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**THE EMERGENCE OF SELF  
THROUGH REFLECTION**

by

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Doctor of Philosophy  
of  
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Except where acknowledged within the  
text, all parts of this thesis  
represent my own original work.

*Petra Campbell.*

**Petra Campbell**

*For my children*

*Danny*

*and*

*Ursula*

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# THE EMERGENCE OF SELF THROUGH REFLECTION

Petra Campbell

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is structured in the form of an historical investigation of the dialectic between two different ideas of the self - that it is given, and that it is fashioned in a process of self-making. It will be argued that both ways of viewing the self are inadequate, generating problems that can only be overcome by an alternative view of the self, which is presented in the final chapter. At the same time, the dialectic between the two ideas in question itself can be shown to move within the context of notions about the being of the self, and the belief in a special relation between thought and the self. Over time, this belief begins to crystallise into an acceptance that there is a relation between reflection and the self. As a result of exploring this relation, it will be argued that reflection has a structure involving three significant elements, namely, introspective mirroring, the retrospective movement of re-appropriation and expressive force. Once this structure of reflection is taken fully into account, it becomes possible to clarify how it functions as the source of the self, a self that is finally defined in terms of a reflexive activity of consciousness, made determinate by its content.

The construction of the context, within which the dialectic between the ideas that the self is given and that it is self-constituted moves, has

its beginnings in the Humanism of the Italian Renaissance, and is captured tellingly in the controversial case of Pico della Mirandola. For some commentators, Pico held an idea of self-making; others, however, reject such an interpretation. But what emerges as important for this thesis is that Pico can be shown to connect ideas about the being of the self with creation *ex nihilo* through the word, thus forging a relation between self-making and thought which has survived and is still operative in contemporary views of self-fashioning. However, almost from the start the connection Pico had made became obscured by the influence of Descartes, for whom the being of the self is that of a given substance. Whilst Locke and Hume discredited Descartes' conclusion, the idea that the self is an entity of some sort continued to exert a powerful influence on later philosophers of reflection, like Leibniz and Kant. As a result, the subject-object dichotomy became entrenched in Kant, who, it is argued, sees reflection in terms of introspection.

But the role of reflection in relation to a self that is somehow given, leads to the idea of the divided self, a division Hegel attempted to heal, but at the expense of a significant characteristic of reflection: that of mirroring. Fichte, equally dissatisfied with the Kantian view of the self, highlights reflection as the means for creating self, in a manner that recalls the efforts of Pico. But as a result of his analyses, self comes to be seen as the interplay of the finite and the infinite, a notion which is carried on in Kierkegaard, yielding contradictions which they never resolve.

Hegel's solution - the destruction of reflection by reflection itself - brings about the demise of the individual self. Nevertheless, this

demise rests on the traditional assumption - grounded in the metaphysics of being - that the self is an original, primordial unity. It is Nietzsche who challenges this notion by positing a contradiction at the heart of the world, a contradiction which results in the idea that being is imposed as a fiction upon what is essentially an indeterminate and inchoate process of becoming. Within this framework self is seen as an invention.

In the course of this historical development the inadequacy of the notion of the self as given becomes ever more evident. That is because reflection inevitably, and always, splits such a self into subject and object. The problems generated as a result can only be overcome by accepting the idea that it is reflection which brings the self into being. Exploring how this comes about is the topic of the final chapter, which introduces the idea of the reflexive self, and distinguishes this latter idea from notions of self-constitution put forward by Habermas and Foucault.

## CHAPTER 1

### **A CONFLICT OF IDEAS**

The idea that the self is constituted, rather than given in some way, has received widespread approval in contemporary debates. In general terms, this idea is based on the conviction that there are no fixed limits to the human way of being. Unlike the orthodox view of recent centuries, with its assumption that human potential develops in accordance with an essentially unchanging nature, the current trend is to suggest that human being can change radically, fashioning and making itself in an ongoing process of human activity. The conception of self which emerges against this modern background places an emphasis on the contingency of the self rather than on its stability, because confidence in the capacity for self-transformation cancels any possibility of a necessary and permanent structure of self.

Elements of this current view can be discerned in Heidegger's belief that human being is determined by its possibilities, in Habermas's discussions of self-constitution through self-reflection, and in Foucault's vision of the constitution of the subject through various human practices. Despite obvious differences in the positions of these thinkers, an underlying commonality nevertheless binds them together, for all share the view of the self as crafted and fashioned by conscious - or sometimes unconscious - design, in response to an ever-changing environment. So whether the social dimension of self-constitution is the preferred issue, or an analysis of the constructed self at the individual level becomes the

focal point, the belief that the self can somehow be shaped or even created, is taken as fundamental.

Nevertheless, for long periods the idea that the self is given - in the sense that it has a permanent essence, unalterable by human action - held sway over alternative conceptions that emphasised an idea of self-making. An historically formed dialectic between these two opposing ideas underlies the modern idea of self-constitution; a dialectic which needs to be taken into account if the present study is to be at all adequate. As I see it, that dialectic has moved overwhelmingly within a context marked by conflicting ideas concerning two issues, namely:- the problem of the 'being' of self, and the question of a special relation between thought and the self.

These two issues continue to influence contemporary thinkers who are convinced that human being is a self-constituting process. They are the most recent proponents in a long line of those who have cast the problem of the self in this particular context, sometimes emphasising one aspect - perhaps the 'being' of the self, or the relation between thought and the self - over the other. But more often than not, both issues have combined to shape what has been, and still is, a major context within which the dialectic between the idea of the self as given and the idea of self-constitution moves. I believe that the first construction of this context occurred spontaneously in the time of the Italian Renaissance, when ideas of self-making, the 'being' of man, creation by the word, and the magical connection between thought and the self, were thrown together in one melting pot.

For this reason, my point of departure is Renaissance humanism, when a rich ferment of ideas distinguished the movement of thought, and vital connections were made in such a way that a belief in the self-making potential of human nature became possible. But from the very start, that belief came into conflict with the more orthodox view of the inherent limitations of human nature - a view which found its expression in the conviction that the self is given. The tensions thrown up by this conflict shaped the foundation of Western thinking about subjectivity, proving strong enough to direct the course of the problem of the self ever since.

This thesis, then, deals with that conflict within the context already mentioned. I will not defend either the notion that the self is somehow given, or the idea of self-constitution. Instead, I hope to show that there are serious problems with both ways of understanding self. Nevertheless, the context I have just outlined - within which these concepts conflict - remains a fruitful framework for conceptualising the self, as I hope to show in the last chapter. In that chapter, I will put forward the idea of the reflexive self, which I propose as a solution to what I regard as major difficulties with both the conceptions of the self in question.

In this first chapter, however, the context to be considered will be the focal point, since I believe it was precipitated by the emergence of the particular form the idea of self-making took during the Renaissance. I will point out that this context has remained operative since the time of the Renaissance; that it was the framework within which Descartes, Locke, Hume, and what might loosely be termed the German Idealists, all explored the self. Finally, towards the end of this chapter, I will show how that

context still provides the fundamental ground for the modern idea of self-constitution, by using as an example the work of Greenblatt. One last remark needs to be added concerning the thesis as a whole. Since I am going to consider the problem of the self within the context of the 'being' of the self and the relation between thought and the self, I shall only deal with those thinkers who have made a significant contribution relevant within that context. That restriction has naturally led to the exclusion of many different aspects and viewpoints concerning the self, but that is unavoidable.

\* \* \*

To begin, then, with the Renaissance. This period has been understood either as the late Middle Ages, or as the Middle Ages recaptured under another name. However, whichever view is preferred, one fact seems uncontroversial, namely:- conditions were such that humanists lived in a world in which values were becoming ever more secularised. As a result, conceptions of human nature began to change to the extent that human being came to be regarded as the central pivotal point of the universe. This kind of thinking enhanced perceptions of the human condition; esteem for human being rose, and its newly exalted status was naturally accompanied by an increasing concern for human freedom, stimulating an overall creative impulse towards self-expression.

That this was a major element of Italian humanism is undisputed. The long accepted interpretation of it - originally put forward by Burckhardt - is that the newly developing exaltation of human being led to a pronounced emphasis on personal excellence and achievement, which fostered a sense of

individuality not experienced in the Middle Ages. In fact, modern-day followers of Burckhardt even go so far as to hold that the humanists advocated a notion of self-making with features that are characteristic of contemporary ideas of self-constitution. Whilst such a view is becoming increasingly controversial, due to its anachronistic overtones, Burckhardt's interpretation, on which it is based, has been the favoured perspective for so long that it needs to be considered here, if only in general outline.

According to this now traditional view, the humanists worked predominantly within a humanistic-religious, rather than a scientific framework of ideas. Further, in terms of what it is to be human, the focus was on the individual rather than the collective - on an active, intentional moulding of human life, rather than the mere compliance with an assumed order of things typical of medieval thought. Fundamental institutions of the medieval world - such as the Church and feudalism - upheld a role as guardians and interpreters of a cosmic order, which could not be modified to the slightest degree, but had to be accepted without question. Such institutions worked to re-enforce the belief that all the material and spiritual benefits that can be aspired to are dependent on the level in the cosmic hierarchy to which human being belongs.

But the humanists saw in traditional hierarchical orders an obstacle rather than an aid to obtaining the good, necessary for human well-being. They defended freedom, so that the ability to shape life autonomously in a human world, could in the first instance be recognised and then safeguarded. Gianozzo Maneti, Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola exalted freedom in order to elevate what to them seemed an unquestionably

human ability to vary the world and better it absolutely. According to the interpretation presently being considered, an exuberant, excessive confidence in the capacity to fashion life shaped the new doctrine of humanism, in contrast to the more contemplative medieval mentality.<sup>1</sup>

When influences prevalent at the time are interpreted in this way, they lead naturally to support for Burckhardt's perception of the striking prominence of the individual in this period. The importance invested in the individual, it is held, led to the cult of the personality, manifest in a preoccupation with the display in social and political life of a deliberately cultivated personal image. At another level, the pursuit of personal excellence in art and in literature has often been regarded in terms of a similar preoccupation with individuality, to the extent that this latter medium has been taken to be a vehicle for the expression of a notion of self-making.<sup>2</sup> As a result of exploring the literature of humanism, several commentators have found that the idea of self-making is directed towards the specific aim of producing practical results. For example, both Machiavelli's Prince, and The Courtier by Baldassare Castiglione, advise that to be a proper adornment at a prince's court, to give good and faithful service to his prince, the would-be courtier must first become his highest attainable self. The reverse of a specialist, he

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1 Nicola Abbagnone, 'Humanism', Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 4, ed. P. Edwards, (Macmillan, London, 1972) pp. 69-72.

Franklin Le van Baumer, Main Currents of Western Thought, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1978) pp. 103-111.

Paul O. Kristeller, 'Pico della Mirandola', Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 6, ed. P. Edwards, pp. 307-311.

2 Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980) pp. 1-9.

must develop all his faculties, observing the classical rule of proportion or harmony between the claims of heart, head and body.

On the whole, however, it is commonly accepted that there were no great philosophers amongst the humanists.<sup>3</sup> Rhetoric and oratory were generally more highly valued than dialectic or critical reflection, so consciousness of individuality was more frequently expressed in literature than in characteristically philosophical discourse. Some, like Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, intent on having their work regarded as purely philosophical, saw themselves as humanists working at a consciously philosophic level.<sup>4</sup> Others who considered themselves in the same light expressed a preference for the active rather than the contemplative, making a choice in favour of moral philosophy rather than physics and metaphysics. Humanists like Bruni condemned all philosophy which did not bear directly on human ethics. In his *Isagogion Moralis Disciplinae*, he affirms,

Moral philosophy is, so to speak, our territory. Those who betray it and give themselves over to physics, seem in a way to

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- 3 Craven makes the point that the humanists took their name from a cycle of studies called the *studia humanitatis*, which was clearly defined as consisting of grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy, studied through the classical authors. Though the cycle included moral philosophy, it excluded logic, natural philosophy and metaphysics. See W. Craven, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola - Symbol of his Age*, (Librairie Droz, Geneva, 1981) pp. 8-9.
- 4 Paul J. W. Miller comments, "This Renaissance humanism was not a philosophy at all, but a cultural and educational program. The humanists were men of letters who employed elegant Latin. They were familiar with certain philosophic concepts, but they were not philosophers. They furnish a plethora of moral attitudes, but not original philosophic ideas. The philosophy of man of such abstract thinkers as Ficino and Pico is altogether distinct and is not derived from the literary movement of humanism." See *Pico della Mirandola*, trans. C. G. Wallis, P. J. W. Miller, D. Carmichael, (Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, Indianapolis, 1977) p. xiii.

occupy themselves with foreign affairs and to neglect their own.<sup>5</sup>

Words such as these expressed the humanist insistence on an aspect of life that medieval philosophy appeared to have unjustly neglected. Palmieri's essay Della Vita Civile and Bartolomeo de Sacchi's De Optime Cive are written in the same vein - saturated with a concern with ethics and politics - whilst Bruni himself turned to translating Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics and Politics. In fact, humanists generally tended to contrast the 'moral' Aristotle, the ancient master of wisdom who described the virtues and vices of man as a political animal, and who proposed the conditions and forms of civil society, with Aristotle the 'physicist' and 'metaphysician' of the medieval tradition.

Others were not as condemnatory as Bruni - for example, Pico, the Florentine Platonists led by Ficino, and even the neo-Aristotelean Pomponazzi - chose to debate the nature of man, the measure of his freedom of will, and the immortality of his soul. Most shared the conviction, as old as Heraclitus, that man is a microcosmic version of the larger universe. But it was Ficino who was the first to formulate a metaphysical view of the nature and place of man in the universe. He made the first translations into Latin of the complete works of Plato and Plotinus, and in his own writings provided a view of human nature derived from both Christian and Platonic sources. For Ficino, man is the metaphysical centre of the universe, standing between the physical world of nature and the spiritual world of the angels and God. But this hierarchy, taken from

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5 Nicola Abbagnone, op. cit.

Plotinus, was modified in order to obtain a perfect symmetry, with man balanced between the natural and supernatural orders.<sup>6</sup>

This tendency to synthesise ancient thought with Christian belief - as Ficino had done - was in accord with those basic elements in humanism which did not have an anti-religious or anti-Christian character. Many humanists believed in the fundamental unity of all religious beliefs and therefore in the possibility of a universal religious peace. Such a peace implied the essential identity between philosophy and religion. 'Does St. Paul teach something more than Plato taught?' asked Leonardo Bruni. According to the point of view of the Fathers of the Church - which was generally shared by the humanists - Christianity simply brought to fulfilment the wisdom that ancient philosophy had elaborated, since reason, which had supported and guided this philosophy, is the same as that which became enshrined in the Word. These concepts were clearly expressed in Ficino's De Christiana Religione.

But it was Pico della Mirandola who came to be regarded by some as the most inspired proclaimer and prophet of regenerative peace, aiming for the conciliation of all the religions and all the philosophies of the world. His The Oration on the Dignity of Man proposed to lay the foundation of the universal peace by showing the accord between Platonism and Aristoteleanism; between these two doctrines and the other philosophies of antiquity; between the Cabala, magic, Patristics, and Scholasticism; and between the entire world of philosophy, Christianity and religious revelation. Pico held the assumption, in common with other humanists, that this diversity of belief came from a single source, from a primordial

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6 Miller, op. cit., p. xv.

revelation, one which these beliefs express in a partial but not contradictory way.

It is within this context that interest in defending the value and freedom of man encouraged discussion of the traditional problems of God, and the immortality and freedom of the soul. They were discussions that were frequently concluded in much the same form as that accepted by the medieval tradition. However, within the understanding of humanism, these discussions assumed a new significance because their purpose was to estimate and justify the ability for initiative on the part of human being in the world.

This, at any rate, is how the main elements of the traditional picture of humanism, originating with Burckhardt, can be sketched out. Much of it can be accepted, whilst there is also enough in it to support a view of Renaissance humanism as the fertile ground from which modern notions of human nature, the self, including self-constitution or self-making emerged. But against this almost universal - and currently fashionable - view, there are some scholars who object that features of it are a highly anachronistic reading of the whole period. In particular, these critics claim that the emphasis on individuality<sup>7</sup> as a defining characteristic of Renaissance thought is a myth projected back in time.

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7 'But at the close of the thirteenth century Italy began to swarm with individuality; the charm laid upon human personality was dissolved, and a thousand figures meet us each in its own shape and special dress. Dante's great poem would have been impossible in any other country of Europe, if only for the reason that they all still lay under the spell of race. For Italy, the august poet, through the wealth of individuality which he set forth, was the most national herald of his time.' So says Jacob Burckhardt in The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore, (George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., London, 1929) p. 143. Burckhardt's books on the Italian Renaissance were widely read.

Craven, for instance, holds that when Burckhardt and Michelet saw in Renaissance humanism the beginnings of the modern era, they uncritically attributed to humanism one of the meanings of the term 'modern' which is inappropriate for that period. What we understand by the rather vague word 'modern' includes, amongst other things, a concept of individuality grounded in a form of social atomism which did not emerge until the seventeenth century. In general terms, the modern outlook proceeds from the standpoint of the individual, in contrast to the pre-modern view of human being as a step on the ladder of the cosmic hierarchy. Or, in Charles Taylor's words,

The essential difference can perhaps be put in this way: the modern subject is self-defining, where on previous views the subject is defined in relation to a cosmic order.<sup>8</sup>

On this alternative reading, to attribute an awareness of individuality and of the self in this modern sense to the humanists, is to read back a concept whose provenance belongs to a much later time. Such anachronistic projection, it is argued, can only lead to the perpetration of half-truths. Condren, for example, believes that anachronism,

...specifies the past as it really wasn't; and it inhibits any increase in self-awareness by occluding relevant differences between past and present. Anachronistic predication enables us

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Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien was first published in Basel in 1860. There had already been 15 German editions by the time S. Middlemore made his authorised translation in 1890.

