted the language, history, social environment or practices which make up the world as I know it in everyday life, my thoughts must be, by definition, incommunicable. One is tempted to recall Wittgenstein's discussion.³⁰ For our purposes here, that is,

²⁷ In this respect, he follows Kant.

²⁸ CM, §8, p. 18/20: "dem apodiktisch gewissen und letzten Urteilsboden, auf den jede radikale Philosophie zu begründen ist."

²⁹ CM, §8, p. 19/20: "so daß wir rechtmäßig eigentlich nicht mehr im kommunikativen Plural sprechen dürfen."

³⁰ See Wittgenstein, in particular, §257 and §265 in *Philosophical Investigations*, transl. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York, 1958). For a persuasive critique of the possibility of Husserl's "transcendental turn" that draws on Wittgenstein's private

in the consideration of first and third person perspectives and their consequences for the problem of subjectivity, the crucial point is that in order for the very notion of subjectivity, or myself as an ego or I to get off the ground, one must presuppose a meaning already, in a sense, in place. Otherwise, it is difficult to see how I could ever even begin to "abstain" or "refrain" from believing, since the act of refraining, or choosing not to, is itself dependent on knowing what it is to refrain. The same holds, of course, for what it means for an "I" to "think". Suzanne Cunningham notes that "the consistent use of the whole language-game establishes a social context, i.e. actually existing other speakers, which can serve for the criterion of that consistency".³¹

If I were to take the being of the world as a mere phenomenon rather than something of which I am apodictically certain, even if I were later to "decide critically" ("kritisch entscheiden") whether it were real or appearant, says Husserl, the phenomenon as such is what makes a definitive decision on the matter possible. Indeed, even if "I abstain" ("enthalte ich mich") from ever believing anything whatsoever based on the testimony of the senses, this "abstaining", together with the whole stream of experience of which the abstaining is a part, is *itself* a phenomenon for me. A fundamental problem here is the strange and strained use of the basic terms of the argument. The idea of "abstaining from belief" with regard to the existence of the world may be a great deal more problematic than Husserl took it to be. Just as Peirce questioned whether Descartes could really *doubt at will*, or rather, just as Peirce showed that the grammar of doubting simply rules out the possibility of choice in the matter, so too in the case of Husserl, it is important to look at his use of the notion of "abstaining from belief".³²

language argument, see Suzanne Cunningham, *Language and the Phenomenological Reductions of Edmund Husserl* (The Hague, 1976).

³¹ Cunningham, p. 29. Cunningham goes on to show how "this commitment, through language to an existing community of speakers is [...] in reality a part of the self-evident that must be accepted and used, and which cannot be touched by any sort of reduction".

³² Peirce's argument runs something like this: one cannot doubt generically. Genuine doubt is always with regard to a specific problem or set of problems. The sort of problems which can give rise to doubt themselves arise when a specific attempt at performing a task or an investigation fails, thereby ushering in suspicions as to our method, or presuppositions about the object of inquiry. Without such a con-

Husserl says that in abstaining from belief in the existence of the world, I do not thereby suspend my experience of the world as existing: "It goes on appearing, as it appeared before; the only difference is that *I, as reflecting philosophically, no longer keep in effect (no longer accept) the natural believing in existence involved in experiencing the world* – though that believing too is still there and grasped by my noticing regard."³³ In other words, in this philosophical state, one somehow still believes in the existence of the world, but one disregards that belief. The question once more is to what extent this is possible. If we take an ordinary case of belief, say the belief that my paycheck will be automatically deposited in my bank account, as usual, on the 25th of the month, I might disregard that belief, and act as if it might well be delayed (that is, not make any major

crete problem to study, whatever mistakes or confusions we have made cannot be revealed, since we can never know where we went wrong. See "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man" and "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities", in Charles Sanders Peirce, *Values in a Universe of Chance: Selected Writings of Charles S. Peirce*, ed. Philip Wiener (Garden City, 1958), as well as "The Fixation of Belief" in the same volume, for Peirce's criticism of Cartesian doubt. Even if it is questionable whether or not Descartes' doubt was purely methodological, that is, even if we acknowledge the seriousness of Descartes' concern with the issues raised by scepticism, Peirce's objection holds with regard to each individual *moment* of the doubt (for example, the postulation of the evil genie, or the questioning of whether or not he has a body). In a word, one can interpret Peirce's critique as a criticism of the very distinction between methodological doubt and genuine doubt. His claim is that what cannot be called genuine doubt is simply not doubt at all, but a spurious use of the term. By the same token, the rejection of *everything* that can be doubted in principle presupposes the capacity to identify *with certainty* what constitutes dubious knowledge. No criterion for this certainty is given. See Stanley Rosen, "A Central Ambiguity in Descartes", in *The Ancients and the Moderns: Rethinking Modernity* (New Haven, 1989), p. 23f. Compare also with Heidegger's analysis of Descartes' doubt: "Descartes does not doubt because he is a skeptic; rather, he must become a doubter because he posits the mathematical as the absolute ground and seeks for all knowledge a foundation that will be in accord with it." Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*, transl. W.B. Barton Jr. and Vera Deutsch (Lanham, 1985), p. 103. "Die Frage nach dem Ding: Zu Kants Lehre von der transzendentalen Grundsätzen", *Freiberger Vorlesungen 1923-44, Gesamtausgabe Band 41*, Abt. 2, hrsg. Petra Jaeger (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), p. 104: "Descartes zweifelt nicht, weil er ein Skeptiker ist, sondern er muß zum Zweifler werden, weil er das Mathematische als absoluten Grund ansetzt und eine ihm entsprechende Unterlage für alles Wissen sucht."

³³ CM, §8, pp. 19f./21 (emphasis added): "Sie [*die Welt*] erscheint weiter, wie sie vordem erschien, nur daß ich als philosophisch Reflektierender nicht mehr den natürlichen Seinsglauben der Welterfahrung in Vollzug, in Geltung halte, indes er doch noch mit da ist und vom aufmerkenden Blick mit erfaßt ist."

purchases or withdrawals) until I know for certain that the money is in my account. One can be circumspect about one's beliefs and behave accordingly. Such is the nature of ordinary "belief" in our actions. But is it really possible to ignore entirely something that, for conceptual reasons, one cannot help but believe, as Husserl suggests that we do? Can we really choose to set aside our "belief" in the existence of the world? In David Bell's pithy formulation: "it makes no sense to 'abstract from' the very factors that are *constitutive* of a given experience. One is not then left with a sphere of primordial experience, one is left with nothing."³⁴

If we take the paycheck example, entirely ignoring the fact that my paycheck is automatically deposited on the 25th of every month would necessarily imply a radical change in my fiscal behavior. The simple fact that I know that the check is coming will carry with it a certainty, however circumspect I may wish to be, that a certain amount of money will in fact be available at the end of the month. I can set aside this conviction momentarily for practical purposes, but ultimately every fiscal act I perform will take place against the backdrop of the knowledge that the money will be available.

What Husserl calls belief is even more problematic since, however much Husserl tries to bracket out the existence of the world as he knows it, there are intrinsic limitations. Husserl cannot change the way language works at will, for example, and his entire discussion is dependent upon language working the way it has always worked for him and not in some other way. Husserl must assume, for example, that he and his reader understand what it means for something to be "kept in effect", in order for him to be able to say that the bracketing does not effect the experience of the world. He must already have some sense of the meaningfulness of the thought "I", some sense of what it means to "refrain" from this or that, and so forth, and it is difficult to see how one can have a transcendental or *a priori* meaning of "to refrain" which is prior in any sense to

³⁴ David Bell, *Husserl* (London & New York, 1990), p. 217. This idea that we "believe" in the existence of the external world is comparable to similar philosophical claims that, in our daily lives, we walk around with "background beliefs" that there is air to breathe, that the floor will not collapse beneath our feet as we walk, and so forth. The use of belief terms implies the possibility of rational choice where, it will be argued, there can be none. More will be said about this as the chapter proceeds.

everyday human experience of refraining. Husserl uses language to describe an experience which is supposed to be at least a logical presupposition for the certainty at which we arrive through that very language. Thus Husserl's methodological claim to transcending the assumptions of everyday consciousness is inherently compromised at the outset, unless, of course, he means something very different from "belief" than we normally do. Generally speaking we do not normally "choose" to believe something based solely upon intellectual considerations. The fact that the empirical ego still experiences the world as existing despite the transcendental abstention from belief is extremely problematic, not only for Husserl, but for the way philosophers deal with belief in general.³⁵ It is problematic for Husserl because the point of the transcendental turn is to be able to have philosophical distance from something that, from the standpoint of the natural attitude, is impossible to "refrain from believing". For the most part, we *know* what we mean when we say the things that we are apt to say.

Husserl's aim in the section under discussion is, as we said earlier, to show the necessity of a position that (i) retains the absolute certainty of self-grounding knowledge, (ii) has the authority of objectivity, and (iii) is not reducible to individual psychology. The point of bracketing the existence of the world is that, "[i]f I put myself above all this life and *refrain from doing any believing* ['enthalte ich mich jedes Vollzuges irgendeines Seinsglaubens'] that takes 'the'

³⁵ Compare, for example, with Quine's comparison of the relative merits of physicalist and phenomenalist conceptual schemes in "On What There Is", in *From a Logical Point of View: Logico-Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, 1953), pp. 17f. According to Quine, belief in "so-called objects" has the advantage of "simplifying our over-all reports": "Physical objects are postulated entities which round out and simplify our account of the flux of experience [...]." On the other hand, the ontology of phenomenism enjoys epistemic priority, since a "play-by-play reporting" of immediate experience, or "individual subjective events of sensation or reflection" is more economical, in that it does not require hypothesized objects. Aside from certain difficulties attending the description of immediate experience as a subjective experience of sensations, difficulties which we will be addressing in the next chapter, we wish to call into question the idea that we can go shopping for fundamental beliefs in the way described here. Despite the radical differences between Husserl's absolutist aspirations and Quine's pragmatic position on the status of truth, they have in common this strange use of the notion of belief as an intellectual position, even in the case of the existence of the world (Husserl), or merely the existence of middle-sized enduring objects (Quine).

world straightforwardly as existing [...], I thereby acquire myself as the pure ego".³⁶ Here Husserl writes as if belief were some kind of deed or performance ("Vollzug") carried out by the intellect which we can, in a sense, *observe ourselves* doing. This is a consequence of seeing belief from the outside, so to speak, as an object. Yet from the first-person perspective, such a view is impossible. Generally speaking, I cannot simultaneously believe something from the inside, as it were, and view that belief from the outside as something separate from myself.³⁷ If we take the example of the drive in the prairie again, I cannot both believe that I saw a farmhouse burning and simultaneously "bracket" that belief. Certainty in the first-person perspective leaves no room for questions concerning grounds or evidence. Believing myself to have seen a farmhouse burning is not something that I do, or an activity that I perform, that I can simply choose to ignore or to cease to do.³⁸ In this particular case, what makes the use of the term "belief" in any way accurate as a description is precisely the fact of my experience of *uncertainty*. If there were no reason to doubt that I did indeed see a farmhouse burning down, then I would not even recognize myself as "believing" that I saw a farmhouse burning down. Rather I would simply say: "I saw a farmhouse burning down." It is not only inaccurate, but even false to say that I am in a "state of belief" when I have not even posed myself a question in the matter.

In the same sense, my belief in the existence in the being of the world is not some activity that I can turn on and off at will, and furthermore, observe myself doing. The model of thinking which we obtain by abstracting from actual human experience necessarily *falsifies*

³⁶ CM, §8, p. 21/22f. (emphasis added).

³⁷ It is possible, in a sense, to "bracket beliefs" in mathematics, that is to say, we do not always use every axiom available at all times, although they are always there in the background, "ready to be used", as it were. But even if we want to say that we somehow "believe" in axioms that we choose not to use in a given proof, which is arguably a strange use of the term "belief", the explicit articulation of an axiom in a given context makes sense in a way that the explicit articulation of belief in the existence of the world does not. One might suspect, however, that the mathematical model of proof haunts Husserl's discussion of evidence and certainty.

³⁸ Of course, a Husserlian would object that what I say here is true of the empirical I, but that is the very point of the reduction to the transcendental ego. Our answer to such an objection would be that, in point of fact, there is simply *no use* of these words that is independent of what Husserl would call "the empirical I".

that experience. If, say, in a state of grief, I look at my reflection in the mirror with the express purpose of studying my face to see if it betrays my sorrow, I no longer see the expression that I am after, since by "bracketing" everything but the immediate image in front of me, I have therewith altered that image. I might well see the bags under the eyes and straggling hairs that are the outward manifestations of inner turmoil, but in concentrating on those attributes, I alter the expression on my face from one of desperate bereavement to one of concentration (or perhaps strained suppression of sorrow). Yet, quite obviously, I can observe someone else in grief without altering that sorrow or its expression. Similarly, viewing beliefs or certainty as something that I *observe* rather than something that I *have* necessarily changes the nature of those beliefs or that certainty. The objectified model gained by this process of abstraction bears little resemblance to belief or certainty in any sense that is comprehensible from the viewpoint of actual experience. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to various aspects of this problem.

Husserl often repeats the idealist gesture of speaking of the freedom of the subject to perform an *epoché*, while remaining untouched in his existential status.³⁹ There is no sense of logically necessary limitations on this freedom, for example, that the transcendental ego is not free simply to invent a conceptual scheme for itself which bears no relation to the world as the "naïvely interested ego" (each of us) knows it.⁴⁰ The transcendental ego cannot spontaneously create or reject experience, for instance, because that very idea *presupposes*

³⁹ In addition to passages already mentioned, see also CM, §8, p. 25/26f.

⁴⁰ Much of the secondary literature about Husserl attempts to make sense of just what the status of a transcendental ego is or can be in the various articulations Husserl gives it. Douglas Heinsen argues that it is to be understood as an intentional object, that is, a meaning or *noema*. This would suggest that Husserl actually understands the pure ego as something that arises only in and through the work of transcendental clarification, and not as something about which he ventures a metaphysical hypothesis. Heinsen argues that Husserl wants to recognize both the temporal primacy of the lived ego and the transcendental status of the pure ego as intentional object. While his argument is convincing, it does not compromise the essential thrust of our critique of Husserl, namely, the unreasonableness of the questions to which the positing of a pure ego is intended to provide an answer. See "Husserl's Theory of the Pure Ego", in *Husserl, Intentionality and Cognitive Science*, ed. Hubert Dreyfus (Cambridge, MA & London, 1982), pp. 147-168. We will return to this later.

the language and world in which it makes sense to think in terms of "spontaneity". The freedom to radically separate one's self from the world, to reduce psychological self-experience to the transcendental-phenomenological ego, in Husserl's terms, is conceptually dependent on the everyday experience of self which is being reduced. As with Descartes' distinction between *être-en-soi* and *être-pour-moi*, Husserl's distinction between the I-in-itself (the transcendental ego) and the I-for-me (psychological self-experience) comes to assume a dualism of dubious lineage. For it is necessarily the temporally, historically, and linguistically located ego who, in thinking and speaking, posits the dualism. This means that the distinction comes from the same source, namely, the person speaking and thinking in the language and tradition in which it can *make sense* to speak and think thus.⁴¹

The idea that that whole world and its objects derives its existential status from the self as transcendental ego is not only a reversal of the natural attitude, as Husserl says, but is a reversal of any possible logical order, since, as Husserl also says, the transcendental ego "comes to the fore" only after *I* have performed the transcendental phenomenological *epoché*.⁴² It is as if the fact that Husserl is not simply the omniscient narrator in a text, but also a philosophy professor in Freiburg writing in German at the turn of the century, were a matter of mere historical detail, contingent and of no significance, rather than a fact about the positing of a transcendental ego. The "I" which experiences and which is the *a priori* condition for there being a world for me is an "I" belonging to everyone and yet to no one. That is, one uses the word "I" as one would normally (and correctly) use the word "he", "she" or, as we have done, "it".

⁴¹ This was the essence of Nietzsche's critique of Kant. See, for example, §355 in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, Sämtliche Werke*, Kritische Studienausgabe Band 3, hrsg. G. Colli und M. Montinari (Berlin, 1980), pp. 593–595, where Nietzsche sardonically points out that Kant's reduction of knowledge to the "idea" could only be considered a satisfactory explanation for someone looking for the security of familiar terms. (*The Gay Science*, transl. Walter Kaufmann [New York, 1974], pp. 300–302).

⁴² CM, §11, p. 26/27f. Of course, the pre-philosophical subject is also quite distinct from the subject of physiology or empirical psychology. To the extent that the latter lay claim to explaining in full our everyday self-understanding and experience of the world, they commit the same fallacy.

In what follows, we will try to illustrate how the grammatical difference between "I" and "he" or "it" carries with it important philosophical consequences, one of these being that we cannot speak of *first-person experiences* in the same way we speak of *third-person experiences* with respect to the kinds of words at issue here, such as knowing, believing, and being certain.⁴³ This issue comes most clearly to the fore in the discussion of how the ego comes to recognize other egos.

3. Other subjects

The *epoché*, says Husserl, is "the radical and universal method by which I apprehend myself purely: as Ego, and with my own pure conscious life, in and by which the entire Objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me".⁴⁴ The problem with this "method", one of which Husserl is well aware, is that it seems to condemn philosophy to solipsism.⁴⁵ Husserl wants to show that the threat of solipsism, as well as of the relativism that is thought inevitably to issue from it, can be avoided if we establish a subjectivity which is not merely subjective. Husserl thinks that if he can show that other egos share the same internal structure as one's own, then he can show that the objective world is not merely phenomenal for my subjectivity, but is phenomenal to other subjectivities like mine (that is, to all human beings capable of experience), and is structured in

⁴³ While the line of reasoning to follow is clearly inspired by the later Wittgenstein's discussions of first- and third-person uses of, in particular, psychological, verbs, it is not intended to be a "faithful" application of Wittgensteinian reasoning. For a concise summary of the crucial points in Wittgenstein's discussion, primarily in *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (Oxford, 1967) and Zettel, eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (Oxford, 1980), see Elizabeth Wolgast, *First and Third Person Uses: A Grammatical Puzzle*, unpublished manuscript (Hayward, 1997). See also Wittgenstein's discussion of the grammatical use of the I in *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations"* (1958) 2nd. ed. (New York, London, etc., 1960), pp. 61–69, and *On Certainty*.