8 Charles Taylor, Hegel, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975) p. 6.

to re-affirm what we think we already believe to be so, it comforts, and mythologises....<sup>9</sup>

Others, like Craven, for instance, argue that the humanists themselves were not much preoccupied with a concern for individuality, nor with any notions of the self. Rather, Christian humanists were more often inclined to regard the self as a potential distraction away from closeness to God. For that reason, the self, or promptings from the self, were better suppressed, and it was generally thought that to engage in rhetoric and oratory based on moral philosophy was a powerful aid in doing so.

This is not to deny that the humanists had a well-developed conception of personal excellence, to an extent unknown in Europe in previous times, nor that it increasingly came to have a secular, rather than a spiritual character, spilling over into social and political life. Given the prevailing cultural climate - with its stress on personal achievements - the lack of an awareness of individual worth would have been strange indeed. But whether the presence of that awareness can be seen in terms of a consciously held notion of self-making is doubtful, according to those who deny that the idea of self-making had any purchase amongst the humanists.

Support for this position may be drawn from the fact that even Burckhardt would probably not have endorsed the idea that the humanists saw themselves as deliberately taking up the task of fashioning a self, even if the idea of self-making had been in the air in his time, which it was not. For Burckhardt, several humanists realised the ideal of the l'uomo

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9 C. Condren, 'Radicals Conservatives and Moderates in Early Modern Political Thought: A Case of Sandwich Islands Syndrome?' Unpublished Paper.

universale, but whether that amounted to a conscious creation of self was never a question for him. Burckhardt at least leaves room for the possibility that to become 'many-sided' need not necessarily entail a conscious shaping of self. But this distinction is not one which latter-day inheritors of Burckhardt's vision appear to acknowledge. For them - and Greenblatt is one notable example, as we will see shortly - there is no doubt that the humanists were engaged in conscious acts of self-making.

This contemporary dispute - between those who attribute a notion of self-constitution to the humanists and those who do not - is one episode in an ongoing dialectic, itself rooted in Renaissance thought. Fundamentally, it stems from tensions between those who favour the idea that human nature is essentially given - and therefore limited in its transformations - and those who do not. The essence of that dialectic is captured even more sharply by the case of Pico, which has become a present-day controversy echoing conflicts that were originally generated by an ambivalence apparent in the humanist writers themselves.

### **The Case of Pico**

Pico, regarded by many scholars as the symbol of his age, accepted Ficino's fundamental position that man occupies a privileged place in the centre of the universe, because he is the bond linking the intelligible and corporeal worlds. But Pico went beyond Ficino in that the subject of man's universality was not discussed merely in passing; instead, it was the primary concern of a short and elegant speech, The Oration on the Dignity of Man. Here Pico agrees that human being embraces the three zones in the universe - the spiritual, intellectual and material. Man, as the synthesis of all three, is a lesser model of the whole creation. Further, Pico also

agrees with Ficino that man embraces the whole of nature in a different sense, in that he knows what his position is within the cosmic structure. Since the human intellect extends to spiritual, intellectual and material matters, it is by means of knowledge that all there is can be comprehended and united.<sup>10</sup>

But, according to one side of a debate that has its source in Pico's own time, Pico's most remarkable contribution consisted in the notion that the root of human excellence and dignity lies in the fact that man is the maker of himself. Not content with assigning a privileged, though fixed, place to man in the universe, as Ficino had done, Pico focussed on the freedom of human being. Man can become whatever he wishes to be; he makes himself to be what he chooses. Ficino's Neoplatonic and metaphysical theme thus received a peculiarly humanist twist:- man, as the little world, is a great marvel; he is the whole world, convertible into every nature, for he has been given the power, the freedom, to attain whatever property he may prefer. Pico expressed the exhilarating optimism and confidence underlying his thinking in the words he attributes to God in the opening passages of The Oration on the Dignity of Man:

We have given to thee, Adam, no fixed seat, no form of thy very own, no gift peculiarly thine, that thou mayest feel as thine own, have as thine own, possess as thine own the seat, the form, the gifts which thou thyself shalt desire. A limited nature in other creatures is confined within the laws written down by Us. In conformity with thy free judgement, in whose hands I have

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10 Miller, *op. cit.*

placed thee, thou art confined by no bounds; and thou wilt fix the limits of nature for thyself.<sup>11</sup>

This passage has become controversial, because for many scholars a radical notion of freedom is at work here. A few others have claimed that this is not the impression Pico intended to convey; freedom of will, they say, must be understood primarily as that capacity to achieve dignity and virtue despite the perils of human existence and in the face of political and economic upheavals. Taken in this latter context, exaltation of freedom is bounded rather than boundless; such exaltation does not extend to regarding free will as an absolute capacity to create human nature; there are acknowledged limitations - a certain acceptance that the basic structure of human nature is given, not self-produced.<sup>12</sup>

But this latter view is not that of the majority of commentators. Cassirer<sup>12a</sup> for one, in stressing Pico's belief in the almost unlimited human power for self-transformation, narrowly averts attributing a fully-fledged doctrine of self-creating to Pico. And, as Pico himself continues, there is at least a hint that self-creating ex nihilo is possible, for Pico's God says to Adam,

I have placed thee at the centre of the world, that from there thou mayest more conveniently look around and see whatsoever is in the world. Neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal have We made thee. Thou, like a judge appointed for being honourable, art the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou

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11 Oratio, in Wallis, Miller & Carmichael, op.cit., p.5

12 W. Craven, op. cit.

12a E. Cassirer, The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy, trans. M. Domandi (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1963) pp.83-85.

canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes.  
 Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the  
 higher natures which are divine. <sup>13</sup>

Like Cassirer, Garin, who is one of the foremost scholars of Pico, favours a literal interpretation of this passage. In Italian Humanism he elaborates that for Pico, human being stands alone, in that it is not determined by a fixed nature; there is no permanent essence. Man creates himself by his own actions, he is therefore the father of himself. Subject to only one condition - that there is no condition - the human state, potentially, is one of total freedom.

There is some encouragement for reading Pico in this way. Ficino had already set a precedent by his own faith in human knowledge. Human being could encompass the spiritual, intellectual and material worlds because human knowledge made such an embrace possible. For Ficino it was knowledge, more than freedom, which draws man towards a condition approximating the divine capacity to create. Greenblatt quotes him,

Since man has observed the order of the heavens, when they move, whither they proceed and with what measures, and what they produce, who could deny that man possesses as it were almost the same genius as the Author of the heavens? And who could deny that man could somehow also make the heavens, could he only obtain the instruments and the heavenly material, since even now he makes them, though of a different material, but still with a very similar order.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Miller, Oratio, in Wallis, Miller & Carmichael, op.cit., p.5

Garin, and Cassirer too, do not shrink from attributing a similar conclusion to Pico. Garin, for instance, speculates that if, for Pico, man is self-creating activity, actuating and synthesising reality in his knowledge, then he is barely distinguishable from God.

not because he is impertinently seeking to arrogate to himself the throne of the true God: but because he is, like God himself, a pure existence capable of becoming the point at which all other beings meet.<sup>15</sup>

In response to these words by Garin, scholars like Miller and Craven warn against falling into the trap of anachronistically attributing to Pico a position that seems to belong amongst modern notions of subjectivity. They argue that Pico's words in the above passages should not be taken literally. Pico is writing a fable, which he uses to open his Oration, itself a work of moral exhortation, meant to impress as such, and to justify aspects of his thought which the authorities were suspecting as heretical.<sup>16</sup> What Pico really means is that man gives his nature to himself, but as a sculptor gives form to a statue. This does not mean that man is an absolute creator of himself, for the making activity of human being operates upon potencies which are already given. In Pico's own words,

At man's birth the Father placed in him every sort of seed and sprouts of every kind of life. The seeds that each man cultivates will grow and bear their fruit in him. If he cultivates vegetable seeds, he will become a plant. If the seeds of sensation, he will grow into a brute. If rational, he will

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14 S. Greenblatt, op. cit., p. 18.

15 E. Garin, Italian Humanism, trans. P. Munz (Oxford, 1965).

grow into a heavenly animal. If intellectual, he will be an angel, and a son of God.<sup>17</sup>

To read Pico in the way proposed by Craven and others accords more harmoniously with the generally accepted view that overall - and Pico not excepted - the humanists were moralists rather than philosophers. The Oration, then, is a warning of the potential degradation to which man can sink, and an exhortation to make the most of his highest possibilities. Craven, who argues for this reading, looks for supporting evidence in how Pico understands human nature. He holds that it is only after considering the way Pico uses the word natura in his other works that it can become clear whether the privilege bestowed by God on man is intended literally as a philosophical statement with metaphysical implications or as a story with a moral.

According to Craven, Pico always uses natura in its scholastic sense: meaning something prior to all choice, a pre-condition for any choice, because it defines the boundary within which choice is possible. Pico understands this within an Aristotelean context. All activity is directed towards an end. There is an end appropriate for each nature, including the human, which is also its good, in that the end is fitting for that nature. At the human level, when a choice is made the good must be in harmony with the end which accords with human nature. Without reference to that end, no choice would be possible, but since the end is itself defined in relation to human nature, no choice can be made without reference to it. Craven

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16 W. Craven, op. cit., pp. 32, 34, 82.

17 Oratio, in Wallis, Miller & Carmichael, op. cit., p.5

believes that the idea of man literally choosing his own nature would have been nonsensical to Pico.<sup>18</sup>

This is borne out by what Pico writes in the Commento, in which he deals with natural desire. He again takes for granted that every nature has its proper perfection, because it participates in the divine goodness. Proper perfection is understood as each nature's end, for which it has a 'natural desire'. Ideas like these also occur in the Heptaplus and De ente et uno. In the Heptaplus Pico writes,

In regard to man, although different philosophers hold different opinions, nevertheless all have kept within the narrow bounds of human capacity, limiting the felicity of man either to the mere search for truth, as the Academics do, or to its attainment through the study of philosophy, as Alfarabi said.... I neither reject nor despise their arguments and opinions, if they are taken as speaking only of natural felicity. But it is certain that through this, neither men nor angels can be exalted any more highly than they say. This is strongly confirmed by the fact that since nothing can rise above itself by relying on its own strength (otherwise it would be stronger than itself), so nothing relying on itself can attain a felicity any greater or more perfect than its own nature.<sup>19</sup>

In the light of these words, human nature has its natural fulfilment, which cannot be exceeded by the efforts of human being alone. As Craven sees it, Pico speaks here of a nature that is definite and circumscribed,

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18 Craven, op. cit., p. 32.

19 In Wallis, Miller & Carmichael, op.cit., pp.149-50

unable to be elevated by human choice or endeavour; only the grace of God could achieve that. This accords with the passage in the Oration, where Pico metaphorically describes human nature in terms of something already given by God at man's birth, a nature that is made up of 'every sort of seed and sprouts of every kind of life'. Here is the basic, indispensable material, grounding the very possibility of human choice.

That nature is prior to any choice is made even more explicit in De ente et uno,

In the first place, there is a natural being of things, as for a man to be man, for a lion to be lion, for a stone to be stone.... There are other beings which can be called accidental, such as for a man to be wise, beautiful, healthy.... Humanity, by which man is man, is a different good from wisdom, by which man becomes no longer man, but wise man.<sup>20</sup>

It is clear that the 'natural being of things' is the fundamental ground determining the kind of choice that can be made; health, wisdom, and beauty can be chosen by human being, but not by a lion, or a stone. In that sense nature precedes choice.

But there is something else going on as well in this passage. Wisdom, beauty, health, are 'accidental' beings, which are added on to natural being. Pico asks,

How will he be happy who altogether is not? Indeed, that goodness which beings attain when they first are does not suffice for them. They desire to attain the other goods, which complete and adorn it. Just as we truly say that they desire other

goodnesses besides the first goodness, even so we truly say that they desire other beings besides the first being, because to be happy is other than to be a man.<sup>21</sup>

Here Pico links different kinds of being (natural and accidental), kinds of goodness, which fall into the same categories (first and subsequent), and the natural desire which leads to making choices. In a nutshell, just as natural being is the indispensable ground for all accidental being, so the first goodness - the natural goodness which is the end of natural being - is the ground for all desire, and subsequently for all further choice. It is a very Aristotelean story, with few original modifications or additions.

On evidence of this kind Craven bases his conclusion. Pico's references to nature in writings other than the Oration show that for him human nature is something given, which has as its end its own proper fulfilment. Further, there are definite limits which man cannot exceed by his own efforts. Pico took this framework of Aristotelean ideas for granted; for him, nature determined by choice would have been inconceivable. So, the words of God to Adam must not have been meant to be taken literally. They are not part of a philosophical discourse seriously advocating a new and original doctrine of man as self-creating. In fact, their very position in the Oration makes their force clear. They constitute a fable, a story with a moral, for the purpose of acclaiming man's privileged status, so that we may all recognise it and make the most of it. Pico is quite explicit a little later on, urging us to,

Let a certain holy ambition invade the mind, so that we may not be content with mean things but may aspire to the highest things

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21 ibid., p. 58.

and strive with all our forces to attain them: for if we will to,  
we can.<sup>22</sup>

But Craven himself does not pursue his own argument far enough to draw out a point which could strengthen his case even more, although paradoxically, it supports that of his opposition also. That point bears significantly on one of the issues mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, namely:- the issue of 'being', which I suggested forms part of the context within which the dialectic between opposing theories of the self takes place. That is, in trying to understand exactly what Pico means in the opening passage of the Oration - concerning whether or not he is putting forward a theory of self-making - we have been led to consider what he means by 'being'. This is not only because the present discussion is itself a modern one, shaped by the history of the problem of the self and its being which has unfolded since the time of Pico, but also because in many passages - such as the one above, concerning natural and accidental being - what Pico means by nature is interconnected with what he means by being. It is in this interconnection between nature and being in relation to self-improvement, or self-making - depending on what view is taken of Pico's words - that the point can be located for the emergence of one of the issues which over time comes to shape the context of future conflicts.

That is, at the heart of Pico's thinking several assumptions about being come together. One is that the various kinds of goodness he mentions - such as beauty, happiness, wisdom - are seen by him in terms of kinds of being, instead of as qualities in the sense that we, in the twentieth century, are more familiar with. In other words, happiness, wisdom,

beauty, are elevated to the status of being itself<sup>23</sup>, they are not seen as the properties belonging to being. There is nothing radical about this, it was the standard late medieval conception, but it is important to note that Pico is implicitly working with this understanding. In *De ente et uno*, after saying that man desires other goodnesses besides the first goodness of natural being, and that man also desires other 'beings' besides the first being, Pico goes on,

If anyone should grant that it can happen that someone does not wish to be unless he is happy, it would not follow, as Olympiodorus thought, that good and being are different, but that man is another being than happiness, and that the goodness of man is other than the goodness of happiness.<sup>24</sup>

According to Pico, Olympiodorus thought that good and being are different. Olympiodorus, it seems, might have been happier with the notion that good does not have the ontological status of being, that instead it is a quality or property. But Pico gives the impression that he himself could never agree with such an idea; for him, man is one kind of being - natural being, whilst happiness is another kind of being - accidental being. And so 'good' (kinds of goodness) and being are the same, in that they have a similar ontological status - both are beings. Happiness is a good, and happiness is also a kind of being. Olympiodorus was mistaken - according to Pico - in thinking that good and being are different. Good and being are the same, for both are being. That is not where the difference lies;

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23 In the Latin text, Pico uses the word *esse* in this context, meaning kinds of being rather than properties or qualities of being. Pico della Mirandola, 'De ente et uno', *Opera omnia*, Vol. 1. (Georg Olms, Hildesheim, 1969) p. 253.

24 In Wallis, Miller & Carmichael, *op.cit.*, p.58

rather, the difference is found in kinds of being - natural and accidental.

Pico does not spell out what these differences are, but underlying his thinking seems to be the assumption that one crucial difference between natural and accidental being is that natural being has a nature that is already given, previous to any shaping by man, whilst accidental being has not. Therefore, if we cannot choose our own nature, since it is given, we cannot choose natural being in the way we can choose being happy. That Pico holds an assumption of this kind is suggested by the likelihood that he understands natura in the Aristotelean sense - as the principle of growth. At least, that likelihood is strengthened if we follow Craven in accepting that Pico uses the term natura in its scholastic sense, for which the evidence seems conclusive.

But in that case, nature - understood as a principle of growth - does not fall into an ontological category, as being itself does; at most it distinguishes a characteristic of a certain kind of being. Yet - although he sometimes takes this point implicitly into account - Pico is not always sensitive to this distinction between nature and being, and for that reason it is easy to misread what he is saying in the Oration and similar passages. In them he often appears to use the terms 'being' and 'nature' interchangeably, as though they belong to the same category, instead of explicitly confirming that nature is intrinsic to one kind of being - natural being - and then subsequently distinguishing between natural and accidental being.