⁴⁴ CM, §8, p. 21/22. The German quote in full reads: "Die εποχη ist, so kann auch gesagt werden, die radikale und universale Methode, wodurch ich mich als Ich rein fasse, und mit dem eigenen reinen Bewußtseinsleben, in dem und durch das die gesamte objektive Welt für mich ist, und so, wie sie eben für mich ist."

⁴⁵ CM, §13, p. 30/32.

the same way.⁴⁶ But this subjectivity, which I acquire for myself through the *epoché*, is, as we have seen, fundamentally distinct from my self as lived. Here Husserl retains Kant's distinction between the empirical self and the transcendental unity of apperception (Husserl's transcendental ego), where the latter is "prior in the order of knowledge to all objective being" including the being of the self as an object of knowledge.⁴⁷

Like Kant, Husserl argues that philosophy must begin with the transcendental conditions for acts of consciousness and not, as Descartes did, with the empirical ego. Similarly, Husserl, like Kant, believes that he can deduce a set of what he calls "eidetic laws" that are universal and necessary for any possible experience and which are constitutive of experience as such. Finally, just as the manifold of experience must be ordered according to the categories of consciousness in order to be objects of consciousness, according to Kant, so too for Husserl, the eidetic laws constitute objects for consciousness out of what would otherwise be a Heraclitean flux. Not only the objects of sense-experience, but even the empirical self is constituted in this way; to reveal the apodictic constitutive principles of the transcendental ego would be, therefore, to uncover the essential structure of the world and of ourselves at one and the same time. This is the sense in which Husserl takes the task of philosophy to be an "all-embracing science".⁴⁸

Husserl sets out to demonstrate that there must be a plurality of empirical egos or monads, each of whom, meditating upon himself, is necessarily lead back to his transcendental ego.⁴⁹ In order to do this, he must show how it is that the subject comes to recognize other subjects, not simply as objects of its own consciousness, but as subjects in their own right. The other's consciousness as well as his lived body cannot be immediately present to me in the same way as my own consciousness and body. If that which belongs intrinsi-

⁴⁶ CM, § 56, p. 130/133f.

⁴⁷ Compare, for example, CM, § 12, p. 27/28. with Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Werkausgabe Band III, hrsg. von Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt am Main, 1974), p. 365. (*Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. Norman Kemp Smith [New York, 1965], pp. 336f.)

⁴⁸ For a comparison of Kant and Husserl on this point, see Donald Crosby, *The Specter of the Absurd: Sources and Criticisms of Modern Nihilism* (Albany, 1988), pp. 254f.

⁴⁹ CM, § 33 & 34, pp. 67–72/69–75.

cally to the other were directly accessible to me as such, "it would be merely a moment of my own essence, and ultimately he himself and I myself would be the same".⁵⁰ And since I can "primordially apperceive" only myself as a living being, my apperception of the other must be mediate. More specifically, I can only come to know the other by an operation of "analogizing apprehension" ("analogisierende Auffassung").⁵¹ Such apperception is similar, Husserl says, to the "identifying syntheses" which I perform on the distinct moments of awareness, and from which I thereby acquire the sense of a continuous self perduring through time. Just as I connect the "here" of the present with the "there" of past moments of self-experience, so too, I connect the "here" of my consciousness and experience of myself as a living organism with the "there" of another subject experiencing herself as a living organism.⁵² Since one of Husserl's most important tasks is to show that the transcendental ego does not condemn us to solipsism, but rather guarantees the objectivity of the common world, his discussion of "monadological intersubjectivity" is pivotal.⁵³

In *Man and People*, Ortega y Gasset offers an account of how the individual consciousness comes to know other subjects that, among other things, indicates a fundamental problem in Husserl's discussion. To begin with, he commends us to ask ourselves if our "own behavior in the presence of a stone can be called social".⁵⁴ The discussion continues with observations about the non-social character of our relationships with inanimate objects and plant life, where the crucial fact of this relationship, for Ortega, is the unilateral source of action and experience. In classical terms, plants and stones can neither be agents or patients, while animals, on the other hand, can be both. In my relation to an animal, my actions towards it are formed, at least in part, by the anticipated reaction on the part of

⁵⁰ CM, § 50, p. 109/111: "so wäre es bloß Moment meines Eigenwesens, und schließlich er selbst und ich selbst einerlei."

⁵¹ CM, § 50, pp. 110f./112f.

⁵² CM, § 55, pp. 126–128/129–131.

⁵³ A recent work devoted to this theme in the *Cartesian Meditations* is Daniel Birnbaum, *The Hospitality of Presence. Problems of Otherness in Husserl's Phenomenology* (diss., Stockholm, 1998).

⁵⁴ Ortega y Gasset, *Man and People*, transl. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1963), pp. 84f.

the animal: "When I go up to a horse to saddle him, I reckon from the first with his possible kick, and when I approach a sheepdog I reckon with his possible bite, and in either case I take my precautions."⁵⁵ Similarly, there is nothing odd about the locution "we went out for a walk", when used in reference to myself and my beagle, while it would be improper, Ortega reminds us, to say "we are" about myself and the stone. This is because, as he says, "the stone *is* a stone *to me*, but to the stone I absolutely *am not*".⁵⁶ There is a reciprocity of acting between human beings and animals that simply does not exist between human beings and stones. The question is, for Ortega, whether or not this reciprocity can be called properly social. While the dog responds to me by licking or biting, while its behavior might indicate fear or affection, I cannot have any sense of the "inner life" of my beagle. I cannot, without anthropomorphosing her, worry about what she "really thinks of me", or refrain from accompanying her on her daily walks out of "respect for her privacy". Concerns about the inner lives of others seems to be something particular to human relations; in Ortega's view, this is due to the unique relation each one of us has to her own life.

While my own life is the primary, or in Ortega's terms, the radical reality for me, that is, the absolute horizon for any possible experience of mine, the inner life of the other is merely a presumption or an "assumed reality".⁵⁷ The perplexity lay in my understanding of what it means for another to have an inner life. The inner life of another is to the one living it, what my life is to me, namely, the absolute boundary for all possible experience. Thus another subject is both an element in my experience of the world, and something intrinsically foreign, or "transcendent", in that it is impossible for me to live another's life. While condemning the excessive idealism and utopianism of Kant and Husserl, Ortega commends them for recognizing that the "real world", the appearance of an objective world of common experience, is not the ground for communication and understanding between human beings, but rather the product of the latter. The epistemological question of how human beings

⁵⁵ MP, p. 86.

⁵⁶ MP, p. 86.

⁵⁷ By reality, Ortega means "everything with which I have to reckon", MP, p. 96.

can know the world actually rests on the question of how human beings recognize the humanity of other human beings.⁵⁸ What it means for there to be an "objective world" is that a plurality of egos recognize each other as such, and therewith, the experience of the "objective world" as an experience of other egos like my own. Ortega credits Husserl with being the first to define clearly the philosophical problem of what the former calls "The Appearance of the Other".⁵⁹

Ortega's interest in Husserl is primarily to delineate his own thought, and therefore his analysis of Husserl is thematic rather than expository. Nonetheless, he says that he must repudiate one point in Husserl's meditations upon how the ego comes to know other egos – Husserl's starting point. Husserl's idea of an analogical transposition is that since I am wherever my body is, and my body can move from place to place, so too the "here" for me can always be "there". Thus when there appears a body like mine "over there", I can infer that my body can appear to it there as it appears to me here. If I could be at both places at the same time, I would be able to see my body just as I see the body of the other. Given its similarities to my own body, I can then infer that it is the body of an ego "*coexisting in the mode There*, 'such as I would be if I were there'".⁶⁰ Husserl's "colossal error", according to Ortega, consists in considering the difference between my body and the body of another ego as merely a difference in perspective. The body of the other exists for me "only through my body, my seeing, my touching, my hearing, its resisting me, and so on".⁶¹ It is not simply that I experience my body from within, something that I cannot do with another body, but that my body *is* my *within*. And since I experience my body from within, and since it is the condition for my having experiences or cogitations, even when observing a part or the whole of my body from without, say, in a mirror, or while removing a splinter from my foot, I do so from within my body. Ortega argues that it simply is not the case that the ego "transposes" his body onto that of the other and therewith attributes to him an "inwardness" like its own. This alleged transposition

⁵⁸ MP, pp. 108f.

⁵⁹ MP, p. 122.

⁶⁰ CM, § 54, pp. 116–119/120–122: "im Modus Dort ('wie wenn ich dort wäre')." Discussed in Ortega, pp. 123–125.

⁶¹ MP, p. 125.

is merely an abstraction from experience, and, being abstract, is not real. Recalling the fundamental experience of reciprocity discussed earlier, Ortega notes that “the abstract Ego does not respond, because it is an abstraction”.⁶² What reveals the presence of an “inwardness like my own”, thought it is clearly not mine, is its *gestures*:

The expression that is sorrow or irritation or melancholy, I did not discover in myself but *primarily* in the other and it at once signified inwardness to me – grief, annoyance, melancholy. If I try to see myself tearful, irritated, afflicted in a looking-glass, my corresponding gesture *ipso facto* ceases or at least is altered and falsified.⁶³

Ortega’s main point here, as he says a few pages later, is that, “[o]ur body is known to us first and above all from within, and the other’s body from without. *They are heterogeneous phenomena.*”⁶⁴ The purpose of this digression is not to examine the merits of Ortega’s own position in contrast to Husserl’s, but to examine the implications of seeing the phenomenon of subjectivity as distinct, depending upon whether it is seen from the inside or from without. When we say that there is a real distinction at issue, we are not positing some ontological dualism. We are saying simply this: what my thoughts or feelings mean as an object of observation or consideration for someone else (or even for myself, retrospectively), differs from what they *mean* to me when I think or feel them, that is, when I *have* them. If what is true of self-awareness is not necessarily true of the awareness of the other, it would seem that the attempt to secure an objective (or external) account of the workings of subjectivity is misguided. Since there are two distinct phenomena at issue, self-awareness and the evidence of objective descriptions might be, at least in some cases, not only discrete but incompatible. In simple terms, the transposition of the third-person perspective onto reflections about oneself is a mistake.

It would stand to reason, though Ortega himself does not follow this line of thought, that the distinction between the phenomenon of knowing something from within and that of knowing something

⁶² MP, p. 127.

⁶³ MP, p. 126.

⁶⁴ MP, p. 136 (emphasis added).

from without finds expression in language, in the ways we normally talk about these discrete phenomena. In the case of someone else’s perceptions, it makes sense to talk about having “evidence” or grounds for accepting their reports or interpreting their behavior: someone massages her temples while knitting her eyebrows, for instance, and I infer that she has a headache. For the most part, however, I do not notice that *I* have a headache while passing a mirror and noting my grimace reflected in the glass. There is no room, in the latter case, for evidence either for or against the assertion “I have a headache”. On the other hand, the report “I have a headache” from someone else, especially in certain well-known circumstances, can well leave room for doubt: one might have grounds for believing or not believing the report “I have a headache” from, say, one’s husband. In the former case, it is hardly accurate to describe the statement “I have a headache” as a judgement at all, since the statement is not *based* on observation of my own gestures or the circumstances surrounding the remark. In the latter case, however, events accompanying the statement and the gestures and behavior of the person making the assertion are indeed grounds or evidence for my judgement “he must have a headache”.

When I doubt someone’s report that he has a headache, however, I am not doubting whether he has grounds for the claim that he has a headache. I am not, that is, doubting the accuracy or *validity* of his report, but his sincerity: whether he might be politely saying that he wishes to go home, or something of that sort. In most cases, evidentiary demands for claims such as “I have a headache” are unintelligible. To respond to such a remark by saying “Oh? Prove it!”, would be a kind of grammatical joke. For what could possibly serve as a satisfactory objective proof of “having a headache”? Such “reports” do not *refer* to states of affairs, and that means, quite simply, that they are not amenable to the kind of certainty to which states of affairs, such as the comparative lengths of two lines, are.

Recall that for Husserl, as for Descartes, the object of philosophizing is certainty, and this goal seems to involve starting with what cannot be doubted even in principle, and building up arguments upon that basis. We have been suggesting that the very notion of *certainty* that is both the starting point and ultimate goal is

problematic. If we consider my headache, once again, it may seem reasonable at first to say that I can be "certain" of my own headache in a way that I can never be certain of someone else's headache. Yet this picture may be misleading. The "certainty" that I have in knowing that I have a headache consists in this: I can never be in doubt of my own headache. This means that questions about certainty do not arise in the case of my own headache as they may in the case of someone else's headache. This is why it is so unusual for someone to say: "I know that I have a headache", or "I am certain that I have a headache." But even on those rare occasions when one might be inclined to make such an assertion, it does not mean "I have grounds for believing that I have a headache". One would be hard put to find an example where the use of "certainty" in such instances is tied to some notion of evidence or grounds. The certainty that I can have about *someone else's* headache, however, can often be related to the evidence or grounds that *I* have for believing her report, or interpreting her gestures and behavior thus.⁶⁵

One might object here that there are occasions when it is reasonable to say something like, "I know that I have a headache". However, such expressions are intended as a response to others *when doubt is introduced*. In other words, "I know", "I am certain", etc. are used in contexts where there can be doubt. But in the case of my own pain, if no one raises any doubts, I have no use for expressions of certainty either. And, as we said earlier, where doubt may arise, it has nothing to do with whether the one complaining of the headache has adequate evidence for the claim, but rather whether she is being honest, or whether she possesses an overly refined sense of politesse which prohibits stating a preference explicitly as such, or perhaps whether she is even aware of her own feelings. Alternatively, it may be a doubt with respect to my own capacity to interpret her behavior. It would seem, then, that part of the problem of achieving absolute certainty is that the ostensible certainty of first-person or subjective experience is incommensurable with the objectivity of third-person or objective experience, and the certainty that attends it.

⁶⁵ Although, as we will show shortly, it is far from always the case that we require evidence in order to render a judgement such as "X is in pain". In the following sections, we will discuss the reasonableness of evidentiary demands even in cases in which we do observe and "interpret" someone else's behavior.

Husserl's attempt to arrive at an objective subjectivity presupposes that the absence of the possibility of doubt and the certainty that characterizes certain forms of objective knowledge share some innate quality that makes them both instances of the same notion of "certainty". If Ortega is right, however, that assumption (one which Husserl shares with the Idealist tradition, and, as shall be shown, the poststructuralist critique thereof) is fundamentally misguided.

4. *Theoretical doubt and genuine uncertainty*

The grammar of psychological words is complex, and what look like counter-examples to the account offered here present themselves easily. A twelve-year old complains of a stomach-ache the morning of a mid-term geometry examination, and his mother tells him that "it's just nerves". The boy may react by saying "I know if my stomach hurts or not", but it seems clear enough that he does not mean by this, "I've checked my behavior and the circumstances surrounding it, and the evidence for my stomach hurting is conclusive". To the contrary, he must mean something like, "Don't question my complaints. I'm not lying, and I'm not stupid. My stomach hurts, and that's that". Again, the use of "I know" here is a response to another person's introduction of doubt with respect to the boy's sincerity or self-understanding, or, one might say, a response to the introduction of the (real or perceived) *demand* for objective evidence or grounds. But let us say that the boy goes off to his exam, and notices that, in fact, his palms are sweating and even that his hand is shaking. He might then think to himself: "Gee, maybe I am nervous." Could one not say that here is an instance in which someone has evidence or grounds for a statement about his own "inner state" on the basis of outward behavior? It seems more accurate to say that, in this case, the boy had a reason to *notice* that he was nervous. The difference that ought to be noted here is the difference between having objective or external evidence for a belief about a "subjective state" and the objective reasons for noticing something about the state one is in.⁶⁶ Returning to our earlier

⁶⁶ One may be tempted at this juncture to question the weight being placed on one's own intentions. Why, one might ask, is what the boy meant so decisive? One

example of the comparison of two line-segments, there is a parallel difference between the objective grounds for the statement that line A is longer than line B, and the recognition of the objectivity of that claim.

One complicated problem arising out of this discussion is the issue of self-deception. We all have ample evidence that it is indeed quite possible to be deluded about oneself or one's motives, and yet one might wonder *how* it is possible.⁶⁷ For present purposes, we will limit our discussion to the sorts of problems that are directly relevant to the topic at hand, namely, differences between first- and third-person uses of certain terms, and the consequences of these differences for our notions of subjectivity, objectivity, doubt and certainty. To begin with, there is clearly a difference between deluding oneself about one's motives, convictions and so forth (so-called "propositional attitudes"), and deluding oneself about being in pain or being hungry ("sensations", or "raw feels"). We will begin with the former.

Let us say that a man looks back on his marriage and says: "I thought I was in love, but now I see that I was just doing what everyone expected of me." Is this case of "doubting" one's motives or being "mistaken" or "unsure" about them the same sort of "doubting", "being mistaken" or "being unsure" involved in questioning someone else's motives? It would not seem to be the case. The husband's uncertainty about his feelings for his wife is not relative to some "evidence" or grounds on the basis of observing his behaviour or the circumstances surrounding it, but rather describes his attitude towards those feelings, behavior and circumstances. What about

may be wrong about one's own reasons for behaving in a particular way. Furthermore, the entire issue of intentions is highly problematic from the standpoint of sociobiology, for example. The aim of a phenomenology of "meaning intentions", it will be recalled, is to *describe* psychological phenomena as psychological phenomena, rather than attempt to *explain* these phenomena in other terms (social, biological, or what have you). The question as to the legitimacy of the latter is bracketed, so to speak, in order to concentrate on the phenomenological description. In *this* regard, we are following Husserl's method.