So when he says - in the passage from the Oration quoted before - 'thou wilt fix the limits of nature for thyself' it is easy to read him as saying 'thou wilt fix the limits of natural being for thyself'. Then, when he goes on to say:- 'Thou...art the molder and maker of thyself; thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer', it seems to mean, quite consistently, that this making of self is meant as the making of natural being. Such an understanding is further strengthened by the fact that Pico will allow that man can make, by choosing, certain kinds of being - accidental being like happiness, etc. So, if man can make one kind of being, then why not the other? It is because Pico does not clearly specify that he assumes a distinction between kinds of being - one of which can be created by man and the other not - and because he uses the term 'nature' as though it were a kind of being that man can perhaps shape, like other kinds of being, that his text is open to such widely fluctuating interpretations.

This lack of clarity is a symptom of the tensions in Pico's thought. At one level of interpretation - if the above explanation is accepted - the controversial passage from the Oration loses some of its bite. Pico can be interpreted quite straightforwardly as holding that human being/nature - that is, natural being - can fashion for itself other kinds of (accidental) being - goods like happiness, etc. But this does not mean that human nature can make itself. It has already been given its nature by God, even if it is a nature full of 'every sort of seed and sprouts of every kind of life' - indeterminate enough to be overflowing with potential for creativity, for making other beings like wisdom, happiness, health and beauty. To paraphrase the words of the Oration, human being can feel as its own, have as its own, possess as its own, the forms of being it most

desires. In that sense its nature is not limited, as are the natures in other creatures, because it can formulate and instantiate other kinds of being in addition to its natural being. Human being can rise to the greatest heights of nobility, that is, humans can be noble. Conversely, humans can descend to the level of the lowest creatures - humans can be brutish.

But even if this straightforward interpretation is accepted, it is still not enough to render Pico's position free of ambiguity, for now there is support for both sides of the debate, for both Craven and Garin. For Craven, because it confirms that Pico does recognise the limitations of human nature, in that it is given, not self-made, with its own proper end and fulfilment. For Garin and others who prefer a literal interpretation, the way is open to argue that the very possibility of exercising the capacity to create additional beings, other kinds of being, elevates human nature to the god-like level that had already been prepared for by Ficino in a different context. Such a move on Pico's part, it could be argued, was therefore not itself unprecedented in humanist literature. Further, the beings Pico has in mind are all ones that can only be in relation to human natural being, and in that sense, the making of those beings is a self-making.

The current debate - as far as I know - has not developed to the extent to which I have just taken it. But at least it is possible to argue along these lines if Pico does hold that good - happiness, wisdom, health etc. - is the same as being, and that being falls in the categories of natural and accidental. Unfortunately it is not altogether certain that he does so, for after the passage previously quoted, he remarks,

I omit the questions of whether something is called good absolutely and being absolutely.....of whether being is called good absolutely and good is called being absolutely; for this is not the place to discuss everything.

It seems that Pico is here questioning what he elsewhere holds in favour. When he raises the question of whether something is called good absolutely and being absolutely, he clearly has the ontological status of good in mind, he is questioning here what in other places he accepts, that good is some kind of being. But that very assumption itself emerges most pertinently against the background of the Platonic Forms.

That he feels obliged to raise these questions at all indicates his concern that the Neoplatonic framework he wants to endorse may conflict with another view he has in mind - Aristotle's distinction between natural and accidental being. The questions seem to be, if goodness is a kind of being, what sort of being is it; or is it perhaps a quality rather than being itself? But these questions are raised only to be put aside. His problems arise because he is trying to work within both a Neoplatonic and Aristotelean context. Although this is in keeping with his general ambition to synthesise all the main currents of thought - ancient and contemporary - it also generates difficulties. Nor is Pico willing to settle finally on either a Platonic or Aristotelean view on this issue, even though he cannot successfully bring about a synthesis of the two.

The result is that his position on being, and his position on the nature of man remain ambiguous. This is particularly noticeable when the overall views expressed in both the Oration and the Heptaplus are compared. In the Oration human nature seems to have no restrictions at all. Within

the context of a boundless capacity for transmutation, the only limits recognised are those which are self-imposed, within a framework of becoming. But in the Heptaplus, written later, Pico works with the notion that man is a microcosm, faithfully reflecting the order and laws of the universe, the macrocosm. The entire work is built on the argument that there are precise and complete correspondences between the four 'worlds' of creation - the angelic, celestial, elemental and human.<sup>25</sup> Confined within the strictures of a very different framework, human nature is not something apart, subject to self-made laws peculiarly its own, but is instead a synthesis of whatever is in the other worlds. Ultimately human nature already is all, rather than potentially becoming all.

That these concepts could not be easily merged into a coherent account appears not to have troubled Pico. Nor is it the case that he later retracted or modified what he said in the Oration. Rather, in the Oration and the Heptaplus he seems to have drawn on two diverse sets of ideas about man - his mutability and microcosmic character respectively - using them to serve different purposes. In neither case did he explore philosophically the ideas he used; he simply took them for granted, and paid no attention to the inconsistency in holding both.

That discovery leaves the way open for the diverging interpretations which sparked off the controversy about Pico in the first place. But that only brings us back full circle, and nothing is resolved thereby. The position we have reached, and are left with, provides support for both sides. The evidence Craven cites seems to lead to the conclusion that Pico did not have a new and revolutionary doctrine of human nature. But

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25 Craven, op. cit., p.29.

equally, from the opposing point of view, a notion of self-creation can be read into Pico, grounded in his ideas about being, and of human nature as so full of potential that possibilities for self-making are limitless in scope.

This is why the case of Pico is so important for the theme of this thesis. The ambivalence of his writings on kinds of being is linked directly with a view of the self; that ambivalence provides a single point around which opposing views, in his own time and ours, can easily gravitate, and all find some support. That this is so, is obvious from the nature of the contemporary controversy amongst historians just cited. That controversy is grounded in certain conflicting metaphysical notions about the being of the self, manifested as an opposition between those who support an idea of self-constitution - and hence a notion that the being of the self is fashioned - and those who conflate the being of the self with the essence of the self, which is then believed to be given, and not made through human endeavour.

At another level, it is clear that these conflicts already lay beneath the surface of Renaissance humanism, since Pico's writings stirred up similar controversies in his time, evident from the responses of those Church authorities who accused him of heresy. The modern debates are in that sense an extension of earlier ones, contributing to an ongoing dialectic over time, with periods where one side holds sway over the other. But above all, the case of Pico ensured - and continues to ensure - that the dialectic between these differing conceptions of the self is cast in the context of the nature of the being of the self. Pico linked these two separate issues in such a way that they have remained interconnected to our

day. In that sense, he is - as one of the most able representatives of Renaissance humanism - the source for the construction of one aspect of a particular kind of context for conceptualising the self.

### **Self-Making by the Word**

But Pico's kind of humanism, along with that of Ficino's, is also the source of that other aspect mentioned at the beginning of this chapter:- the relation between thought and the self. It is this issue which I now want to pursue further. For Ficino, as already noted, man, by means of the possession of knowledge, duplicates a condition approximating the divine ability to create. This is because knowledge can potentially provide him with the measure of all there is. Through observation of the heavens, for example, he learns when celestial bodies move, how they proceed, in what way, and what they may produce. Once in possession of such knowledge it becomes possible for man to 'somehow also make the heavens', since through knowledge he possesses 'almost the same genius as the Author of the heavens'. The only things man lacks are the 'instruments and the heavenly material'. But this should not obscure the fact that man does make the heavens, 'though of a different material, but still with a very similar order'.<sup>26</sup>

Behind such thinking lay the rich variety of influences so characteristic of the Renaissance, amongst them the idea of the magus, who was thought to have access to super-human powers. It is now generally accepted by students of the Renaissance that Ficino, and Pico, his close associate, were not immune to the seduction of occult ideas, for the Neoplatonism of the time, which they enthusiastically fostered, had a

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26 See the passage from Ficino quoted in footnote 14 above.

Hermetic and consequently magical core. Both Ficino and Pico, due to their position as members of the same circle around the court of the Medici in Florence, had access to the considerable flow of manuscripts arriving in Florence from Byzantium after the fall of Constantinople. The movement they founded, loosely named Renaissance Neoplatonism, is described by Frances Yates as a fertile amalgam of genuinely Platonic teachings with Neoplatonism and with other philosophical occultisms dating from late antiquity.<sup>27</sup>

Amongst these latter texts was what became known as the The Corpus Hermeticum, which Ficino attempted to blend with Neoplatonism. Pico contributed by encouraging the assimilation of the Cabala, which also involved practical Cabala, a form of magic. Yates goes so far as to suggest that Pico's Oration on the Dignity of Man is a reference to the powers of a magus<sup>28</sup>, and that Pico combined Ficinian Neoplatonism, and its Hermetic, magical core, with Cabala in order to make the practice of magic safe, protected from diabolical influences by holy powers.<sup>29</sup> What has not been sufficiently understood, according to her, is that Christian Cabalism was a deeply religious movement, believed by Pico, at least, to be compatible with Christianity.<sup>30</sup>

Yates has been criticised for the extravagance of her ideas concerning Renaissance occult thought. To many, including Craven, they seem to lack

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27 Frances Yates, The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age, (Ark Paperbacks, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983).

28 ibid., p. 18.

29 ibid., p. 21.

30 ibid., p. 19.

any substantial support. That controversy is not relevant here, but what is of interest is the less controversial and much wider acceptance of the scope of Ficino's and Pico's learning, as well as Pico's public espousal of certain Cabalistic ideas, public enough to draw the charge of heresy from the Church. It seems reasonable to suppose, then, that some knowledge and blending of occult and Christian thought was consciously fostered, even if to an extent more modest than Yates would like to claim. There is also no reason to doubt her point that Pico's nine hundred theses, which he put up for public debate, contained seventy-two Cabalist Conclusions.<sup>31</sup> In the fourteenth Conclusion, she believes, Pico argues that Cabala confirms the truth of Christianity, on the grounds that the name 'Jesus' is the Tetragrammaton, the ineffable name YHWH, the four letter name of God but with a medial S inserted. The implication that Christian Cabalists drew from this is that the S in the name of Jesus makes audible the ineffable name and signifies the Incarnation. However strange and far-fetched this argument may appear, Yates assures us that the thought was certainly not new; it had a Patristic and Medieval tradition behind it, being represented for example in the works of St. Jerome and Nicholas of Cusa.<sup>32</sup>

Even if we only tentatively accept Yates' interpretation, the fourteenth conclusion at the very least shows that Pico had some familiarity with a long tradition in the Cabala:- that of the art of combining Hebrew letters - especially the four letters of the Tetragrammaton - with the intention of uncovering a hidden meaning beneath the divine words of Scripture. Cabalists believed that the written word of

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31 *ibid.*

32 *ibid.*, p. 20.

God was the result of God's inspiration, and that Scripture contained within itself an essence of his being. But they also believed that God is hidden, so behind the words of Scripture there lies an essence to be disclosed by any one of three methods of interpretation - Gematria, Notarikon, and Temura.<sup>33</sup> Later, and certainly by the time of the Renaissance, it was thought that to pronounce the Tetragrammaton properly brings to the fore the power of God, and before very long this belief was corrupted into the conviction that knowledge of the art of combining letters gives access to super-human powers. It is highly likely that Pico was aware of this background, and it is possible that he implicitly drew on it to support the implication of the fourteenth conclusion, that the S in the name of Jesus signifies the word made flesh.

Whilst the nature and extent of Pico's involvement with the Cabala is another issue, two points of importance for this thesis do emerge. The first concerns his familiarity with an originally un-Christian belief - that man has the capacity to direct not only the natural but also the super-natural worlds, by exercising control through the invocation of supernatural powers. This originally occult idea, vigorous in that it spawned so many variations of one kind or another, was clearly part of the climate of thought surrounding Ficino and Pico. It had certainly been incorporated in the Cabala, as Pico's fourteenth conclusion testifies, despite all its Christian overtones.

Quite plausibly, this belief was the driving force behind Ficino's words quoted earlier, concerning man's ability to create the universe in

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33 Charles Ponce, *Kabbalah*, (Quest Books, The Theosophical Publishing House, Illinois, 1983) p. 169.

the manner of God. It is equally likely that a version of the same belief is expressed even more obviously in God's words to Adam in Pico's Oration, where the context is, significantly, the Creation myth. As Pico has it, God tells man to be the 'molder and maker' of himself, advising man to 'sculpt' himself into whatever shape he desires:- 'Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upwards from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine'.

What is interesting about this passage is that the elements of an essentially occult idea concerning the reach of human mastery and autonomy are combined in the text with the Christian version of the idea that thought, translated into the word, is a medium for creation ex nihilo. This fusion is clear from the way Pico places the idea of human self-making in the same context as divine creation, so there is at least an implication that man's capacity to shape and mould echoes that of God's, as Ficino had suggested. If this is the case, then there is all the more reason why Pico remained so frustratingly - for us - ambiguous about kinds of being. It was not only his attempts at blending Aristotelean with Neoplatonic ideas that were at stake, but also his efforts at fusing occult and Christian beliefs.

God created, it is commonly held, by the power of his word. This notion, deeply embedded in Christian belief, formed part of Pico's intellectual inheritance, it surfaces, for instance, in his fourteenth Cabalist Conclusion in the idea of the Word made Flesh. One interpretation concerning its genesis is that it developed in Judaism when the transcendental deity, who was thought to dwell far off in the heaven of heavens, was believed to have established his relationship with the earth

and the world of human being through intermediaries such as the spirit<sup>34</sup>, and angels, wisdom<sup>35</sup>, and the word.<sup>36</sup> By the time the books of the Old Testament were written, then, it was already a maturing idea, occurring in well-developed form in Psalm 33,

By the word of Yahweh the heavens were made,  
 their whole array by the breath of his mouth:  
 He spoke, and it was created;  
 he commanded, and there it stood.<sup>37</sup>

Subsequently there appeared modifications and accretions. Augustine stressed, for instance, that God created as a result of choice, that he was motivated by an act of pure will. This same theme appears in Pico's Oration, where it plays a prominent part in enabling man to become whatever he chooses. Nor is there a question of God providing man with further material out of which to shape himself, man's will is sufficient; his creative ability is, in this sense, analogous to one of God's most familiar attributes - His capacity to create ex nihilo.

In the works of Ficino and Pico, this Christian belief is fused with the occult belief in the human power to uncover the hidden meanings behind certain words. This particularly applies to the Tetragrammaton. By finding out the real significance of the letters in the name of God, a power can be unleashed to direct the course of events, both earthly and

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34 Isa. 40:13; 48:16; 139:7, Wisd. 1:5; 7; 9:17; 12:1.

35 Prov. 8:22, Eccles. 24:3f.

36 Alan Richardson, A Theological Word Book of the Bible, ed. Alan Richardson, (S. C. M. Press Ltd., London, 1954) p. 93.

37 Psalm 33:6; 9, The Jerusalem Bible, (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1968)

divine. In this way, both occult and Christian ideas re-enforce each other, strengthening the belief in the creative power of the word. God Almighty creates through the Word; similarly, man exercises his might over the realms of the universe by appropriating the power hidden in the secret meanings of words.

In Ficino's work, this is clearly expressed in his regard for the power of knowledge. The possession of knowledge is the human equivalent of God's word, in that both are the medium through which creating occurs. It is by knowledge that man appropriates the genius of the divine maker. In contrast, it is by means of freedom of will, reminiscent of Augustine, that Pico links the ideas of divine creation by the word with the human power of operating on the universe. But in Pico the outcome is not the same as Ficino's conclusion - that man should exercise his potential control over the worlds; rather, Pico suggests that man can make his own self. How that is to be understood might indeed be controversial, but there is no doubt that for Pico, man is free to choose whatever self he wishes to become. In this case willing, transmitted through the word and into action, becomes the medium for creating.

This blending of occult and Christian ideas that came originally from divergent and opposed backgrounds could not be sustained in the religious climate of the time. That it led to tensions is clear from the reception of the Oration by Church authorities. The Church's power as a censor was such that, officially at least, the idea of creation ex nihilo, through the instrument of the word, was again confined to the religious context.<sup>38</sup>

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38 It is interesting to note that the idea of the creation of the universe as we know it, through the medium of thought, or the word, also occurs in Eastern texts. In the Awakening of Faith, continued on next page

Any analogy between this idea and the human ability to create, especially if it drew too closely on God-like attributes, was vigorously denied and denounced as heretical.

However, I want to suggest that the connection Pico had made - between man's God-like ability to create through the word, and the self - survived. At first, it took on the transmuted form of a belief in a special connection between thought and the self. Even when the presence of this connection appears least detectable, when any idea of self-making could no longer be respectably sustained, it still lingered in the Cartesian conviction that an intangible process - thought - can articulate the self. To be sure, it was a self now conceptualised as already given, enduring and substantial; but in Descartes' Meditations the 'I' is not only invested with objective validity, its disclosure relies purely on the medium of thought. Similarly Locke, through his struggles, revealed the difficulties in the notion of a substantial self, but that the self can be articulated through thought was never a problematic notion for him. Hume, more radically, went so far as to be sceptical about the very existence of the

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one of the texts of Mahayana Buddhism, Asvaghosha writes, What is called the essential nature of Mind is always beyond thoughts. It is, therefore, defined as 'immutable'. When the one World of Reality is yet to be realised, the Mind seems mutable and not in perfect Unity. Suddenly, a thought arises; this is called ignorance.

Ken Wilber comments that ignorance, in the sense used here by Asvaghosha, means ignore-ance of immutable, perfectly unified Mind. It is that ignorance which literally creates the conventional and symbolic universe of separate things extended in space and succeeding one another in time. The major instrument of ignorance is thought; it is thought itself which is ultimately responsible for the seeming existence of the conventional universe. Thought, in this sense, refers not so much to refined and developed logical processes, but rather to the root process of intellection, by which we create distinctions and dualisms. Ken Wilber, The Spectrum of Consciousness, (The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, U. S. A., 1985) p. 110.

self, because that existence could not be demonstrated by thought. In their separate ways, these philosophers were strongly, though implicitly, attached to the assumption that thought, and only thought, makes real an objective entity - the essentially unchanging self. That assumption, I suggest, is analogous in structure to Ficino's belief that if God created by means of the word, then it must be by means of the word, or thought, that all there is can become known.

So, though the belief in man's God-like potential to create ex nihilo was never again linked quite so provocatively with human self-making - as, I have suggested, Pico had dared - a residue nevertheless remained, captured in the faith that thought can uncover the nature of the self. This faith persisted even whilst the Cartesian idea of a given, substantial self suppressed notions of self-making as incompatible. For a long period the idea of an essentially unchanging self prevailed. But the idea of self-making did survive; though it only re-surfaced after the Cartesian notion of the self as substance had been discredited. In objecting to the idea of a substantial self, Leibniz - I hope to show later in this thesis - came close to holding that the self is constituted, through the medium of that kind of thinking we now identify as reflection. So the connection between thought and self-making once again began to re-emerge, even though what Leibniz hinted at was not developed until Hegel drew an open and explicit connection between thought and self-constitution.

But with a difference. The ideas Hegel upheld bear little resemblance to Pico's notion of self-creation. Nevertheless, by the nineteenth century the movement of thought had been such that the idea of self-constitution could begin to develop towards its fullest statement yet, so that now, in

the twentieth century, the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, through the medium of the word, is currently very much a feature of the modern idea of self-making. At its most superficial level, this trend is evident from the titles of certain books, like the recent Nietzsche: Life as Literature by Alexander Nehemas<sup>39</sup>. In another way, it can be found in Foucault's preservation of a link between the self and the word, in that for him discursive practices, amongst others, constitute a significant means for the making of the subject.

But it is most striking in the work of Greenblatt, who is very willing to read back into Renaissance humanism modern notions of individuality, and of a self-making that occurs unquestionably through thought, transmitted by the word. An example of this is his account of Thomas More's self-fashioning. In his book entitled Renaissance Self-Fashioning Greenblatt accepts Burckhardt's central perceptions, but moves beyond them. For him there is no question that in the period concerned there was a conscious sense that the self could be fashioned. He goes even further, by suggesting that self-making was rather more complex than previously supposed because it was affected by contradictory impulses, both social and individual. Turning to sixteenth century England, Greenblatt believes that there appeared to be 'an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process'.<sup>40</sup>

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39 Alexander Nehemas, Nietzsche: Life as Literature (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985).

40 Greenblatt, op. cit., p. 2.

He suggests the presence of a representational element in self-making; a manifestation of the nature and intentions of an individual in speech and actions, and he goes on to connect this point to literature. He says,

we may grasp that self-fashioning derives its interest precisely from the fact that it functions without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life. It invariably crosses the boundaries between the creation of literary characters, the shaping of one's own identity, the experience of being molded by forces outside one's control, the attempt to fashion other selves.<sup>41</sup>

Stronger still, Greenblatt claims for literature a special place in the process of individual self-making. Literature manifests the concrete behaviour of any one particular author; it expresses the social codes by diagnosing acceptable or unacceptable behaviour, and it reflects upon those codes. If all three of these functions combine and work together, then, for Greenblatt, self-fashioning at both a literary and concrete level comes into force.

This view is captured simply and clearly in his list of ten factors conducive to self-fashioning; the ninth point is that 'self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language'.<sup>42</sup> In exploring this point, Greenblatt sets out to show how Thomas More embodies a self-fashioning which brings together literature and the concrete, external events of his life. There is, notably, an explicit admission of the role of self-reflection, which Greenblatt unquestioningly links with More's self-making,

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41 *ibid.*, p. 3.

42 *ibid.*, p. 9.

both as the means for shaping the self and, paradoxically, as the means towards perpetual self-estrangement. Later, it is through a withdrawal into meditative thought that a deeper monolithic structuring of the self can occur, preparing the way for the next stage in More's self-making, which is shaped by his writings on religious controversy. Finally, in the closing stages, Greenblatt presents the Tower Works as the indispensable medium for More's self-making, ending with More's ultimate immersion into the larger totality of the Church. Greenblatt sees that immersion as a merger in which the disparate parts of More's identity are brought together in a dialogue which is only destroyed on the scaffold.

More's whole way of being is taken to express Greenblatt's own point:- that in the process of self-fashioning, fiction and reality merge. More's literary output becomes the medium for his own self-fashioning. In this way, in Greenblatt's own terms, Pico's original connection between man's God-like ability to create *ex nihilo* through the word, and human self-making, again unmistakably re-surfaces. Self-fashioning - as Greenblatt presents it - echoes a God-like ability to create *ex nihilo* in that it too occurs through the word. That, at least, is suggested by the idea that self-fashioning is always in language, in literature. As a purely human creation, literature is not limited by extrinsic, recalcitrant factors beyond human control - factors like an already given natural being - just as God's ability is not limited by any such obstructions that are beyond His control. By blurring the boundaries between literature and social life, and then drawing the means for self-making exclusively from this amorphous source, Greenblatt disposes of any non-human factors, and elevates the power of the word, so that the self that is fashioned becomes truly a human creation.

In this 20th century study of the self, Pico's contribution is only implicitly re-presented, for it is clear that Greenblatt shows no awareness that he is invoking a position which forms one part of an ongoing dialogue between conflicting metaphysical notions of the self. He articulates a thoroughly modern concept of self-fashioning. But this was not conceivable until the idea of the self as an entity had been established, and rejected. Underlying the current version of the idea of self-constitution is a certain foundation, established during the Renaissance, concerning the problem of the 'being' of the self, and the special relation between thought and the self. I want to suggest that Pico's particular connection of ideas continually emerges in changing forms whilst its basic structure is preserved. Further, that this connection - forming the context for the clash between conflicting notions of the self - has passed largely unquestioned; it has been accepted on faith, much like the ancient idea of divine creation by the word. It is the nature of that persistent faith in the inter-weaving of thought and the being of self which will form the issue to be explored in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER 2

### **THE INVENTION AND COLLAPSE OF THE SELF AS SUBSTANCE**

If thought and self are indeed interlinked in a special relation, then one question that can be asked is:- what is it about thought that makes this possible? One plausible answer is that thought is 'the very root process whereby we create distinctions and dualisms'.<sup>1</sup> That is, thought is the tool by which we carve up and label the original anonymity of all there is. In creating a distinction, we use thought to impose a boundary line, as it were, separating this off from that. As ever more boundary lines are produced distinctions multiply, forming an imaginary grid that we impress on human experience. We also create dualisms, for once distinctions are made defining parts of the whole, a tendency to regard those parts themselves as wholes is inclined to develop. This happens, for example, when we think of a particular country as a sovereign state, which has the right to function autonomously without undue interference from the rest of the world; or again, in a very different sphere, when the mind is seen as a distinct entity from the body. In cases such as these, two aspects of one whole come to be treated as two distinct wholes.

Thought can also be used to make a very particular distinction, one which demarcates the process of thinking off from a source generating this process. A distinction of this kind is unlike the distinctions that correlate with features already existing in the external world, by means of which we distinguish entities like horses, trees, the sky, and so on. The

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1 Ken Wilber, The Spectrum of Consciousness, (The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Illinois, 1985) p. 110.

distinction that demarcates thought as a process from the source of thought, brings the self, or any such creation, into being without the presence of an external correlate. In this case, thought uses nothing other than thought to create the self, for the self comes into being purely as a result of the distinctions created by the process of thinking. Understood in this way, thought is linked in a special relation with self, or whatever else is created by the same means, like the mind, or the soul.

But if this view is adopted, it implies that the being of self is indistinguishable from thought. Such a self, it might be countered, is too dependent on thought for its existence to be real; it is too much an invention to be credible as an item in reality. It is only a conception, which must not be confused with the 'real' self. The challenge is to adequately conceptualise an entity, not to mistake that concept for the entity itself.

An objection of this sort remains so familiar, and therefore so acceptable, that it almost seems to enshrine an independent 'truth', relevant for all time. Even in the present day, it may still take some effort to remember that objections of this kind were themselves shaped by contingent influences in a particular context, that their origin belongs in a time when the very status of knowledge was being severely shaken. In such circumstances, one way to steady foundations in danger of crumbling was to hold to a sharp demarcation between what is 'real' and what is not.

The Renaissance had been largely free of this predicament, for the emphasis had lain overwhelmingly on widening horizons, on expanding the scope of the historical, geographical, and scientific image of human being.

This emphasis fitted compatibly within the overall spirit of the Renaissance world-view. New ideas flourished, and old ones were renewed in attempts to bring about a synthesis of knowledge. Such efforts resulted in the essentially interpretative vision of a universe composed of a hierarchy of levels of existence and layers of meaning, a cosmos justifiable on the grounds that it embodied an order of Ideas, or archetypes - that it manifests the Will of God.

However, the counterpart of this spirit was a growing critical awareness, which initially weakened and eventually eroded crucial beliefs, shaking the traditional truths which had guaranteed the certainty of knowledge.<sup>2</sup> By the time of Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes and Locke, the Renaissance interpretation of the universe began to appear as the paradigm of anthropomorphic projection. Bacon, for instance, struggled against what he called 'Idols of the human mind'<sup>3</sup>. In common with others, he stressed that instead of projecting meanings, devised in the mind, onto facts, scientific truth and discovery require austerity. What is needed is a patient mapping - by means of empirical observation - of a universe now no longer understood as a meaningful hierarchy but as a world of ultimately contingent correlations. The beginnings of the new vision of the world, supported by the science of Galileo and Newton, veered towards atomism, mechanism, and sometimes a thoroughgoing materialism.

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2 Alexandre Koyré, Introduction, Descartes, Philosophical Writings, trans. E. Anscombe and P. T. Geach, (Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., Middlesex, 1977) p. viii.

3 In Charles Taylor, Hegel, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983) pp. 3-6.

It was in this intellectual climate that visions of human nature changed radically. Charles Taylor sees the shift from the old world view to that of the new as pivoting not so much on knowledge claims about the external world as on changing notions of the subject which, he thinks, underpinned the scientific revolution from the very beginning.<sup>4</sup> The essential difference between previous views, which defined the subject in relation to the cosmic order, and the newly emergent view in the seventeenth century, was that now the subject became what Taylor calls 'self-defining'.

What he means is that with the collapse of the belief in a divinely ordained hierarchy of existence, the individual could no longer be regarded as securely positioned within the relational structure of the cosmos. In the state of uncertainty that followed, concerning the place of human being in the universe, there was no recourse other than to define human being within new parameters. But these had to reflect the recognition that the new methods and discoveries relied on nothing other than human ingenuity, justified by empirical verification. If that ingenuity made it possible to define the universe, then it was also capable of defining the subject who possessed it. In such a climate of thought, when what counted as knowledge had to be pared down to all that is essentially clear, distinct, and objectively valid, debates about human nature in general gave way to a more particular concern with the nature of self, of subjectivity.<sup>5</sup>

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4 *ibid.*, p. 4.

5 The material for this section has been drawn largely from Charles Taylor's book, *Hegel*, *ibid.*, ch. 1.

### Descartes' Idea of the Self as Substance

The context just outlined is the one in which Descartes belonged. His very location in seventeenth century thought places him at that juncture where the old world view gives way to that of the modern conception of the universe. That Descartes is caught in the middle of these changes becomes manifest from the orientation of his thought:- he is intent on accepting the authenticity of the scientific revolution, particularly the possibility of understanding the universe in terms of mathematical, rational principles. At the same time, he shows his allegiance to the Neoplatonic character of the old world-view by attempting to salvage the notion of timeless certainties; hence his search for indubitable knowledge, for that which could remain eternally true. However, he also realised that if former theories and convictions - once unquestionably regarded as part of a corpus of certain knowledge - can lose that status, then the new theories are equally at risk of being discredited at some later time. Therefore if discursive knowledge, if sets of propositions about the external world can prove to be fallible, there is no alternative but to turn towards what lies within; that is, to examine the structures of reason itself.

Given this framework it is no wonder that Descartes could not accommodate a position as ambiguous as some tolerated in the Renaissance. Unlike Pico, for whom human nature sometimes is all, at other times appears to have the potential to become all, Descartes was compelled to search for firmer ground. This search inevitably affected the question of the being of the self - or, put in Cartesian terms, the being of the ego. In essence, Descartes could not be open to what moved Pico precisely because Descartes insisted on the substantiality of 'I'. In this respect a comparison with Pico is illuminating.

If the opening words of Pico's Oration are taken to be a metaphysical doctrine of self-making, resting on a notion of human nature as essentially capable of self-transformation, then Descartes presents the very opposite of that view. His understanding of 'I' - an ego regarded by him as the very nucleus of human nature - involves a reification of 'I' to the point where it is seen as a necessary entity, with universal attributes. Such a self can be developed but never radically transformed. If substance exists in such a way that it is not dependent on anything other than God, its creator, then, although substance can undergo accidental change, or be annihilated, it is nevertheless inherently stable and permanent. In such a notion of substance, there is no possibility of the total change that allows for self-transformation, for self-making.

But if the Oration is taken as a fable with a moral, meant as an exhortation to actualise the highest potential in human being, then Descartes and Pico do share some common ground. In the Passions of the Soul Descartes frequently explains how, by exercising free will, we can make ourselves into better and more virtuous human beings. He describes the will as by its nature so free 'that it can never be constrained'.<sup>6</sup> In this he agrees with Pico. But what remains implicit in Pico, that willing has the same structure as thinking,<sup>7</sup> becomes explicit in Descartes, who uses the term 'thought' to include, 'everything that is in us in such a way that we are immediately aware of it. Thus all the operations

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6 The Passions of the Soul, Oeuvres de Descartes, ed. by C. Adam & P. Tannery, Paris, 1897-1913, cited hereafter as AT XI, 359, in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Vol. I, trans. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothof & D. Murdoch, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984) cited hereafter as CSM, p. 343.

7 See Ch. 1, p. 36.

of the will, the intellect, the imagination, and the senses are thoughts.’<sup>8</sup> So Descartes, even more explicitly than Pico, acknowledges the role of thought as a means for making ourselves into what we choose to be. Furthermore, Descartes says,

...we can reasonably be praised or blamed only for actions that depend upon this free will. It renders us in a certain way like God by making us masters of ourselves, provided we do not lose the rights it gives us through timidity.<sup>9</sup>

Here, in The Passions of the Soul, the same combination of elements that enabled Pico to link the idea of creation by the word with self-making reappears, though in a much weaker form. The will, for both Pico and Descartes, has the same structure as thought; the will (thought) is the means by which we can make ourselves into what we choose to be; and in exercising this will (thought) we can be masters of ourselves, and that renders us in a certain sense like God.

The parallels between Pico and Descartes are noteworthy, but so are the differences. Whilst Pico connects the idea of man’s God-like ability to create with self-making, the scope within which he connects his ideas is so wide that what he actually means by self-making remains unclear. It can mean either that we only develop a nature that has already been given, or that we create ourselves by means of an unlimited capacity for self-transformation. Descartes, however, by stressing the substantial being of ‘I’, introduces a new factor in those very areas where his own work draws

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8 Descartes, Definitions in Second Set of Replies, At VII, 160, in CSM, Vol. II, p. 113.

9 Descartes, The Passions of the Soul, AT XI, 445, in CSM, Vol. I, p. 384.

him closer to Pico. That is, Descartes interprets the being of 'I' as the being of a substance whose essence is thought. As a result, Descartes can understand the idea of self-making only in terms of self-improvement, because as a substance 'I' cannot undergo a radical transformation. All that is left of Pico's exuberantly confident idea is the affirmation of the Augustinian view of the will, as the means for making ourselves into better, more virtuous human beings.

So the view that the self is created ex nihilo, through the power of the word, or thought, can have no place within the Cartesian scheme. It is blocked by Descartes' conclusion that the 'I' he apprehended in meditation has all the solidity of substantial being, a solidity which would provide a stable foundation grounding the search for indubitable knowledge. That the nature of such knowledge could be discovered by an exploration of the subject conformed with the remnants of the Neoplatonic conception of man to which Descartes still adhered - that of man as microcosm, faithfully reflecting the macrocosmic universe.

In these terms, his preoccupation with 'I' points both to a concern with the nature of the subject, and to the belief that subjective certainty can provide a way for securing the foundations of scientia. The trend amongst recent commentators has been to regard the Cogito primarily in terms of this latter concern; there has been a tendency to see the Cogito as a rather unsatisfactory argument, designed only to serve as a lynch-pin in a particular theory of knowledge. Placed in the context I have just outlined, however, the Cogito is important for its own sake. There are at least some scholars who see this very clearly. Hatfield, for one, holds that in the Meditations Descartes is intent on leading his reader to a

direct apprehension of the readers' own thought, and through it to an immediate experience of 'I'. Only after the ego has been grasped in an act of intuitive apprehension, can the indubitable knowledge gained become the basis for discursive argument and the kind of propositional knowledge defined as scientia.