⁶⁷ The literature on self-deception is vast, both in psychology and philosophy. See, for example, Brian P. McLaughlin and Amélie O. Rorty, eds., *Perspectives on Self-Deception* (Berkeley, 1988). An introduction to the problem of self-deception within Freudian psychology and late nineteenth-century literature and philosophy can be found in Hans Sjöbäck, *Psykoanalysen som livslögnsteori. Läran om försvaret* (Lund, 1977).

the man who never makes the discovery that he actually never loved his wife, but married her because she, and her parents, and perhaps his own parents expected it of him? He might continue in the "mistaken" belief that he loved her for the rest of his life, while friends, acquaintances, perhaps even his own family read out of his gestures towards her, his behavior when they are among others, and the way he relates the story of his life to others that he has never felt at home in the marriage. If confronted with the specter of uncertainty, even after much soul-searching, he may insist (as he believes it is expected of him) that he married out of love. According to Nietzsche, more often than not, the human need for self-justification takes precedence over our ostensible craving for truth: "'I have done that', says my memory. 'I cannot have done that' – says my pride, and remains adamant. At last – memory yields."⁶⁸

In the situation described above, there is room for doubt and uncertainty, both objectively and subjectively, but again, they are incomparable. The uncertainty as to what the husband actually feels and experiences that may be felt by those around him have to do with how they are to interpret and respond to his outward behavior. They are not sure what they ought to take as evidence for his feelings, what stories and gestures are relevant, and so forth. But in analyzing his own behavior, the husband is not looking for relevant information in the same sense that his intimates are. One might say that in posing himself the question, "Have I been fundamentally mistaken about who I am, and what I want?", he has *taken notice* of aspects of his behavior and his thinking that he had not noticed earlier, and assigned to them an importance that he had previously not placed on them. In posing himself such a question, he is, in a sense, putting his whole life in parentheses; the sort of uncertainty he experiences alters his self-understanding at its roots.

But let us consider a more quotidian case. I notice that I have a rip in my favorite coat. Can I be *mistaken* about this coat being my favorite coat? Is it the case that I "revise my beliefs" when I buy a new coat that then becomes my favorite coat? It may well be that I

⁶⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §68, transl. R.J. Hollingdale (London, 1990), p. 91. (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse, Sämtliche Werke*, Kritische Studienausgabe, Band 3, hrsg. G. Colli und M. Montinari [Berlin, 1980], p. 86)

like *two* coats very much, and would perhaps be inclined to say, "I'm not sure which coat is my favorite", if someone were to pose the question. The reason for my lack of certainty is not, however, a lack of *evidence or grounds* for preferring the one coat over the other, but a question of my *attitude* toward the coats. It is not as if I can *actually* prefer the one coat to the other but, after weighing their respective merits and deficiencies, be forced, on rational grounds, *actually* to prefer the other one. To the contrary, many of us have found ourselves saying things like: "I know that it's an old rag, but I like it." And someone can surely say: "Oh, that's only because it has sentimental value. You've had it for so long." Once again, however, this is an attempt to explain or interpret a fact at hand, namely, that this coat *is* my favorite coat. That this is my favorite coat is rather the ground for the interpretation, and not the reverse. In the quest for generality, philosophers tend to conflate *attitudes*, on the one hand, with observations or *opinions about*, or explanations of these, on the other, and call them all "beliefs" or "judgements". However, the judgement, "This is my favorite coat", can only arise as a response to an uncertainty or a calling into question. Often enough, I am not even aware of my preferences in such matters, in which case calling them "beliefs" or "judgements" is misleading.

A friend, on the other hand, may mistakenly believe a certain coat to be my favorite, and buy me a gift of a pair of gloves to match the less favored mantle. Perhaps my friend *interpreted* the frequency of my wearing that coat as a sign of its preferred status when, in fact, I have chosen to save my favorite coat for special occasions, for fear of damaging it by wearing it out. In this case, it is reasonable to talk about grounds for an interpretation or for drawing a certain inference.

One may nonetheless ask if judgements about others' subjective states are *always interpretations or inferences* drawn on the basis of observable behavior. In many cases, they clearly are. Ortega refers to the body of the Other as a "field of expressiveness" of his or her "inwardness":

I see a human body running, and I think: *he* is in a hurry or training for a cross-country race. In a place where there are a great many marble slabs, I see a body

digging a large whole in the ground; I think: *he* is a grave-digger and is digging a grave.⁶⁹

Similarly, Ortega continues, one can remind oneself of "how many of the other man's intimate concerns have been revealed to us by 'ill-suppressed gestures'".⁷⁰ It is equally worth noting, however, that it also happens that one sees directly or "immediately" that someone is in a state of panic or fear. Let us take, then, a case of someone else's sensations or immediate experiences. I see a toddler who is crying uncontrollably after falling down from a bookcase: is it not a rather artificial, or even an incorrect, use of words to say that I "inferred" that he hurt himself, or that I "interpreted his behavior to mean" that he hurt himself? The reason why it strikes one as odd to speak in this way is precisely because, in so speaking, one introduces terms that belong to a discussion where there is room for doubt, and in a case such as the one described, there is no room for doubt, except for what Peirce aptly coined "paper doubt". But notice that such theoretical doubts necessarily presuppose that "what is given to observation" is *merely* the boy's bodily movements; in point of fact, what is "given to observation", in this instance, is a little boy who has fallen down from a bookcase and hurt himself. We do, at times, see exactly what has occurred and understand immediately what the crying means, and, at other times, do not see what has occurred, and, therefore, do not know what the crying means (perhaps the child is hungry, or lonely).

Returning to Husserl, one sees that the very idea of a reduction presupposes the possibility of theoretical doubt where, in practice, doubt is impossible. What remains to be shown, for our part, is that genuine doubt in the case described above, as well as in the example of the comparison of two line segments with which the chapter began,

⁶⁹ MP, pp. 113f. A comparable point is made by Fred Stoutland in "On Not Being a Behaviourist", in *Perspectives on Human Conduct*, eds. Lars Hertzberg and Juhani Pietarinen (Leiden, 1988), pp. 37–60: "We normally take behaviour to be intentional simply on the basis of observation. We observe people looking for a book, setting a meal, trying to open a door, hurrying home. Such descriptions are not normally the result of inference, and when they are, they must be based on observations of behaviour themselves expressed in intentional, not physical terms." (p. 55.)

⁷⁰ MP p. 114.

is a *conceptual impossibility*; with the possibility of real doubt excluded, what remains is “theoretical doubt”, which, outside of the seminar room, is nonsense.⁷¹ The idea of finding objective grounds for the certainty of self-experience is an attempt to tackle the specter of scepticism, which is grounded in the idea that in every case of knowledge, even what we are inclined to call “certain knowledge”, there always remains a kernel of doubt.

In the introduction, we suggested that such doubt must arise from the following thought: I cannot feel the pain of the fallen toddler as he feels it. The child, in a sense, owns his pain. Thus absolute certainty as to his pain is impossible for me to have as an observer. If I could somehow “get inside his head”, I could see the pain itself, and not merely its manifestations. The “distance” between the immediate experience of pain and its manifestations in observable behavior is seen as a sort of “gap” which is left open for doubt. Similarly, I cannot “see” the immediate recognition that A is longer than B in the mind of someone else; therewith, the objectivity (and certainty) of the grounds for the validity of the judgement that A is longer than B seems to be threatened. In a word, I can never be certain of someone else’s certainty.

We have suggested that the room opened for doubt is a result of a misleading formulation of the problem. Philosophers have fallen into confusion, not because we really cannot be certain of the child’s pain, but because we formulate a problem for ourselves which has no existence outside of that formulation. A child expressing pain, whether by crying, screaming: “Ouch!!”, or whimpering: “I hurt myself”, does not refer to a state of affairs that he has observed, or for which he has or lacks evidence. He can neither doubt nor be certain of his pain. In observing his behavior, however, we can doubt that, for example, the pain expressed was as grievous, say, as the mere shock of falling. Or we might doubt that the pain was as acute as the child’s need for attention. We do not therewith doubt his pain as such. The difference here is one of the possibility of doubt or certainty versus the impossibility of either. Doubt and certainty are intimately bound up with grounds and evidence; where there is no place for the latter, there is no room for the former. Yet it is precisely

⁷¹ The term “nonsense” here is being used *descriptively*, not evaluatively.

in virtue of the misapplication of the third-person perspective onto first-person experience that much of the modern philosophical history of the subject has come to be written.

It was mentioned earlier in the chapter that Husserl and Kant both distinguished an empirical self from the I that is presupposed by all thinking as such. One motivation for Kant’s distinction, it will be recalled, was to call into question the Humean idea that the self is a philosophical fiction, or “imaginary principle of union”.⁷² Hume states:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into *what I call myself*, I always *stumble on* some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. *I never can catch myself* at any time without a perception, and never can *observe* any thing but the perception.⁷³

Here and elsewhere in the *Treatise*, Hume writes about his own thinking and experiences as *if they belonged to someone else*, as if it were possible to “observe” his impressions and experiences in the same respect that one can observe another’s behavior and actions. Or better, perhaps, he writes as if he were *observing* his impressions and experiences rather than *having* them. Indeed he states without further ado, regarding the discovery and production of identity by means of the relation of resemblance among perceptions, that the “case is the same whether we consider ourselves or others”.⁷⁴ One could interpret Kant’s introduction of a transcendental subject as a grammatical objection (in the philosophical sense) to this aspect of empiricism: it is not the case that one “observes one’s impressions and ideas”; it is more accurate to say that one “*has* impressions and ideas”.⁷⁵ The

⁷² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1975), p. 262.