This is not a point that has been fully explored in the literature; it is as argument only that recent commentators have predominantly seen the Cogito. Kenny, Williams, Frankfurt, even Hintikka despite his attempt to show that the Cogito is performative, all share one common approach:- they discuss the Cogito solely in terms of logical consistency. This is not to question that the Cogito can be regarded as an inference, or even as performative. But to treat it only as such, misses the point Descartes is trying to make, and to which an older generation of scholars, such as Bréhier, were sensitive, namely:- that 'I' can be grasped in direct apprehension, with indubitable certainty, and that that certainty can be cast in the form of an inference - the Cogito - only after coming to know 'I' in direct apprehension.

Hatfield, as mentioned, is someone who takes this point seriously. He draws attention to Descartes' meditative style of writing. Since for Descartes the ordinary, everyday mode of being is to be almost wholly immersed in the senses, a procedure is needed for freeing the intellect from sensory domination in order that the 'truth might be seen.'<sup>10</sup> For this purpose, Hatfield claims, Descartes chose the literary form of the Meditations, as the one most suitable for containing and conducting the

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10 G. Hatfield, 'Descartes Meditations as Cognitive Exercises', in Philosophy and Literature, vol. 9 No. 1, April 1985, p. 42.

necessary cognitive exercises. Hatfield regards the Meditations like a set of instructions for uncovering the truths that lie immanent in the intellect, rather than as continuous argument. Not that there is no argument, but some conclusions seem to be unfounded. He says,

I want to suggest that Descartes' work is constructed in such a way that the force of such conclusions depends upon the ability of the meditative exercises to evoke in the reader certain experiences that bring their own content and carry their own conviction.<sup>11</sup>

To achieve this aim, Descartes, according to Hatfield, utilised two aspects intrinsic to the meditative style of spiritual exercises available in the Roman Catholic tradition. One involves bringing forward certain considerations, cast in the form of discursive argument; another is the method of exemplification, as when, for example, Christian virtue is exemplified in a contemplation of the life of Christ. Here it is not required that arguments be persuasive, but rather, the intention is to become immediately acquainted with God. Hatfield attempts to show that Descartes used this model in constructing his Meditations, claiming that both argument and exemplification occur throughout. Sometimes argument is used to facilitate exemplification; the examples he points to are the sceptical arguments of the First Meditation which are not meant to achieve a positive conclusion, but rather to suspend judgement so that something that can be immediately and indubitably known is uncovered.

Hatfield claims that once it is recognised that the Meditations are constructed on this model, much which otherwise appears puzzling when

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11 ibid.

treated as argument, becomes quite natural if seen as exemplification. For example, the briefly sketched argument to the conclusion "that the proposition 'I am', 'I exist', whenever I utter it or conceive it in my mind, is necessarily true", is ultimately presented as resting upon the direct apprehension of the meditator's own thinking. This requires that the mind must first 'be abstracted from the senses', a goal that is prepared for by the doubt of the First Meditation, and realised in the Second Meditation. And so the conclusion of sum from cogito (to cite the simpler form used in the Discourse) is regarded as established not by argument, but by 'recognising it as something self-evident in a simple mental intuition', and is recalled as such at the beginning of the Third Meditation.<sup>12</sup>

The Meditations, then, are a method of discovery through which the Cogito can be 'clearly and distinctly' apprehended. The key factor is intuition. In both the Rules (especially 5-7,11) and the Discourse, intuition serves as the starting point for all knowledge. Beginning with what is intuitively certain, the Cartesian method derives conclusions by steps which themselves possess intuitive certainty. But intuition can only be had for one's self, in direct experience. Hatfield points out that for Descartes,

Whether in geometry or metaphysics, proper judgement of the truth results only when one feels one's own will compelled to give assent - compelled not by any external factor, but by one's own intellectual apprehension.<sup>13</sup>

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12 ibid., pp. 44-45.

13 ibid., p. 54

Nor is this method meant to be one of merely subjective personal introspection. Rather, Descartes' intention is clearly to aid the meditator in discovering, through meditation, a source of impersonal, objective judgements that lies hidden in the intellect. The meditator is to penetrate through the levels of personal experience until he reaches that which compels assent. Having arrived at that point, the meditator is able to discover what it is that makes universal agreement possible.

In summing up, Hatfield asks whether the sincere participant in a Cartesian retreat can have the experiences called for by the Meditations. He concludes that there would be no difficulty in admitting the indubitability of the Cogito, although the subsequent step to the separate substantiality of the mind will not find acceptance.<sup>14</sup> The Meditations are successful, he believes, when they enable a direct apprehension of the clear but remote principles of First Philosophy, an apprehension which relies on intuition illuminating the Cogito and the proofs of God's existence.

Whilst this reading of Descartes is insightful, a full recognition of what it means for 'I' to be grasped in immediate intuition is nevertheless absent. But that recognition is just what is most important for present purposes. Hatfield provides an interpretation which implies a certain wholeness of thought and being, for, as a consequence of Descartes' method, thought itself brings into being a certain phenomenon. Hatfield's approach makes it clear that in a Cartesian meditation, thought dwells upon and directly grasps a presence - 'I'. For Descartes, this apprehension in thought fundamentally establishes the existence of 'I'. Before anything

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14 ibid., pp. 55-56.

else can be said of this presence, its existence is determined by, and integral to, thought. I think, therefore I am. Meditation leads Descartes to the realisation that 'if I convinced myself of something ('... or thought anything at all' - French version) then I certainly existed.'<sup>15</sup> At this point, he does 'not yet have a sufficient understanding of what this 'I' is, that now necessarily exists';<sup>16</sup> what he has discovered, though he only partially acknowledges it, is the existence of a presence the very being of which emerges in thought, and depends on thought. In this sense, thought and 'I' have the same kind of being, since thought brings 'I' into being.

This point is not drawn out in Hatfield's account, but it is missing altogether in the work of other commentators mentioned above. On the whole, the trend has been to isolate the Cogito, to see it purely as a piece of reasoning, on which scientific knowledge can be founded. This is misleading, because it neglects the process of meditation, which leads to the intuitive apprehension of the Cogito. Without taking that process into account, the point that thought brings 'I' into being, and that the being of 'I' therefore cannot be substantial, in the way Descartes concluded, remains entirely obscured.

The problems Margaret Wilson faces, for instance, are generated as a result of a one-sided approach. In her discussion of the 'Cogito reasoning',<sup>17</sup> she argues that the Cogito involves an inference from 'I

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15 Descartes, Second Meditation, At VII, 25, in CSM, Vol. II, p. 17.

16 ibid.

17 Margaret Daulet Wilson, Descartes, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978) pp. 50-51.

think' to 'I exist', and suggests that the indubitability of 'I exist' is a condition of the indubitability of 'I think'. But her thinking about the Cogito remains confined within predominantly logical parameters, and this determines the kind of objections she raises, like the question, 'what makes us think we are justified in accepting a principle that lets us infer from 'I think' to 'I exist'?<sup>18</sup> The subsequent attempt to solve this problem solely within a context of discursive argumentation leads to an unresolvable state of affairs in which Descartes' 'system' appears riddled with problems. Yet Descartes' own words warned against just the kind of approach taken by Wilson and others; he says,

only those who really concentrate and meditate and withdraw their minds from corporeal things, so far as possible, will achieve perfect knowledge of them [that is, of the primary notions of metaphysics, the Cogito and the proofs of God's existence]. Indeed, if they were put forward in isolation, they could easily be denied by those who like to contradict just for the sake of it. This is why I wrote 'Meditations' rather than 'Disputations' as the philosophers have done...<sup>19</sup>

An older generation of French scholars did come close to recognising that the being of 'I' is intrinsic to thought. Bréhier, for instance, points out that, 'I cannot know that I think without knowing that I am. Cogito ergo sum.', and he goes on,

If I came to doubt this relation, my doubt would again entail my affirmation, and every reason for doubting that I have managed to

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18 *ibid.*, p. 4.

19 Descartes, Second Set of Replies, AT VII, 157, in CSM, Vol. II, pp. 111-112.

adduce - doubt about sensible things, the existence of an evil spirit - are but new reasons for repeating my affirmation. The certainty of my existence as thought is the necessary condition of my doubt.<sup>20</sup> (My underlining)

But Bréhier is careful to call the interconnection of thought and 'I' a relation, on the grounds that to regard it in terms of an identity between thought and 'I' is potentially misleading. Descartes, he points out, is not following in the footsteps of ancient metaphysicians like Parmenides or Plotinus, who tried to establish an identity between thought and being, as part of the attempt to encompass the total reality of the universe within the limits of thought. The complete apprehension of reality that Plotinus sought was to be achieved through the intuitive act of a soul, co-extensive with all reality. But Descartes resists such ideas, according to Bréhier, by warning that the Cogito is not,

an illumination of the mind through which it sees in a divine light the things that God sees fit to reveal to it by means of a direct impression of divine lucidity on our understanding.<sup>21</sup>

It is at most,

a proof of the capacity of our soul to receive intuitive knowledge from God'.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps his eagerness to distance himself from the implications of this particular Neoplatonic doctrine prevented Descartes from accepting

20 E. Bréhier, The Seventeenth Century, trans. W. Baskin, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974) p. 68.

21 Descartes, AT V, 133, in Brehier, ibid., p. 69.

22 ibid.

what his own method of doubt had brought to light. Yet, it was open to him to recognise that in the case of 'I', being is intrinsic to thought. To say or think 'I', is a special case in which the being of the ego and thought are the same, a case in which thinking itself becomes the necessary and sufficient condition for being.

On some occasions he does come close to acknowledging this. In his reply to Gassendi's objection that he does not need such a large apparatus to show that he exists, that he could have inferred that from any action other than thinking, since whatever acts is, Descartes says,

When you say that I could have concluded the same thing from any other of my actions, you are very mistaken, because there isn't one of them of which I am entirely certain - I mean with that metaphysical certainty which alone is here in question - except thought. Thus, for example, this consequence would be no good: I walk, therefore I am, except insofar as the consciousness of walking is a thought, from which alone this conclusion is certain, not from the movement of the body...<sup>23</sup>

Margaret Wilson, in commenting on this passage suggests that since Descartes does not assert that 'I persuaded myself' is certain, nor that 'I think I am something', and further, would not want to assert that 'he deceives me' is certain, there are grounds for believing that the Meditations introduce 'in some sense, a hypothetical approach to the problem of the certainty of one's own existence, in relation to one's thinking.'<sup>24</sup>

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23 Cited in Margaret Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

24 Margaret Wilson, *ibid.*, p. 54.

But that is to miss the point, by focussing almost exclusively on the content and force of certain propositions. It is the consciousness of 'I' that is at issue, a consciousness that could never be derived from walking, or any action other than thinking. Descartes is quite right to point out that the appropriate conclusion to be drawn from walking is that the body moves. To conclude that 'I am walking, simply from the act of walking itself, introduces an extra factor - 'I' - not strictly entailed by either walking or by body movement. It is only consciousness that would produce the conclusion 'I walk, therefore I am' because it is only through consciousness, formed when thinking apprehends 'I' by means of the method laid out in the Meditations, that 'I' comes into being.

Not that Descartes himself takes this opportunity to dwell on how the being of 'I' and thought are the same. He is prevented from making such an acknowledgement, and not only because he rejects the Neoplatonic doctrine mentioned just now. More importantly, Descartes assumes that the 'I' he has discovered is a substance, a thinking thing. In the Second Meditation, almost immediately after discovering 'I', Descartes interprets this presence as a thing that thinks. He asks,

But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions.<sup>25</sup>

And in a letter to Colvius, Descartes refers to Augustine's version of the Cogito and writes,

I find that he (Augustine) does really use it to prove the certainty of our existence. He goes on to show that there is a

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25 Descartes, Second Meditation, AT VII, 28, in CSM, Vol. II, p. 19.

certain likeness of the Trinity in us, in that we exist, we know that we exist, and we love the existence and knowledge we have. I, on the other hand, use the argument to show that this I which is thinking is an immaterial substance with no bodily element. These are two very different things.<sup>26</sup>

In assuming that 'I' is a res cogitans, a thinking thing or substance, Descartes loses the chance to preserve what his method of doubt uncovered, that the existence of 'I' is established purely in thought; that in some modes of thought, like meditation, 'I' exists not as some object apart, but as intrinsic to thought itself. As it is, the direct apprehension of 'I' in which the method of doubt culminates, becomes immediately problematic because Descartes assumes that he has discovered the presence of a substance.

His reasons for assuming that 'I' is a thinking thing are partly embedded in certain metaphysical convictions, which lead him to hold that 'every property, quality or attribute of which we have a real idea' must inhere in something, a substance, even though,

The only idea we have of a substance itself, in the strict sense, is that it is the thing in which whatever we perceive (or whatever has objective being in one of our ideas) exists.<sup>27</sup>

We have a real idea of thinking, for we cannot doubt that we think when we deny, affirm, or doubt etc.. Since thinking is a mode for Descartes, that mode cannot be unless it inheres in a thing; since 'I' is the source of

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26 Cited in Descartes: Philosophical Letters, trans. and ed. by A. Kenny, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970) pp. 83-84.

27 Descartes, Definitions, in the Second Set of Replies, AT VII, 161, in CSM, Vol. II, p. 114.

thinking - as in 'I think' - 'I' is the thing in which thinking inheres, and so he is driven to attribute some kind of substantiality to 'I'.

If we return briefly to the beginning of this chapter, it seems that Descartes illustrates very well the process discussed there - that of the activity of thought in creating distinctions and dualisms. When it comes to articulating the immediate grasp of 'I' in intuitive apprehension, Descartes almost at once makes the distinction between the process of thinking and a source or 'cause', as he puts it, of this thinking. But, in introducing an Aristotelean distinction between substance and attribute, Descartes obscures the originally unified being of thought and 'I'. In imposing this metaphysical distinction, the process of thinking separates thought and the ego into different categories; it is in this manner that Descartes invents 'I' as a substance whose essential attribute is thinking - a res cogitans.

Even so, the way in which he makes the distinction is ambivalent. Hobbes, for instance, notices how Descartes asks the questions,

Which of these activities (that is, denying, affirming, imagining, willing, desiring, and so on) is distinct from my thinking? Which of them can be said to be separate from myself?<sup>28</sup>

Hobbes wonders whether Descartes is committing himself to the view that 'he who understands is the same as the understanding', for that would mean, Hobbes thinks, that 'the understanding understands, the sight sees, the will wills, and, by a very close analogy, the walking (or at least the

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28 Descartes, Second Meditation, AT VII, 29, in CSM, Vol. II, p. 19.

faculty of walking) walks.'<sup>29</sup> Descartes replies that he does not deny that 'I, who am thinking, am distinct from my thought, in the way in which a thing is distinct from its mode', and he goes on, 'when I ask "Which of all these activities is distinct from my thinking?", I mean this to refer to the various modes of thinking which I have just listed, not to myself as a substance.'<sup>30</sup> But if this is what Descartes meant, his manner of expressing that meaning is ambiguous, as Hobbes rightly detected, for the two questions in the Second Meditation do imply that just as denying, affirming, willing, and so on, are not distinct from thinking, so thinking is not distinct from the ego. Again, as in his reply to Gassendi, Descartes comes close to acknowledging that the very being of 'I' is intrinsic to thought.

Yet he not only actually demonstrates that thought brings 'I' into being - even though he misunderstands his own discovery - but he shows that it is a certain kind of thinking which fulfils this function. Whilst Descartes is meditating, he also reflects; it is noteworthy that the Meditations are written in the first-person. That is, to take up the first-person standpoint is to take up the 'stance of radical reflexivity'<sup>31</sup>, as Charles Taylor has pointed out. The very possibility of saying 'I', rests on a movement of consciousness away from a preoccupation with experience towards an inner grasp of the agent of experience. Since such a grasp depends on a turning inwards, to a source that is assumed to make experience possible, a reflection back towards that

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29 Descartes, Third Objection, AT VII, 177, in CSM, Vol. II, p. 125.

30 ibid.

31 Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986) p. 130.

which has the experience is involved. The apprehension of myself as agent of experience depends on such a reflection - an apprehension which underlies and is expressed in the first-person standpoint. It is because Descartes does not just write down his experience, but owns that experience by taking up the standpoint of the first-person, that his meditation is also a reflection. For this reason, Descartes must be regarded as the instigator of the philosophy of reflection, an innovation that shaped the context in which the being of the self would be explored for generations to come.

But for Descartes himself, his misunderstanding of what he had discovered was essential to his overall project. He could not afford to acknowledge that the being of 'I' and thought are the same, because that would put the reality of the ego at stake, and with it the possibility of the certainty of scientia. At a fundamental level, it was Descartes' need for objectivity which led him to assume that 'I' is a substance, for he assumed that only that which is substantial is real, and can be objectively known. So Descartes' own self-understanding could not encompass the notion that he had, in a powerful sense, invented the self, by splitting 'I' off from the process of thinking itself. But the result was that a metaphysical distinction between the process of thinking and a thing that does the thinking became unavoidable. Through this separation of thought from 'I', the original unity gave way to a dichotomy between knower and known. Once that separation was effected the way opened for objectifying 'I' as the self, a move that Locke went on to make.

### Locke's Struggle with the Idea of Self as Substance

Accepting the Cartesian conception of 'I' as a substance, as a 'thinking thing', Locke gives that substance a name - self. In doing so, he differs from Descartes, who always used the term 'self' only as a reflexive pronoun and never as a noun; Descartes often refers to 'myself' but never to the self. Locke, however, explicitly articulates the inferences Descartes implicitly made about the self, but, in the process he reveals that the complexities of the relations between thinking and a substantial self lead to a breakdown.