⁷³ Hume, p. 252 (emphasis added).

⁷⁴ Hume, p. 261.

⁷⁵ Hume says of the problem of personal identity and the subtle questions surrounding it, that they can never be decided. Therefore, he concludes, they “are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties” (p. 262). Of course, Hume was using the notion of grammar in the classical sense, but using the term grammatical in the philosophical sense, one could say that our purpose here is to show how these two overlap in the comparison of the certainty of subjective experience with the certainty of objective phenomena. See Wittgenstein’s discussion in *The Blue and Brown Books*, pp. 66–69.

reason why this insight leads Kant to posit a superindividual transcendental ego is that he also wants to show that we must have the categories of understanding and ideas of reason as he, in his epoch and tradition, understands them.⁷⁶ As a consequence, this supposed objective, universal and *a priori* self gets laden with the historically determinate and specific concepts of Euclidean geometry, Newtonian physics, etc. Nonetheless, part of Kant's greatness lay in his insight that even Hume could not observe from without, for example, the Newtonian picture of the relation between cause and effect. Hume treated that picture of reality as if it were bare reality, for the simple reason that he was not aware of his having a particular attitude toward that picture at all. The point of Kant's "transcendental method" is to make explicit the concepts and ways of thinking that belong to anyone thinking thus.⁷⁷

Husserl tried to handle the problems raised by the new historical self-consciousness by showing (rather than assuming) how there must be a plurality of egos which can come to know each other. As we have seen, his account of how we come to recognize each other as thinking subjects, and as participants in a common world, fails to do justice to fundamental facts of human experience for the following reasons: (i) The difference between my relationship to my life and my relationship to your life is not merely a matter of perspective; (ii) while it is reasonable to speak in terms of evidence and doubt with regard to states of affairs about which I make judgments based on observation, it is nonsense to speak of evidence, doubt, or even judgment with respect to expressions of pain such as "My stomach hurts"; (iii) this latter observation indicates that the experience of immediacy is not a matter of certainty, and, therefore,

⁷⁶ It is not insignificant, of course, that Kant (unlike Hume) had a pietist background that made concern with the soul a most personal affair. Hume, on the other hand, was a forerunner of the new "enlightened" thinking on such matters, in which it was a sign of scientific progress that one treated thoughts and perceptions as objects to be observed from the outside. For the influence of pietism on Kant's philosophy, see Peter Josephson, "Immanuel Kant, pietismen och den moraliska problematiseringen av kroppen", in *Lychnos. Årsbok för idé- och lärdomshistoria* (Uppsala, 1996), pp. 81–121. The historical background of Kant's and Hume's respective philosophies is not, however, directly pertinent to this study.

⁷⁷ If Kant had the historical and linguistic self-consciousness that came a century later with, say, Nietzsche, he might have made a similar analysis of the thinking of his own epoch, but without making the same claims to universality.

cannot serve the epistemological purpose of grounding knowledge of states of affairs; (iv) Husserl seems to underestimate the extent to which the crucial elements of his philosophy are dependent upon the very contexts of language, personal history, and concrete circumstances which must be bracketed for his investigation to get off the ground.

It is arguable that the reason why Husserl gets caught in the very sort of trap that he's at such pains to avoid, that is, a view of human intentions as objects of analysis, or things, is that he insists upon seeing philosophy as a science. In the case of science, the natural sciences in particular, one defines one's object of investigation with the help of scientific methods.⁷⁸ It is these methods that determine what that object is, that definition arrived at with the explicit purpose of obtaining a concrete result. Certain particles of particle physics, for instance, can only be obtained with the aid of an accelerator costing hundreds of millions of dollars, and then, only for a fraction of a second. Husserl's philosophy, on the other hand, attempts to investigate human phenomena as such, with no particular concrete aim other than the *general* picture that is acquired through the analysis. One decides what it is to be human, to live, to think and to act, on the basis of the general scheme and definitions one is working with. In this scheme, one must account for objectivity in terms of what is immediate, directly given and observable and so forth. Yet it also belongs to the general scheme of philosophical thinking and its language that one speaks of ideas, concepts, and intentions, which themselves do not seem to be reducible to objective data of experience, at least not without remainder.

The terms in which the problems are posed, then, make it impossible in principle to get out of the snare, as long as one allows this representation of human language and experience to replace facts of language and experience. Husserl's "transcendental ego", admittedly

⁷⁸ It is not without reservations that I avail myself of a comparison with the natural sciences. As we have already remarked, Husserl's idea of philosophy as a self-grounding science puts it at odds with the contemporary concept of natural science. Furthermore, one of the major impeti for a phenomenological account of consciousness was Husserl's fervent anti-naturalism. Nonetheless, if we constrain the parallel to the particular questions being raised here, the comparison strikes me as both justified and helpful.

a product of abstraction (the reduction), is defined by the role it plays in Husserl's philosophy, that is, as objective ground and guarantor of epistemic certainty. Unlike particles, however costly and complex their process of generation, *the transcendental ego serves no function or purpose outside of its place in the philosophical system*.⁷⁹ And yet this abstraction is said to be the ground for the objectivity and certainty of all knowledge, including the knowledge that, in our everyday lives, we could not even begin to question, such as the comparative lengths of line-segments A and B as discussed earlier. In this respect, Husserl remains well-entrenched in the metaphysical tradition, in an almost classical sense: he posits (or deduces, it hardly matters) an abstract entity as the ground and guarantor of truth and objectivity, an entity which has no existence apart from the statements one is apt to make about it when philosophizing. Whether one calls such an entity God, the transcendental ego, the community of interpreters, or what have you, the requirement that there be some absolute explanatory ground that does not admit of the diversity and complexity of actual human experience, betrays a presupposition which Richard Rorty, echoing Nietzsche, calls a longing for "metaphysical comfort".⁸⁰ What we have been suggesting throughout is that the need for metaphysical comfort arises when we are haunted by the specter of doubt. But that need disappears as soon as we recognize that the doubt was imagined rather than real.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Husserl, of course, would respond to this by saying that if one has truly understood his philosophical system, there is no "outside" of it. It can be seen for what it is only through the first-person perspective of the transcendental ego. It is impossible to meet this objection within the context of the present discussion. Some indication of the problems involved here is given in chapters II and III, where we discuss the poststructuralist critique of the phenomenological project.

⁸⁰ Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis, 1982), p. 165. We do not wish to suggest that Rorty's rejection of all philosophical problems as pseudo-problems is accurate. To the contrary, the problem of certainty and objectivity as Husserl articulates it, is clearly something more than a sentimental nostalgia for old-time religion in philosophical guise.

⁸¹ Rorty, like Derrida, would presumably agree with this statement. But he would also deny the possibility of genuine certainty. One of the aims of the present study is to show that the existence of certain kinds of experience precludes the very possibility of doubt in certain situations, and that these experiences remain untouched by epistemological demands for certainty. Thus, for instance, the difference between the objective grounds for the validity of the statement that line A is

We have already discussed two distinct uses of the term "certainty". One is in contexts in which there can be no room either for doubt or for certainty. We maintained that this is an illicit use, or rather a misuse, of the sense of "certainty". For example, assuming that, as we said, one has unimpaired vision and an unencumbered view, one line is distinctly longer than the other, and the two lines are printed clearly, it is difficult to find a reasonable sense to the claim that one is "certain" that line A is longer than line B. Precisely because it is so plainly evident to anyone with eyes to see that line A is longer than line B, though there might be circumstances in which it would be appropriate usage to say "I am certain that A is longer than B", they would be few and far between. On the other hand, it requires no great feat of the imagination to come up with examples of the use of "certainty" in contexts in which doubts have been raised, since "I am certain that ..." is used, in non-philosophical language at least, as an assertion of knowledge in response to the *possibility* of some mistake or misunderstanding. As one philosopher formulates it:

Certainty in all forms entails a *meta-reflection*, an *assessment* that a given judgment has been made properly and correctly. It is a *retrospective certification* that the *evidence* is in order and that the train of thought leading up to the judgement has followed adequate procedures. *Declarations of certainty in actual cases are thus relative to the standards of evidence* and ratiocination presupposed for different types of judgement.⁸²

If I am looking at two lines written on a blackboard two meters away, and describing what I see for someone on the telephone, he

longer than line B (that is, a state of affairs) and the recognition of those grounds (my relation to that state of affairs) means that the objectivity of the truth and meaningfulness of the statement is not jeopardized by the ontological status of "recognition"; one way of putting the matter is to say that line A as printed on the page in this book is objectively longer than line B as printed on the same page, whatever we want to say about the notion of the thinking subject. In this respect, Rorty's facile pragmatist conclusions about the nature of truth and meaning are not borne out by a careful examination of what actually happens when we speak of certainty in non-theoretical contexts. We will return to this in our discussion of Rorty.