The first hint of this is evident in his own ambiguity, for whilst there are frequent references to 'the same self' in Book II of An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, he refrains from using the term 'the self' consistently in all contexts. For instance, he writes, 'it is self to it self now',<sup>32</sup> and 'so is concern'd for it self',<sup>33</sup> - phrases which sit at odds with expressions like 'the same self'. This ambiguity cannot be explained entirely by taking into account the style and idiosyncrasies of English expression in Locke's day; rather, there is reason to believe that Locke is ambiguous because he implicitly regards self as an object that can be known and examined, whilst at the same time his views on substance demand that the nature of that object remains obscure. So his objectification of self is far from straightforward, a fact which is reflected in his use of language.

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32 John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985) II: XXVII: 10, p. 336.

33 ibid., II: XXVII: 17, p. 341.

Locke accepts unconditionally that self is a substance.

Self is that conscious thinking thing, (whatever Substance made up of whether Spiritual, or Material, Simple, or Compounded, it matters not) which is sensible, or conscious of Pleasure and Pain, capable of Happiness or Misery, and so is concern'd for it self, as far as that consciousness extends.<sup>34</sup>

However, whilst affirming that self is a substance, Locke dismisses as unimportant the question of what kind of substance the self is composed of. Unlike Descartes, for whom 'I' is a mental substance, Locke is not prepared to commit himself to any one characterisation. In this respect he is at least consistent, for the fact that he avoids this question here expresses something about his view on substance in general. That view, basically, is as follows:- substance exists, for we cannot imagine how sensible qualities can exist without the support of some substratum; qualities are always qualities of something, hence substance is the underlying ground in which these qualities inhere.

But whilst this is a metaphysical thesis, it is also intrinsically bound up with epistemology; Locke wants to hold that substance exists, yet we cannot have knowledge of it. Since this position impinges significantly on Locke's struggles to articulate the objectivity and substantiality of the self, it is helpful to look briefly at how Locke understands knowledge, before sketching his view of substance.

Knowledge, for Locke, is always a matter of having ideas; we can have no knowledge of anything of which we have no ideas. Every idea we have is ultimately derived from experience, directed through only two sources of

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34 ibid.

knowledge - sensation and reflection. We receive ideas from sensation when our senses are affected by external objects, ideas such as yellow, white, hot, cold, soft, hard, bitter and sweet. We receive ideas from reflection when we attend to the operations of our own minds, for then we are furnished with the ideas of perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing and willing.

Locke also recognised intuition and demonstration as degrees of knowledge. Of these two, intuition is the more fundamental and certain, for the mind immediately perceives the agreement or disagreement of ideas, whereas in demonstration such perception is not immediate but mediated by other ideas, even though each step in demonstration rests upon an intuition. Finally, we can have knowledge about finite beings other than ourselves; this is a kind of perception which goes 'beyond bare probability, and yet not reaching perfectly to either of the foregoing degrees of certainty, passes under the name of Knowledge'.<sup>35</sup> Locke called this sensitive knowledge, that is, knowledge by sensation.

Of intuition, Locke has this to say,

The different clearness of our Knowledge seems to me to lie in the different way of Perception, the Mind has of the Agreement, or Disagreement of any of its Ideas. For if we will reflect on our own ways of Thinking, we shall find, that sometimes the Mind perceives the Agreement or Disagreement of two Ideas immediately by themselves, without the intervention of any other: And this, I think, we may call intuitive Knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

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35 Locke, ibid., IV: II: 14, p. 537.

36 ibid., IV: II: 1, pp. 530-531.

Such knowledge is irresistible and leaves no room for hesitation or doubt; that is why the certainty and evidence of all our knowledge depends upon it.

Intuition, however, does not have the same meaning for Locke as it had for Descartes. Wary of Cartesian innatism, Locke accepts that intuitive knowledge is immediate and indubitable, but emphasises that all ideas and all knowledge are acquired, and not innate. His aversion to the doctrine of innatism is based on the view that what is assumed to be certain inward knowledge is scarcely separable from, and in fact may accommodate, all our individual prejudices. Further, innatism leads to the proclamation of infallibility, that is, to an unshakeable belief based on nothing except the affirmation of an individual. So, for Locke, it is a dangerous dogmatism, because it is individually inspired and characterised by groundless affirmations.<sup>37</sup> Locke might readily concede that we have intuitive knowledge of the identity of our clear ideas, and of the differences between them, but that is as far as intuition can take us. Intuition fails in that it cannot determine the necessity of relations between ideas; it cannot establish the necessary connection of ideas with each other. As Locke says in his discussion of substance,

the simple Ideas whereof our complex Ideas of Substances are made up, are, for the most part such, as carry with them, in their own Nature, no visible necessary connexion or inconsistency with any other simple Ideas.<sup>38</sup>

Necessary connections or inconsistencies between ideas are not 'visible'. Locke attaches importance primarily to experience. Unwilling

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37 E. Bréhier, op. cit., pp. 272-273.

38 Locke, op. cit., IV: III: 10, p. 544.

to accept a description of reality based on a logical system deduced from non-empirical principles, he cannot admit intuitive knowledge of the connection or inconsistency between ideas. Such relations are not 'visible'; therefore they cannot support the grounds for acceptable, verifiable principles. At best, they can form the basis of hunches. The most significant point here is that all the simple ideas - which taken together constitute our complex idea of substance - are themselves not connected in any 'visible necessary connexion'. For that reason, we are not really justified in holding the idea of substance.

This is borne out by what Locke says regarding ideas and knowledge of substance,

So that if anyone will examine himself concerning his Notion of pure Substance in general, he will find he has no other Idea of it at all, but only a Supposition of he knows not what support of such Qualities, which are capable of producing simple Ideas in us; which Qualities are commonly called Accidents.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, we cannot have an idea of substance, in the sense that we cannot have an idea of what substance is; the most we can do is to suppose that there exists such a thing because qualities cannot be if they have no support. Since our ideas from sensation establish that there are qualities, and that they are accidental - because their presence is subject to change - they must be the contingent properties of some thing, a thing which endures as a permanent substratum throughout changes in the qualities. The existence of that substratum is necessary, for if that does not exist, the qualities cannot exist either. But because there is no 'visible necessary connection' between the simple ideas we have of

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39 ibid., II: XXIII: 2, p. 295.

qualities, we cannot have an idea of substance. Without an idea of substance, we can have no knowledge of substance. Locke goes on even more explicitly,

The Idea then we have, to which we give the general name Substance, being nothing, but the supposed, but unknown support of those Qualities, we find existing, which we imagine cannot subsist, sine re substante, without something to support them, we call that Support Substantia; which, according to the true import of the Word, is in plain English, standing under, or upholding.<sup>40</sup>

In the above two passages, Locke is discussing substance in general, but he applies what he says there to the particular case of corporeal substance. He says,

By the complex Idea of extended, figured, coloured, and all other sensible Qualities, which is all that we know of it, we are as far from the Idea of the Substance of Body, as if we knew nothing at all:<sup>41</sup>

Here again, ideas of sensible qualities must not be taken to also represent the real elements of bodily substance. The above passage makes clear why this is so for Locke. The ideas of sensible qualities are just that, ideas of sensible qualities only; so those ideas cannot be extended to give the idea of substance as well. If we can have no idea of substance we do not know what it is, and so, as Locke himself says, we can only have a supposition of its existence.

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40 ibid., II: XXIII: 2, p. 296.

41 ibid., II: XXIII: 16, p. 306.

But the issue becomes more complicated. So far, it has been pointed out that Locke holds that we can have no idea of substance in general, and we have seen how that applies to the particular case of corporeal substance. Yet in spite of this, Locke also holds that we can know that there are different sorts of substances. He says,

We have the Ideas but of three sorts of Substances; 1.God.  
2.Finite Intelligences. 3.Bodies.<sup>42</sup>

In this case - in spite of what he says about our inability to have an idea of substance in general - we can, after all, have ideas of three sorts of substances. Time and place - instead of qualities - establish that God, finite intelligences, and bodies are different sorts of substances. God, for instance, is without beginning, eternal, unalterable and everywhere. Finite intelligences (that is, ourselves) each have a determinate time and place of coming into existence, and the relation to that time and place will always determine the identity of each one as long as it exists. The same holds true for bodies; as long as bodies do not undergo an addition or subtraction of matter, so that the identity of each 'parcel of matter' is not altered, each body begins and ends existence in a certain time and place. A further re-inforcement of their substantiality is provided by Locke's statement that whilst these three sorts of substances do not exclude one another in the same place, we cannot conceive of two of the same kind in the same place; for example, two material bodies cannot be in the same place at the same time.<sup>43</sup>

Yet, if Locke really means that we can have ideas of three sorts of substances from time and place, then his thought is at odds here with what

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42 ibid., II: XXVII: 2, p. 329.

43 ibid.

he otherwise thinks about substance. In the discussion of substance in general he makes quite clear that we cannot derive the idea of substance from the existence of qualities, we can only suppose a support for those qualities. I take Locke to mean that we are not only unable to know what substance is - what it is composed of; how it is constituted - but we cannot even have the very idea of substance; all we can do is suppose that there must be some underlying ground in which qualities inhere. If that is so in the case of qualities, then it must be even more so in the case of time and place. That is, there might be some plausibility in arguing that because there are qualities there must be a substance that underpins those qualities; however, there is not much plausibility in trying to argue that through time and space we have the idea of three sorts of substances. In this latter case it is no longer a question of supposing the existence of substance, we now have the idea - and therefore the knowledge - that there are three sorts of substances. Yet, the grounds - time and place - for having such an idea are far more tenuous than the grounds - the existence of qualities - which lead to the supposition of the existence of substance.

This tension - between on the one hand supposing the existence of substance, without being entitled to the idea, and therefore the knowledge, that there is substance, and on the other hand the idea, and therefore the knowledge, that there is not only substance, but three sorts of substances - is carried over into what Locke also wants to hold concerning our knowledge of the existence of God, finite intelligences, and bodies.

I say, then, that we have the Knowledge of our own Existence by Intuition; of the Existence of GOD by Demonstration; and of other Things by Sensation.<sup>44</sup>

But the knowledge of the existence of these three kinds of entity carries with it the knowledge that in each case existence is substantial since we can have ideas of three sorts of substances - each sort of substance corresponding to each kind of entity. Taking the case of finite intelligences as an example, this must mean that our own existence is substantial. In a passage reminiscent of Descartes, Locke stresses the immediacy of the intuitive knowledge of our own existence, he says,

As for our own Existence, we perceive it so plainly, and so certainly, that it neither needs, nor is capable of any proof. For nothing can be more evident to us, than our own Existence. I think, I reason, I feel Pleasure and Pain; Can any of these be more evident to me, than my own Existence?<sup>45</sup>

That is, we perceive our own existence so clearly, it is so evident by means of qualities like thinking, reasoning, the capacity to feel pleasure and pain, etc., that it is futile to try to prove it; our existence defies any proof, we simply grasp it. The fact that we perceive our existence is emphasised as Locke goes on,

If I doubt of all other Things, that very doubt makes me perceive my own Existence, and will not suffer me to doubt of that. For if I know I feel Pain, it is evident, I have as certain a Perception of my own Existence, as of the Existence of the Pain I feel: Or if I know I doubt, I have as certain a Perception of the Existence of the thing doubting, as of that Thought, which I

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44 ibid., IV: IX: 2, p. 618.

45 ibid., IV: IX: 3, p. 618.

call doubt. Experience then convinces us, that we have an intuitive Knowledge of our own Existence, and an internal infallible Perception that we are.<sup>46</sup>

More than one commentator has found this emphasis on perception problematic. For example, Schacht asks:- what is it that I perceive? I cannot perceive existence as such, because existence is not a thing that can be perceived. So Locke would appear to be saying that it is myself I perceive existing. But do I, Schacht asks, actually perceive anything which can be called 'myself'? Do I, in addition to thoughts and simple and complex ideas perceive a self which is having these thoughts and ideas?<sup>47</sup>

It is possible to reply on Locke's behalf that Schacht is led into asking the wrong questions because he, Schacht is not distinguishing sufficiently between two different notions:- one, that we perceive our existence from certain qualities we possess, and two, that we perceive that we exist as substance from the qualities we possess. He assumes that Locke means the latter, and bases his questions on this assumption. But maybe Locke is implicitly working with both these different ideas. To maintain the former is to say that we have a certain perception of our own existence because we demonstrate qualities like doubting, reasoning, thinking, etc.; since qualities must inhere in something, we suppose that we are each a substance, whilst taking into account that nothing can be said about that substance because we cannot know it. This is not inconsistent.

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46 ibid.

47 Richard Schacht, Classical Modern Philosophers, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1984) pp. 128-129.

But this kind of defence of Locke will not work. For Locke, we have the idea of ourselves as a sort of substance from time and place. Since we have the idea, and therefore the knowledge, of ourselves as substantial, Schacht's understanding of Locke is right - it must be the case that for Locke we exist as substance. This can be supported by what Locke himself says; he says quite explicitly that, 'I have as certain a perception of the existence of the thing doubting, as of that Thought, which I call doubt'(My underlining). Since the existence of the thing doubting must be substantial - because this thing is a finite intelligence, which is a sort of substance, the existence of which we can know in intuition - Locke must mean that the thing doubting, feeling, and so on, is substantial.

This simply raises questions like those of Schacht's all over again. Do I perceive 'a thing doubting'? That is, do I perceive a substance (thing) that is doubting? On Locke's own terms I cannot, the most I can do is to suppose the existence of such a substantial thing from the existence of qualities. So there does appear to be an unresolvable inconsistency in Locke's thought; it is one thing to say that we suppose the existence of substance from the existence of qualities, as he does in Book II of his Essay, but quite another to say that we have a certain perception of the existence of the thing (substance) doubting, as he does here.

These tensions indicate that Locke, in taking over Descartes' assumption that self is a thinking thing, encounters more problems than he can settle. At the most fundamental level, Locke's acceptance that the self is substantial - whichever way that is to be understood - introduces a distance between the 'I' and thinking, feeling, and so on. Locke himself tellingly adopts the language of an observer; he says, 'I know I feel

pain', and further, 'I know I doubt', and most strikingly, 'I have as certain a perception of the thing doubting, as of that thought, which I call doubt'.

This separation of self into knower and known inevitably leads to a notion of self as an object, all the more so because 'I' is a thinking thing, a substance. In Cartesian terms, a substance is not dependent for its existence on anything other than God. Locke, broadly speaking, agrees with this view. Even when he says that substance is a standing under, as quoted earlier, he still sees that standing under in terms of a re substante. As a result, self - as substance - is assumed to have a degree of independence, since it is detached enough from the observer to facilitate observation like any other object in the presence of that observer. But for Locke, that assumption is one source of all the tensions already noted. At one level, the existence of substance can only be supposed. At another level, to avoid endangering the idea that the self is a substance, Locke is driven to maintain that we have intuitive knowledge of our own existence, because we can perceive the existence of the thing (the substance) doubting. To suppose the existence of something (substance) is very different from perceiving with certainty the existence of that same thing, as I have already argued.

At the same time, the fundamental separation of the self into knower and known, which Locke inevitably emphasises, in turn generates multiple aspects of the self. For example, if substance, for Locke, underpins perceivable qualities like thoughts, then maybe the substance Locke has in mind is consciousness. He does say that,

consciousness always accompanies thinking, and 'tis that, that makes everyone to be, what he calls self; and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, 48

The self is substantial, as Locke himself says. He also agrees with the Cartesian conception of consciousness as necessarily entailing self-consciousness. We cannot, for both Locke and Descartes, feel, meditate, or will, without knowing that we do so. So if consciousness is self-consciousness, and self is a substance, then maybe consciousness is also a substance. But for Locke, since it is by immediate self-awareness that 'everyone is to himself that which he calls self,'<sup>49</sup> it follows that this very self-consciousness constitutes the essence of a person, and consequently that the identity of the person is to be found in the identity of the consciousness.

And as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the Identity of that Person; it is the same self now it was then; and 'tis by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that Action was done.<sup>50</sup>

But for this reason, to identify self with consciousness and consciousness with substance would be a mistake, because Locke himself seems to resist such an identification. Some commentators, like H. E. Allison, argue that Locke succeeds in distinguishing the ideas of person and personal identity, from the ideas of man and of substance. Locke's

48 Locke, *op. cit.*, II: XXVII: 9, p. 335.

49 *ibid.*, II: XXVII: 9, p. 211.

50 *ibid.*

scepticism regarding knowledge of substance induces him to make the distinction between personal and substantial identity.<sup>51</sup> There is some support for this interpretation. Since we are supposed to lack knowledge of a thinking substance, Locke, in his attempt to account for the continuity of consciousness - particularly in relation to memory - becomes content to assert that the continuity of personal identity throughout a change of substance is at least possible, although we have no knowledge thereof.<sup>52</sup> Locke says,

...the same numerical Substance is not considered, as making the same self: But the same continued consciousness, in which several Substances may have been united, and again separated from it, which, whilst they continued in a vital union with that, wherein this consciousness then resided, made a part of that same self.<sup>53</sup>

and he says,

Person, as I take it, is the name for this self.<sup>54</sup>

This seems to suggest that different substances may come together and separate again within consciousness, whilst consciousness itself continues. Since, for Locke, consciousness 'accompanies' all our thinking, it is not clear that Allison is altogether right; as far as 'thinking substance' is concerned, Locke cannot, with certainty, be taken to be trying to drive a

51 Henry E. Allison, 'Locke's Theory of Personal Identity', in Locke On Human Understanding, ed. I. C. Tipton, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977) p. 109.