⁸² Carl Page, "Symbolic Mathematics and the Intellect Militant: On Modern Philosophy's Revolutionary Spirit", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 57, no. 2, April 1996, p. 237 (emphasis added).

might question whether or not I've seen correctly. After squinting my eyes for ten seconds, it would be perfectly reasonable for me then to say: "Yes, I am quite certain. Line A is longer than line B." In the first case, there is no reason to distrust the testimony of the senses, in the second, there is. In the latter case, there is some procedure by which I can check the accuracy of my statement (such as, for instance, squinting my eyes). The extent to which one speaks in terms of evidence is exactly the extent to which the statement refers to a state of affairs, that state of affairs being the relative lengths of the two printed or drawn lines. The validity of the truth of the statement "Line A is longer than line B" is not dependent upon my actual recognition of that validity for its truth.

Further, we noticed that the demand for evidence in the first use (or misuse) of "certainty" seems to lead inexorably to an objectification (and therewith, a falsification) of the kind of certainty that one has in recognizing the truth of a statement. One consequence of this is that the *recognition* or *insight* that a judgement is true, for example, gets confused with the objective *grounds* that are recognized or understood. This distinction led to a discussion of the equally important difference between situations where there can be a question of evidence (the comparative lengths of the two segments when my visual access is blocked, for instance; or the actual comparison of the two chalk lines on the board by pointing or showing to someone who, for whatever reason, questions the assertion) and where there can be none (my having a headache). There is no state of affairs to which I am referring when I say that I have a headache; therefore, there can never be a question of certainty or doubt or evidence with regard to the statement. While I can doubt that what I thought was the cause of the pain is in fact the cause of the pain, for example, I cannot actually wonder whether or not I am in pain. Even if we were to take an example from extraordinary circumstances, such as extreme inebriation or anaesthetization, one would be more inclined to say that "I am injured, but don't feel pain" than to say: "I am not sure whether or not I am in pain." Indeed even in the case of excessive inebriation, one would be inclined to take such a remark as a comical token of a general confusion induced by the alcohol. What could it mean, in practice, to take it literally? In most cases, such a statement could only be gibberish, that is, it is unclear how it could be used meaningfully.

Finally, we said that confusions with regard to the foregoing tend to give rise to worries that, for example, what we call objective judgements, when all is said and done, revert to subjective states. Our response to this concern was to point out that if one sees the difference between indubitability and dubitability, and the possibility of certainty in some cases but not in all, as a *fact* of human experience, then one no longer makes the evidentiary demands on first-person statements that one makes on third-person judgements. One accepts the irreconcilability of the two ways of thinking and speaking not as a restriction on our freedom but as a simple fact of life. It is not at all clear that relativism and nihilism ensue the moment we accept that the notion of certainty admits certain uses and not others. Rules of due process in law are designed to protect the rights of the defendant; the failure to produce juridically viable evidence that a crime has been committed does not mean that, in point of fact, a crime has not been committed. Similarly, failure to produce evidence for certain kinds of assertion in no way casts doubt on those assertions. It simply means, in many cases, that the sort of statement in question is not amenable to the kind of evidentiary demands that philosophy places on it. This need not open the floodgates of scepticism or relativism. Nevertheless the gist of the most influential critique of Husserl's idealism today is that the very distinction between certainty and uncertainty is a chimera dreamt up by philosophers sleepwalking through the corridors of language. This view will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Before moving on to that claim, it may be useful to summarize the consequences of the foregoing for the notion of transcendental subjectivity, and pose a number of questions about the methodological legitimacy of such an approach.

5. A note on meaning and use

In order both to summarize the discussion so far, as well as to clarify its relevance for larger philosophical problems, it might be best to set the view presented here against a diametrically opposed position. In a recent book on the first person, *The Indexical I*, Ingar Brinck offers an impressive overview of different approaches to the problem of the subject in language, and works through the merits and deficiencies of these before presenting her own positive account.

The underlying assumption of the book, one that is never examined, is stated already in the first sentence of her introduction: "Most of us take it for granted that each of us in some sense has a self. Still, we do not know exactly what we mean by saying so."⁸³

In one sense, the aim of the present investigation is to question just that assumption, one which underlies a great number of similar studies. It is clear enough that the philosophical notion of selfhood, in both the continental and Anglo-Saxon philosophical traditions, is riddled with paradoxes and confusions. Thus if the "we" who do not know exactly what they mean refers to professional philosophers in their capacity as experts in the field of subjectivity, Brinck's remark is an accurate description. If, on the other hand, she wants to say that the precise use of the words "I" or "self" in the contexts to which they belong *in general* is somehow infected with this philosophical perplexity, this needs to be shown. For it is only in the attempt to observe the inner workings of one's thinking through the lens of philosophical analysis that we see, as Brinck says in Humean fashion, only "a tangled heap of thoughts and sensations."⁸⁴ In actual daily life, the various aspects of human existence are, for the most part, unproblematic, even if there is no univocal semantic or logical point of unification for the multifarious things that we are apt to say about ourselves. In what sense do the thoughts and experiences, "I am thirsty", "I am thirty-three years old", "I am in a hurry", and "I am in love" form a "tangled heap" to the one having them? It seems to me that the response must be that, taken together, they fail to meet with some externally imposed requirement for intelligibility or coherence.

This requirement for the use of the word "I" is what leads to the perceived need for new, better theories of subjectivity. It is also this requirement, as we shall see, that forms the basis of Brinck's rejection of the Wittgensteinian view that "I" does not refer. One formulation of Brinck's concern is this: if the "I" does not refer,

⁸³ Ingar Brinck, *The Indexical 'I': The First Person in Thought and Language* (diss., Dordrecht, etc., 1997), p. 1.

⁸⁴ Brinck, p. 1.

[i]n its use as subject, 'I' then *indicates a neuter* without body or mind, without extension or soul: a playground for thoughts and experiences that come and go. But do not thoughts need a subject? Is Wittgenstein's conclusion at all reasonable?⁸⁵

However one understands what Wittgenstein might or might not have intended in his remarks on the use of "I", there is something to be gained in responding to some of the criticisms of Wittgenstein in this section of Brinck's book, as it constitutes a well-composed bill of particulars against the manner of thinking about subjectivity that has been proposed thus far.

The purpose of this section is to look at the source of these criticisms. Once more, the discussion is not intended as a critique of this book in particular, but rather aims to uncover the kinds of assumptions that motivate so much contemporary theorizing about the problem of subjectivity. It seems that the majority of them can be traced back to the idea that either there is some univocal conceptual sense to the terms "I" and "self" (whether this be conceived semiotically, semantically, logically, or otherwise) that can be studied and understood by means of the methods, rules and concepts of philosophy or *there is no self*. While these methods and concepts may have interest and useful application in, for example, logic or linguistics, we wish to show that it is unreasonable to assume that they therewith are applicable to, or explanatory of, our everyday notions of selfhood and the vernacular use of the word "I".

Brinck begins her discussion by presenting stronger and weaker versions of the "thesis" that "I" does not refer. In one interpretation, she notes, meaning is the use or uses that an expression can have. She sees two difficulties with the idea that the meaning of an expression resides in its use(s): (i) "an expression may have an infinite number of uses, which makes it impossible to recount its meaning"; (ii) "to understand the use or force of an expression, one first has to understand its meaning, where by 'meaning' I intend the linguistic sense laid down in dictionaries."⁸⁶ Regarding the first difficulty,

⁸⁵ Brinck, p. 19 (emphasis added). Notice that Brinck assumes that the 'I' must refer even when questioning whether or not it does, that is, if the I does not refer, then it must 'indicate', as she says, a 'neuter', a 'playground' for thoughts.

⁸⁶ Brinck, p. 11f.

we can say the following. It is true that most expressions seem to have, if not an infinite number of uses, a vast variety of uses. Nonetheless, children do learn to speak and understand their mother tongues long before they set eyes on a dictionary. That we cannot reduce a term to one or two essential components we can then "re-count" is normally altogether unproblematic in everyday life. Instead, we give examples of how it is used, we look for some other word that can fill the same function in the sentence, and so forth. Thus the first difficulty is a difficulty concerning the failure of the "non-referential thesis" to satisfy the philosophical requirement that there be a stateable meaning for every word; it is not a difficulty in actual language use. The second difficulty raised by Brinck is intimately bound up with the first. The purpose of dictionaries is to present a concise definition of words *on the basis of actual use*. Words do not derive their meanings from dictionaries; in this respect, it is inaccurate to say that meanings are "laid down" by dictionaries. Most of the language that we use, we have learned in our intercourse with others and not from consulting a lexicon. This second difficulty then, is more or less another way of saying that it seems impossible to formulate a theory of meaning on the basis of actual language use; it is a restatement of the requirement that there *must be* some univocal sense that is being employed in all these uses. *This requirement itself has no use outside of theories of meaning.*

Taking another tack, Brinck worries about the philosophical consequences of granting that mental experiences are "subjectless". We would not be able to judge, for example, if we were all having the (numerically) same experience of happiness, if we could not attach experiences of happiness to their subjects.⁸⁷ Naturally, she finds this an undesirable notion. Brinck presupposes that rejecting the possibility of making sense of the philosophical doctrine of subjectivity (in whatever form) is isomorphic with advancing the positive thesis that impressions, thoughts and feelings are "subjectless". One plausible interpretation of what Wittgenstein meant is that certain kinds of first-person expressions are not "about" states of affairs of the speaker, and are therefore not amenable to the same sort of criteria of evidence and justification, for example, to which observable states of

⁸⁷ Brinck, p. 20.

affairs are. This latter remark does not in and of itself commit one to a theory denying the existence of subjective experience. One could say that it is simply a fact about the way that we use expressions such as "I have a headache", that they are immune to the sorts of doubt that may arise when we say "she has a headache", because, for reasons already discussed, there can be no question of observation or evidence in the first case.