52 Locke, op. cit., II: XXVII: 13, p. 214.

53 ibid., II: XXVII: 25, p. 346.

54 ibid., II: XXVII: 26, p. 346.

wedge between 'person' or 'self' and 'thinking substance'. It is just that the same self does not remain the same 'numerical substance'.

Nevertheless, Locke, in his care to distinguish the notion of person from that of 'numerical' substance, generates doubt about the status of what is signified by the term 'person'. He defines 'person' as a forensic term towards the end of the chapter on personal identity in the Essay. However, as Allison points out, this implies a modification of Locke's first definition of 'person' as a thinking, intelligent being. That definition suggested that 'person' is a substance. But to see 'person' as a forensic term implies that it is an abstract idea, and not in itself an entity of any sort; rather it is simply one aspect of a concrete individual, an aspect in virtue of which he is morally responsible.<sup>55</sup>

Udo Thiel attempts to resolve the inherent difficulties in Locke's concept of person by suggesting that Locke is working with a notion of self-constitution. He suggests that 'person' is the name for a unity which is not first given and then known, but rather exists only by virtue of being constituted by consciousness. He explains,

The only items which belong to this self are those which we ascribe to it in our daily experiences. It is this idea of the self-constitution of personality which makes intelligible Locke's contention that the idea of a person is not connected with the idea of a substance.<sup>56</sup>

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55 H. E. Allison, op. cit., p. 111.

56 Udo Thiel, 'Locke's Concept of Person', in John Locke: Symposium Wolfenbützel 1979, ed. Reinhard Brandt, (de Gruyter, New York, 1981) p. 184.

There is support for Thiel's position in what Locke himself says,

For as far as any intelligent Being can repeat the Idea of any past Action with the same consciousness it had of it at first, and with the same consciousness it has of any present Action; so far it is the same personal self. For it is by the consciousness it has of its present Thoughts and Actions, that it is self to it self now, and so will be the same self as far as the same consciousness can extend to Actions past or to come;<sup>57</sup>

Thiel is in broad agreement with Allison regarding Locke's attempts to make a distinction between substance and personal identity. He holds that by means of the concept of consciousness Locke distinguishes between 'man' (corporeal substance) and 'person'. The same 'life' constitutes the unity of a man, and consciousness makes the unity of a person. The disagreement he cites between Locke and Sergeant on this issue throws an interesting light on Locke's own thought. When, in 1697, John Sergeant published his Solid Philosophy Asserted, he argued that it is part of the notion of a man's essence that he is an intelligent being and that therefore a man is 'essentially and formally one Person too'.<sup>58</sup> That is, Sergeant argues that 'man' and 'person' are one, as a direct response to what he understands to be Locke's doctrine that they are distinct.

Sergeant was therefore one of the first to take Locke to be making a distinction between 'man' and 'person', and on those grounds he criticised Locke's theory of personal identity. For Sergeant, consciousness of my

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57 Locke, op. cit., II: XXVII: 10, p. 336.

58 John Sergeant, Solid Philosophy Asserted, p. 262, in Udo Thiel, op. cit., p. 184.

actions is nothing but the 'knowledge' that they are my actions. He agrees with Locke that we have no innate but only acquired knowledge; but from that he concludes that knowledge is only accidental to the knower; it is not an essential property of the subject. That is, the man/person, 'must have had Individuality or Personality from other Principles, antecedently to this Knowledge call'd Consciousness'.<sup>59</sup>

In other words, as Thiel explains, for Sergeant a man/person must be identical with himself before he can become conscious of his identity; the identity of a person is preserved by individuating principles other than consciousness. In Locke's reply to Sergeant he agrees that since knowledge is necessarily acquired, it is merely accidental to the man. But it is this very knowledge which makes the person, and distinguishes the person from the man. That is, the acquisition of knowledge is the means for constituting the person; in this sense, Locke seems to have an implicit notion of self-constitution. Thiel cites as evidence the note Locke made in his copy of Sergeant's book,

A man has the individuality of a man before he has Knowledg but is not a person before he has Knowledg.<sup>60</sup>

It seems then, that on Locke's view acquired knowledge is by no means merely accidental to the person, in the way he concedes it is to the man. The unity of person has to be constituted by consciousness; I am a person only insofar as consciousness unifies thoughts and actions. Thiel cites another note from Locke's copy of Sergeant's book,

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59 *ibid*, p. 185.

60 Locke's *Solid* p. 265, in Udo Thiel, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

An intelligent individuum is not an intelligent individuum before it has Knowledg.<sup>61</sup>

And Thiel comments,

Only that which appears to myself through consciousness makes part of my personality. Before having consciousness I may have the individuality of a man but not that of a person'.<sup>62</sup>

But whilst Thiel believes that for Locke the person is constituted in consciousness, he also sees difficulties with this way of reading Locke which remain unresolved. For example, Locke does emphasise the corporeality of man; man is a bodily being. But in that case, asks Thiel, how does Locke see the relation between the person and the body?<sup>63</sup> Whilst these are certainly problems for Locke, to pursue them further here would not be directly relevant. The immediate question is:- can Locke be regarded as having an idea of self-making, as Thiel suggests?

The answer to this must be a cautious affirmative. Locke implicitly struggles with the consequences of regarding the self as a substance, and, in his efforts, the indivisible unity of Descartes' immaterial substance is replaced by various aspects of self, namely:- consciousness, numerical substance, person, and man. Of these various aspects, Locke's understanding of how a person comes into being most closely resembles a notion of self-constitution, because person can be taken as a forensic concept, formulated for the purpose of becoming the bearer of duties and responsibilities. That requires knowledge; it is knowledge which, in this

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61 Locke's *Solid* p. 267, in Udo Thiel, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

62 *ibid*

63 Udo Thiel, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

sense, makes the person; and that is why it can be argued that the person is distinct from the man, from substance. Locke's ideas in this case resemble those of Ficino, for whom knowledge was the means for releasing man's God-like capacity to create. But, because Locke cannot relinquish the idea of a substantial self, he cannot resolve the difficulties generated within his own framework. So any possibilities for working out the implications of a notion that the constitution of self depends on knowledge are thwarted. The options that were open to Ficino and Pico are as far removed from Locke as they were from Descartes.

Instead, the idea of self-making in Locke remains restricted within the confines of the idea of the person - which is only one aspect of the self. In any case, despite Thiel's arguments, the ambiguity with which Locke himself regarded 'person' still nags in the background. Nor is it altogether clear that Locke succeeded in driving a wedge between 'person' and 'thinking substance', as I have argued above. When this point is considered, together with the uncertain status of the multiple aspects of the self that Locke generates in order to overcome difficulties that are fundamentally grounded in his unclear view of substance, the conclusion must be that Locke worked with an overall notion of the self as already given, rather than constituted through human activity.

One last point of interest to this thesis must be added. Like Descartes, Locke can be understood as holding the view that thought - reflection - can discover the existence of the self. When he claimed that we perceive our existence 'so plainly, and so certainly' from the fact that 'I think, I reason, I feel pleasure and pain', the perception he means must be that perception which occurs in reflection, when the mind,

turns its view inward upon it self, and observes its own Actions about those Ideas it has, takes from thence other Ideas, which are as capable to be Objects of its Contemplation, as any of those it received from foreign things.<sup>64</sup>

That is, the perception Locke has in mind in the passage dealing with the certainty we have of our existence is not the perception which registers impressions of external objects received through sensation, such as touching, hearing, seeing, etc. Rather, the perception with which we grasp the existence of the 'I' that thinks, feels, and so on, is a faculty - an operation of the mind. It is the 'first simple Idea of Reflection.'<sup>65</sup> As such, however, perception is not unlike thought in its structure. For this reason, it is relevant to note that thought is as intrinsic to the discovery of the existence of the self for Locke as it was for Descartes.

The many tangles in Locke's understanding of the self cannot be unravelled here. For present purposes, an overview rather than a detailed exploration is appropriate; therefore, it must be said in conclusion that Locke's introduction of the concept of identity, or unity of consciousness, which he equated with personal identity, led to a separation of this concept from the metaphysical doctrine of the identity of an immaterial substance in the Cartesian sense. Further, that separation produced different levels at which the concept of the self could be analysed. Above all, Locke's analyses had the effect of embedding even further the split Descartes had initiated - the split between the knower and the known,

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64 Locke, *op. cit.*, II: VI: 1, p. 127.

65 *ibid.*, II: IX: 1, p. 143.

between the given self, the agent directing the operations of consciousness, and those operations themselves.

### Hume's Dissolution of the Self

Of all Locke's early critics, David Hume was the one who came closest to grasping the true nature of Locke's problem. Like Locke himself, Hume recognised that the question of personal identity emerged as a consequence of problems concerning the notion of thinking substance. But he differed from Locke in his more radical attitude towards Descartes' *res cogitans*, rejecting as nonsensical what to Locke appeared as problematic. At least, that is what some commentators like Penelhum and Allison claim, and there seems no reason to dispute this view.

Hume rejects the notion of a permanent, substantial self in the light of what he says about the soul, in the section entitled 'Of the Immateriality of the Soul' in A Treatise of Human Nature. Here he attacks the notion of the soul's substantiality, asking those philosophers who debate whether the soul is a material or immaterial substance to tell us first,

What they mean by substance and inhesion? And after they have answer'd this question, 'twill then be reasonable, and not till then, to enter seriously into the dispute.<sup>66</sup>

Hume points out that this question has proved impossible to answer in regard to matter and body, and then suggests that an account of mental substance faces special difficulties of its own, because,

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66 David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978) p. 232.

As every idea is deriv'd from a precedent impression, had we any idea of the substance of our mind, we must also have an impression of it; which is very difficult, if not impossible, to be conceiv'd. For how can an impression represent a substance, otherwise than by resembling it? And how can an impression resemble a substance, since, according to this philosophy, it is not a substance, and has none of the peculiar qualities or characteristics of a substance?<sup>67</sup>

Hume is referring to those philosophers - amongst them Locke - who maintain that substance itself must be entirely different from any of its qualities, or modes. Given Hume's theory of the origin of ideas - that for every idea there must, in general, be a corresponding impression - it follows that we can have no idea of substance. That is, if impressions are of qualities, then those impressions cannot resemble substance. Since impressions of qualities cannot give impressions of substance, Hume asks what other impression could give rise to the idea of substance in our minds. He claims that there is no such impression, for what could it be like? He asks,

Is it an impression of sensation or of reflection? Is it pleasant, or painful, or indifferent? If at intervals, at what times principally does it return, and by what causes is it produc'd?<sup>68</sup>

Hume concludes that if substance is defined as 'something which may exist by itself' then every impression or idea will itself be a substance,

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67 *ibid.*, pp. 232-233.

68 *ibid.*

for every impression and idea is itself a distinct existence. Therefore, it will make no sense to say that impressions actually inhere in the substance of the mind, since one substance cannot inhere in another. He writes,

Thus neither by considering the first origin of ideas, nor by means of a definition are we able to arrive at any satisfactory notion of substance.<sup>69</sup>

Hume then considers the supposed simplicity of the soul. If the soul is an extended thing - a material substance - then it will have parts, a top and a bottom and sides. Therefore, any ideas that inhere in such a substance must themselves have a definite spatial location. However, 'an object may exist, and yet be no where', and Hume cites moral reflections as an example. From this it follows that there are perceptions which are 'incapable of any conjunction in place with matter or body',<sup>70</sup> and he concludes finally that the soul cannot be a material substance.

However, he says, there are those philosophers 'who conjoin all thought with a simple and indivisible substance'; such philosophers subscribe to the notion of the immateriality of the soul. But their position is no better. The reason for this is that some of our ideas are extended. The very idea of extension is copied from nothing other than an impression, and consequently must agree with it perfectly. To say the idea of extension agrees with any thing, is to say it is extended.<sup>71</sup> But how can something extensionless be locally conjoined with something extended?

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69 *ibid.*, p. 234.

70 *ibid.*, p. 236.

71 *ibid.*, pp. 239-240.

Is the indivisible subject, or immaterial substance, if you will, on the left or on the right hand of the perception? Is it in this particular part, or in that other? Is it in every part without being extended?<sup>72</sup>

So, the theories of the material substantiality and the immaterial substantiality of the soul both confront unresolvable difficulties as far as Hume is concerned. Yet it seems that the soul, if it is a substance, must be either a material or immaterial substance. Since both views lead to the same absurdities, we are forced to abandon the substantial theory of the soul altogether. Hume finally concludes,

To pronounce, then, the final decision upon the whole; the question concerning the substance of the soul is absolutely unintelligible: All our perceptions are not susceptible of a local union, either with what is extended or what is unextended; there being some of them of the one kind, and some of the other.<sup>73</sup>

It is against the background of this discussion that Hume deals with the self. Basically, his view is that there is no single impression from which the idea of self could be derived; hence there is no such idea. At the outset of Section VI of A Treatise of Human Nature Hume dismisses the claim made by some philosophers - and he clearly has Locke in mind - that each of us is intimately aware, through personal experience, of 'what we call our SELF; that we feel its existence and continuance in existence';

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72 ibid.

73 ibid., p. 250.

a self to which 'our several impressions and ideas are supposed to have a reference'.<sup>74</sup>

He asserts that the idea of such a self is without content, since no impression can be found, on introspection, from which it could be derived. When we reflect upon our mental life we become aware only of a succession of fleeting and distinct perceptions; we only find thoughts, feelings, wishes, etc., but not a self. We cannot have an idea of self for, Hume argues,

From what impression cou'd this idea be deriv'd? This question 'tis impossible to answer without a manifest contradiction and absurdity; and yet 'tis a question, which must necessarily be answer'd, if we wou'd have the idea of self pass for clear and intelligible. It must be some impression that gives rise to every idea. But self or person is not any one impression,...<sup>75</sup>

Hume admits that each of us does have an idea of self as one thing which remains the same thing for a lifetime. But this is a mistake, for any impression which alone could give rise to such an idea would itself have to remain constant and invariable throughout a whole life. But there is no such impression. Impressions succeed one another in rapidly changing sequences, none of which remain constant for more than a moment. Even if it were possible for one of those impressions to be of the self, it could only be so at a particular time, other such impressions would occur at

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74 *ibid.*, p. 251.

75 *ibid.*,

different times, so that the idea of the self which endures for a lifetime without interruption could not be a copy of any one impression.<sup>76</sup>

As far as our mental life is concerned, Hume argues that there is no real bond between the perceptions we perceive as we look inwards; there is no identity to justify our belief in an underlying unity and simplicity of the mind. We are mistaken in that belief - for the apparent identity of perceptions is nothing other than a mere quality, attributed to them because ideas appear unified in the imagination during reflection. The principles of this union are the relations of resemblance and causality, and it is these relations which give rise to the fiction of an abiding self.

In his analysis, Hume describes how the relation of resemblance is produced by the memory, which is defined as the faculty which creates images of past perceptions. Since an image necessarily resembles its object, the production of these memory images, and their frequent placement in the 'chain of thought', inevitably leads the imagination to confound the succession of perceptions with the continuance of an identical self. So Hume concludes,

In this particular, then, the memory not only discovers the identity, but also contributes to its production, by producing the relation of resemblance among the perceptions.<sup>77</sup>

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76 B. Stroud, *Hume*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977) p. 118.

77 Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

It is noteworthy that superficially Hume seems to agree with Locke regarding the constitutive role of memory. But, as Allison points out<sup>78</sup>, this agreement soon breaks down, for Locke actually equates the identity of a person with the continuity of his memory, whilst Hume considers the memory as the source of a fictitious belief. Their basic disagreement becomes even more obvious in Hume's analysis of the role of causal relations in the constitution of this belief. Hume suggests that,

the true idea of the human mind, is to consider it as a system of different perceptions or different existences, which are link'd together by the relation of cause and effect, and mutually produce, destroy, influence, and modify each other.<sup>79</sup>

Hume illustrates this by comparing the soul to a commonwealth, which remains identical throughout a complete change in its laws and members because the various parts stand in a causal relation to one another. From this position Hume argues,

memory does not so much produce as discover personal identity, by shewing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions.<sup>80</sup>

Locke, then, is right in that without memory we would never become aware of that causal chain which constitutes our person. But once we acquire an awareness of that relationship we can extend the same chain of causes, and thereby extend the identity of our persons, beyond the limits of memory. Moreover, Hume concludes that,

78 H. E. Allison, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

79 *ibid.*

80 *ibid.*, p. 262.

It will be incumbent on those, who affirm that memory produces entirely our personal identity, to give a reason why we can thus extend our identity beyond our memory.<sup>81</sup>

Hume agrees with the rest of Locke's critics in recognising that personal identity cannot be arbitrarily confined within the limits of memory. However, as Allison points out, since Hume was concerned with delineating the psychological grounds for a belief, rather than with defining the nature of personality and the limits of moral responsibility, he really ignores the main point of Locke's analysis.<sup>82</sup>

Concerning the substantiality of the self, Hume does not engage - other than dismissively - with Locke's struggles. Rejecting the issue as unintelligible, Hume concludes that each of us is,

nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.<sup>83</sup>

Those are the only data present to 'inner sense' or reflection when we look within. And so,

The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, repass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity.<sup>84</sup>

81 ibid.