Brinck interprets the fact that we respond to someone's statement "I have a headache" by offering aspirin as meaning that "we understand her as talking about herself as a subject that instantiates a certain property. We grasp the sentence [...] as of subject-predicate form".⁸⁸ But this is patently false. To say that someone who says "I have a headache" is talking about herself as a subject that instantiates a property, and to claim that someone present at the time of the complaint grasps the sentence as of subject-predicate form, is a reversal of the relationship of grammar (and the abstract philosophical concepts derived from it) and actual language use. The subject-predicate distinction is a summary description of certain forms of expression in language, on the basis of there already being actual language. Similarly, subjects and properties are philosophical abstractions from actual experience (such as having a headache). The conceptual apparatus which Brinck is applying is a reconstruction with the tools of academic philosophy. It is in no way an accurate description of what goes on when someone says that she has a headache and is offered an aspirin. Even if most philosophers would ultimately agree with this last remark, it seems to me that there is a prevalent tendency to confuse the model of communication produced by philosophy with pre-theoretical facts of language use.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Brinck, p. 20.

⁸⁹ Cf., for example, Colin McGinn, *The Character of Mind* (Oxford, New York, etc., 1982), p. 86: "Raising your arm somehow incorporates both willing to raise your arm and your arm rising. This seems intuitively right: from the agent's point of view raising his arm involves some sort of psychological event [...] but also, as is evident by taking up the third-person perspective, raising your arm involves a bodily movement, the arm going up." What we have attempted to show is that what McGinn calls 'agent's point of view' is not, in fact, the agent's point of view, but a third-person perspective on the agent's presumed point of view. Nobody experiences raising his arm as involving 'a psychological event'. It is philosophers who impute to the experience of raising one's arm an 'inner aspect' that must be accounted for, and an outer, observable event, the raising of the arm.

Finally, Brinck offers a few reasons why she thinks that we should take "I" to be a referring expression. Her first reason is that, in the account given by Wittgenstein and, one may surmise, the account offered here, she cannot understand how I can see any connection between experience as I endure it and as someone else endures it. She asks if this position entails that "when I say that another person has a headache, I say something else about her than when she mentions it herself, using the first person? If so, how do I understand what she says when she complains about being in pain?"⁹⁰ In a sense, our own investigation may be read as a reply to the first question in the affirmative, and an explanation of how the view of language proposed here not only allows for the possibility that we understand what someone else means when he says that he has a headache, but (as distinct from theories of meaning) *is based* on such facts. To conclude this chapter, we will repeat, in brief, what has already been said in more detail in the previous sections, but this time against the backdrop of objections of the sort that Brinck has lodged.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Brinck, p. 21.

⁹¹ Alec Hyslop has noticed that one of the problems with anti-Wittgensteinian views of the relationship between the self and others is that they tend to misconceive Wittgenstein's point about first and third person uses of belief or knowledge terms: "On this view, we do not know that others are as we are, nor even have a justifiable belief that they are. However, we are not sceptical, or whatever. We do not, though, merely believe that others are as we are. [--] Talk of belief misses the mark. Does each of us believe we have this 'soul'? Does each of us believe that we exist? Does each of us, in pain, believe we are in pain. Talk of belief, in our case and that of others, opens a gap that is not there." Alec Hyslop, *Other Minds* (Dordrecht, etc., 1995), pp. 124f. What Hyslop fails to notice is that where there can be no question of evidence, justification and belief, it is equally problematic to introduce the notions certainty and criteria. He retains the view that we are "certain" that there are other minds, and therewith can entertain the question of whether or not we are "entitled" to that certainty. We are arguing here, once more, that *we cannot doubt* the existence of other minds and thus the question of certainty (and therewith criteria and justification) has no place. It is striking that even philosophers who take their cue from Wittgenstein, such as Sydney Shoemaker, can make remarks such as, "statements like 'I see an image' and 'I have a toothache' are not inferred from anything (not even from 'criterial evidence'), yet *these statements are made with certainty* and it seems unquestionable that we are *justified* in making them". Shoemaker, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Ithaca, 1963), pp. 211f. (emphasis added). If someone, such as my optician, asks me "what do you see?", and I say, "I see an image", it is not a statement made with certainty. To the contrary, the use of the vague term "image" would seem to indicate that the statement is an

The word "seem" provides a clear illustration of the fact that the meaningfulness or appropriateness of the use of certain words changes depending upon whether they are used in the first or third person. There is no syntactical prohibition from using "seem" in certain cases but not in others, and yet it is clear enough that its meaning is obvious in one case and almost unintelligible in another. Compare the following sentences:

- (i) He seems to be lost.
- (ii) I seem to be lost.
- (iii) He seems to think that I am lost.
- (iv) I seem to think that he is lost.

The first might be my response to noticing someone wandering confusedly along the street, peering at street-signs and street numbers as he walks. These are the signs or evidence for my conjecture or belief that "x is lost". In the second instance, one might imagine a case in which I am looking for a specific address (perhaps I am on my way to a job interview) and I am distractedly rifling through my papers when I suddenly notice that I do not recognize the street name when I look up. I might ask for help from a passing stranger and say: "I seem to be lost, can you help me find this address ...". In this case, I am *describing* myself as being in a certain situation, or, rather, describing my situation, a given state of affairs. In the third example, perhaps I am enjoying a stroll through a foreign city on my vacation, and my light complexion signals to the local denizens that I am a tourist. Upon seeing me study my map as I compare it with the street signs around me, someone may come up to help me find my way. Surprised by the effort (since in fact I am not lost, but am trying to memorize the names of the streets in the foreign language and, to that end, comparing my English map with street signs),

expression of uncertainty as to what it is that I am looking at. The case of "I have a toothache" is more extreme, for the reasons that we have indicated in the body of the chapter. Certainty, a consequence of applying criteria to a judgement after the possibility of doubt has been introduced, rarely plays any part in the use of the statement "I have a toothache". Once more, by what criteria would I achieve "certainty" that I have a toothache? Shoemaker, like Hyslop, conflates the absence of the conceptual possibility of doubt with certainty.

I may think: "Oh, dear. He seems to think that I am lost." This thought is based on the evidence that I am light-skinned and therefore evidently a tourist, and furthermore, I appear to any observer to be studying a map. On the other hand, until I have understood what my interlocutor has said, I cannot be certain that he is indeed trying to give me directions. Perhaps he is only asking for the time. But, with respect to (iv), under what circumstances would I be inclined to say, "I seem to think X"? Now some very clever reader might well find such a use, but it is certainly not obvious what that use would be on the face of it. This is precisely because "seems" is related to the uncertainty that accompanies insufficient evidence for a conclusion, while both "evidence" and "conclusions" are irrelevant in the case of my relationship to my own thoughts in progress.⁹²

When someone says that she has a headache, she does not base this claim on any grounds or evidence. She does not observe her own gestures and behavior on the basis of which she reaches a conclusion about either having or not having pain. On the other hand, I might well have reasons for doubting someone else's reports of pain based on my observation of her behavior or surrounding circumstances. I do not doubt that she has grounds for attributing the property of pain to her subjective experience; what I doubt, perhaps, are her motives in saying so, or her use of what she considers polite conversation. I can neither be certain of my own headache nor be in doubt of it, since the demand for evidence and justification makes no sense in personal expressions of pain. I may have evidence for the belief that someone else who says that she has a headache is lying, for example, if I know that she hates philosophy lectures and may be looking for a polite way of declining an impromptu invitation to attend one. But nonetheless it makes no sense to demand evidence for her "claim" that she has a headache. What

⁹² Of course, one might construct an ingenious scenario à la Parfit, in which my body has been duplicated, cell for cell, and I am in the position of watching my other "self" in some sort of competition with another player. Observing my other self behaving as if he has noticed that the other player has lost its way, I may say of my second self: "Oh, I seem to think that he is lost." But notice that in such a thought experiment, my first self is referring to the second self as another, that is, the sentence actually means: "Oh, (my) second self seems to think that the other player is lost." Here the "self" described is an *object of observation*, rather than the *subject of the thought*: "He is lost."

kind of evidence can she have? Similarly, a child writhing in pain after a nasty fall cannot in any reasonable sense be said to "understand himself as a subject instantiating a certain property". (Only philosophy professors do that). The difference that I am indicating is one between having an experience and observing someone else's experience (and perhaps interpreting it). I can question whether the expression "I" refers to a subject having an experience without questioning the validity of our everyday notions of selfhood. And I do not need a philosophical doctrine of predication to know what it means when someone says that she has a headache. Our pre-theoretical experiences of headaches and communication about these experiences do not fall apart in want of a philosophical foundation to stand on. On the other hand, philosophical doctrines do seem to come apart at the seems when they are torn from the fabric of everyday life.