82 ibid., p. 115.

83 Hume, op. cit., p. 252.

84 ibid., p. 253.

It is quite clear from passages such as these that Hume holds that the entities to which identity is ascribed are perceptions. As far as he is concerned, there is no evidence for the existence of something other than those perceptions - like immaterial substance - in which those perceptions inhere. But this has an unwelcome consequence, for when we ascribe identity we do intend to ascribe it to more than the perceptions themselves. As Penelhum points out, it would require much more than negative arguments to persuade us that when we speak of ourselves as identical through time, we are ascribing identity to the perceptions we have at different times. Such an ascription would be contrary to the facts.<sup>85</sup>

Hume himself, in spite of what he says in the foregoing, does suggest that we are prone to succumb to theories of substance because we are lulled, by the similarity of the experience of certain types of objects, into thinking of a related series as one identical object. This is a mistake, but one which we cannot rid ourselves of, and which we consolidate by the invention of 'some new and unintelligible principle' such as soul, self, or substance.<sup>86</sup>

So, as Penelhum concludes, for Hume any philosophical attempt to justify our belief in the identity of the mind - by inventing a substance or self which can provide the required unity - must be regarded as nothing more than an understandable consequence of a realisation of its absence. Nevertheless, such attempts are either unintelligible, or they are not

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85 T. Penelhum, Hume, (Macmillan Press, London, 1975) p. 77.

86 Hume, op. cit., pp. 253-254.

based on the evidence of introspection; so our belief is false, and can be accounted for as the result of a confused manner of apprehending and reflecting on the perceptions that we have.<sup>87</sup>

But whilst Hume rejects the notion of the substantiality of the self on the grounds of unintelligibility, it must be pointed out that he took that notion seriously enough to 'look' for that substance. In other words, if the self is a substance, then it must be something which can be observed. It is at this level that Hume encounters difficulties, for, on 'looking into' what he calls his self, he cannot find it.

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 without the perception.<sup>88</sup>

The mind is a bundle of perceptions. This is one image which runs throughout the Treatise. The other, as already mentioned, is of a theatre, where the mind appears as spectator to the scenes presented to it. But Hume immediately warns us, 'The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind'.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, this kind of imagery involving 'I' as spectator occurs so frequently in the Treatise that it needs to be taken seriously,

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87 Penelhum, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

88 Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

89 *ibid.*,

since it is often essential to the intelligibility of Hume's arguments, as Fogelin points out.<sup>90</sup>

Fogelin believes that when one looks back at the *Treatise* from a Kantian perspective, it becomes clear that Hume needs the concept of a unified conscious self, but he also agrees that Hume could not have supplied it given his own principles. Whilst Hume should have recognised the need for a transcendental judging self, there is no evidence from the text that he was aware of this point. I believe this is right, for, as Fogelin points out, Hume has no qualms about treating fundamental ideas as fictions, but it seems that his own theories demand a self that genuinely, and not just apparently, endures over time.<sup>91</sup>

Hume's constant underlying assumption that it is possible to look within, and observe the operations of the mind, suggests the presence of some kind of unified consciousness capable of carrying out this kind of observation. His efforts to show the implausibility of understanding the self in Cartesian/Lockean terms cannot quite obscure the fact that he himself still implicitly works within a framework which requires that the self be treated as a given object. The collapse of the idea that the self is a substance - already foreshadowed by Locke - is arguably completed by Hume. Yet the effect of this collapse was, for a long time, only minimal. The framework of related ideas - of the self as a given object, of the possibility of observing that object in introspection - continued to be

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90 R. J. Fogelin, Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1985) p. 101.

91 Fogelin, op. cit., p. 101.

preserved in the powerfully convincing vision of a self divided by a gulf into knower and known.

This image, emerging in Locke, became ingrained in Hume, who unquestioningly evoked it in his metaphor of the mind as a spectator in a theatre, and in his assumption that it is possible to scrutinise inner mental processes. Even Kant who, like Hume, rejected the substantiality of the self, nevertheless became immersed in the details of articulating that vision. The notion of self as object, once it had taken hold, proved far more difficult to overcome than the idea that self is a substance. Hegel struggled with it and so did Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

At the same time, the conviction that the self can be observed in inward concentration stimulated the idea of thought as self-reflection. Descartes, Locke and Hume, had all given varying accounts of what they find when they turn inwards to 'look within'; yet all three regarded some form of introspection as the most appropriate means available for reaching the self. Whilst neither Descartes, Locke nor Hume considered introspection itself in any detail, the result of retaining the view that self is some kind of object generated the idea that thought can reflect that object somewhat like a mirror.

Such an idea grew in the work of Leibniz and Kant. In this context, the role of introspection was gradually widened into a developing conception of self-reflection. But not without the cost of certain restrictions. By continuing to assume implicitly that self is like an object, these thinkers were limited in how they could regard the function of thought in its relation to the self. Thought could only reflect that

object, or reflect upon the thoughts about that object. Under these conditions, a conception of thought such as that expressed at the beginning of this chapter, could not even surface; thought, as self-reflection, remained confined to mirroring ever more fully what was believed to be already there.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE SELF AS OBJECT OF REFLECTION

It seems that when I think of myself thinking and already know, between the thoughts themselves, what I think of my thoughts, and a little later marvel at this triplication of reflection, then I turn upon myself wondering and do not know how to admire this admiration.<sup>1</sup>

In words like these Leibniz more than once expressed his appreciation of what he took to be the intricacies of reflection. Before him, Descartes had remained largely noncommittal about the structure of reflection. Even though he had introduced a link between it and the self, Descartes had merely considered reflection to be the awareness of having a thought while that thought is present in the mind. In his conversation with Burman, Descartes says,

I am now aware and have the thought that I am talking and that I am eating; and both these thoughts occur at the same time.<sup>2</sup>

But Burman is not convinced. To be aware, he says, is itself a thought. In order to have the thought that you are aware, it is necessary to move from the thought you are having to another thought, which means leaving

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1 Leibniz, 'Selections from the Paris Notes 1676', in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters, trans. & ed. by Leroy E. Loemker, (D. Reidel Publishing Co., Dordrecht, Holland, 1969) p. 161.

2 Descartes' Conversation with Burman, trans. by J. Cottingham, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1976) cited hereafter as CB 6, 15-20, p. 6.

behind that original thought; so therefore you cannot be aware that you are thinking, only that you were thinking.<sup>3</sup>

In reply, Descartes affirms that to be aware is both to think and to reflect on one's thought. This reflection can occur while the previous thought is still there because the soul is able to think of more than one thing at the same time. The soul can continue with a particular thought it has, since it possesses the power to reflect on its thoughts as often as it likes.<sup>4</sup> He says,

It is correct that to be aware is both to think and to reflect on one's thought. But it is false that this reflection cannot occur while the previous thought is still there.<sup>5</sup>

Since Descartes goes on to say that everything in the mind qua thinking thing is a thought, the 'reflection' here has to be a cogitatio which is somehow either part of the original thought, or present alongside it.

How exactly this was to be understood had clearly troubled Hobbes, who had earlier pointed out that,

...I do not infer that I am thinking by means of another thought. For although someone may think that he was thinking (for this thought is simply an act of remembering), it is quite impossible for him to think that he is thinking, or to know that he is knowing. For then an infinite chain of questions would arise: "How do you know that you know that you know...?"<sup>6</sup>

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3 ibid., CB 7, p. 7.

4 ibid.

5 ibid.

6 Descartes, Third Set of Objections, AT VII, 173, in CSM, Vol. II, p. 123.

On that occasion, Descartes had replied as follows:

It is irrelevant for the philosopher to say that one thought cannot be the subject of another thought. For who, apart from him, ever supposed that it could be?<sup>7</sup>

Yet both Burman and Hobbes raised different and relevant problems, which continue to linger despite Descartes' cavalier attempts at dismissing them.

Nevertheless, it seems that Descartes did remain sensitive to Hobbes' objection, which occurs in the context of Hobbes' argument that a thinking thing is corporeal. In a later discussion with Bourdin, when the superiority of a thinking substance over matter is at stake, the nature of reflection again potentially becomes an issue. But this time Descartes refuses to be drawn out, avoiding any discussion by simply denying that reflection has special significance in this context. In reply to Bourdin he says that a 'reflexive act' is not required in order for a thinking substance to be superior to matter, because,

The initial thought by means of which we become aware of something does not differ from the second thought by means of which we become aware that we were aware of it, any more than this second thought differs from the third thought by means of which we become aware that we were aware that we were aware. And if it is conceded that a corporeal thing has the first kind of

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7 *ibid.*, AT VII, 175, in CSM, Vol. II, p. 124.

thought, then there is not the slightest reason to deny that it can have the second.<sup>8</sup>

This passage is so clearly referring to the possibility of an infinite regress that it is difficult not to believe that Descartes is thinking of Hobbes. Not that there is any overt acknowledgement of Hobbes. Descartes merely says that to establish the superiority of a thinking substance all that is required is the recognition that incorporeal things think, and corporeal things do not; to further require that it be an essential feature that incorporeal things reflect on their thinking, whilst corporeal things do not, as Bourdin wants to insist, 'would hinder our understanding of the real distinction between the human mind and the body.'<sup>9</sup>

In this exchange with Bourdin, reflection emerges as essentially no different from, or more special than, any other kind of thinking. However, the very dismissiveness of Descartes' attitude on this occasion lends itself to the suspicion that he is becoming aware that his position is not as straightforward as he would like to think.

These situations - in which Descartes deals rather cursorily with reasonable objections - develop because, as Cottingham points out, it is essential for Descartes that the mind be able to focus on the premisses that prove God's existence all at once. It is not sufficient to regard them in turn; they must all be attended to together, because the certainty

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8 Descartes, Seventh Set of Objections, AT VII, 559, in CSM, Vol. II, p. 382.

9 ibid.

and guarantee of truth lasts only as long as the attention.<sup>10</sup> Whilst Descartes is happy to concede that we cannot think of a large number of things at the same time, it remains crucial for him that the mind be able to attend to several thoughts at once. Amongst these thoughts is the awareness of thinking, since for Descartes that awareness is the same as thinking - a view that fits in with his idea of the mind as a simple substance, so transparent to itself that there can be nothing in the mind of which it is not aware. Yet this is just what Hobbes challenges. For Hobbes, I cannot infer that I am thinking by means of another thought, on the grounds that to do so involves questions leading to an infinite regress. Later, Burman confronts Descartes with the denial that thoughts occur together; rather, says Burman, the mind passes from one thought to another, and so to be aware of having a thought is already to have passed beyond that thought.

At the heart of these disputes lie differing conceptions of awareness, reflection and thinking. Descartes wants to insist that to be aware is itself a thought, and that to think, and to reflect on that thought, occurs simultaneously. But for someone like Hobbes, the awareness by which I infer that I am thinking cannot itself be a thought; rather, that inference is based on perception, which is simply the act of looking inwards. Nor does Hobbes conceive of thoughts as occurring simultaneously; like Burman, he believes that thoughts follow one another in a sequence in time, instead of occurring at the same time. But given that Descartes has his own reasons for maintaining that thinking, and reflecting upon that thinking, occur at the same time, he is tied to a self-imposed restriction,

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10 Cottingham, Commentary in Descartes' Conversation with Burman, op. cit., p. 58.

and this prevents him from entering deeply into discussions about the structure of reflection. It also prevents him from dealing with the nature of reflection in anything like the manner of Leibniz.

### **Leibniz - and the Reflection which Re-constructs Self.**

Leibniz could avail himself of a framework for exploring reflection not accessible to Descartes, even though Descartes himself provided its very means. For Descartes, a thinking thing remained an essential unity, not plagued by any serious problems emerging from a separation between an inward observer and the activity of consciousness. But before long, Locke had indirectly shown that the effort to understand Descartes' conception of a thinking substance inevitably led to articulating it in terms of different aspects of the self. Alongside that development, an acceptance of a distinction between an observer - who is discrete from but scrutinises the operations of consciousness - and those operations themselves, began to grow steadily. This distinction shaped the understanding of reflection, but above all, it was a distinction which became - as a result of the analyses of the self by Leibniz and Kant - an issue in itself, important enough to trouble Fichte and Hegel later. (Since that distinction will play a significant part in further discussions in the next few chapters, it will be convenient to refer to it from now on as the distinction between the observer and the thoughts observed.)

The point being made here is that the nature of reflection came under consideration once the invention of the self as an entity had taken hold, for then it was simply assumed that - as an entity - the self could be the object of reflection. In a context shaped not only by a conception of the self as a thinking thing, but also by the recognition of many aspects of

that thing, the dichotomy between that thing and thinking emerged in sharp relief. Under such conditions, the distinction between an observer and the thoughts observed became ever more ingrained as part of the accepted approach for exploring the self, and with it rose the conviction that the only tool for distinguishing the many diverse facets of the self was inward reflection - an awareness in which thoughts could be captured as in a mirror.

So, the deepening dichotomy between the observer and the thoughts observed reinforced confidence in the revelations of reflection - that most appropriate means for carving up the self into various conceptual constructs. There could be no self-analysis, unless it was possible to turn attention inwards in contemplation, and to capture in reflection the internal features making up the self. It was against this background that Leibniz could say 'attention is reflection'.<sup>11</sup> To many, including Leibniz, it became very clear that probing analyses of the mind, soul, consciousness and ego, rested on the fact that, in Leibniz's words,

In our mind there is a perception or sense of itself as of a certain specific thing;...As often as we will, we recognise that we perceive our thoughts.<sup>12</sup>

This ability had already been recognised by Descartes, and more or less by others before him, but now it became a phenomenon worthy of serious scrutiny. Leibniz, for one, demonstrated this new development very well, for the rise to prominence of reflection as an issue becomes immediately apparent when the differences in the approaches of Locke and Leibniz are

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11 Leibniz, 'A fragment on Dreams', in Loemker, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

12 Leibniz, 'The Paris Notes', in Loemker, *ibid.*, p. 162.

noted. Locke, intent on working out the various levels of the self, continued to see reflection merely as that capacity of the mind to perceive its own mental processes. But Leibniz was able to develop a much fuller conception of reflection, because he already accepted the distinctions made by Locke.

As Allison points out,<sup>13</sup> the most important treatment of Locke's distinctions between self, person, and consciousness is to be found in Leibniz's New Essays Concerning Human Understanding. In this book, Leibniz closely follows Locke's formulations, even though the various distinctions Leibniz makes between the self, the appearance of self, consciousness (consciosité), and between real and apparent identity rest on categories already present in Leibniz's own metaphysics. Since those categories were only implicit in his earlier writings, before the advent of the New Essays, it seems fair to assume, as Allison does,<sup>14</sup> that they were developed purposely in response to the tensions generated by Locke's distinctions between substance, the man, and the person, which Leibniz attempted to resolve.

On the whole, Leibniz has a very different point of view from that of Locke, but they do share a common Cartesian heritage; just as 'I' is an immaterial substance for Locke, so also Leibniz regards the rational soul as a simple, indestructible substance. Further, both Locke and Leibniz struggle with the implications of the Cogito. Against that background,

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13 H. E. Allison, 'Locke's Theory of Personal Identity', in Locke on Human Understanding, ed. I. C. Tipton, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977) p. 115.

14 ibid.

both develop the conviction that the problem of the nature and identity of the self must be analysed on several levels.

But when it comes to specific issues, like that of personal identity, the differences begin to emerge. In an attempt to overcome the problems bequeathed by Locke, Leibniz makes use of even more distinctions than Locke himself. For instance, Locke, as Leibniz sees it, holds that personal identity can be preserved even if there is no real or substantial identity. Leibniz disagrees with this, and introduces the term 'apparent identity',<sup>15</sup> arguing that personal identity must be grounded in some sort of real or physical identity. Yet Leibniz does concede the possibility of personal (apparent) identity without a corresponding real or physical identity, though he believes it would take a miracle to produce such a state.<sup>16</sup> Since Locke never actually claimed that personal identity does in fact exist without substantial identity, only that it is necessary to separate the two conceptions, the disagreement between them on this issue does not appear to be very serious.

Nevertheless, that disagreement provides the context in which Leibniz becomes so involved in making ever finer analyses that passages like the following become common,

As regards 'self', it will be as well to distinguish it from the appearance of self and from consciousness. The 'self' makes real

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15 Leibniz, New Essays on Human Understanding, trans. & ed. by P. Remnant and J. Bennett, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982) Book II, ch.xxvii, section 9, 236.

16 ibid.

physical identity, and the appearance of self, when accompanied by truth, adds to it personal identity.<sup>17</sup>

This is not the place to try to fit together the meaning of all these terms; it is enough to note that by using them Leibniz adds yet further dimensions to the by-now multiple levels of the self.

For that reason, Leibniz presents a good example of all that was involved in the transition away from the relatively simple Cartesian conception of the self as thinking substance. In several discussions on individual substance, Leibniz shows how thoroughly Cartesian he is, yet at the same time his own inclination towards a wider vision of the self is revealed in the very generality of his view on substance. In one discussion he says that ‘in order to judge the concept of an individual substance, it is well to consult the concept which I have of myself.’<sup>18</sup> But this is not easy, for the concept I have of myself and of all other individual substances is infinitely more inclusive and difficult to grasp than, say, the concept of a sphere. It is not hard to judge which features are, or are not, included in the concept of a sphere in general; but it is much more difficult to judge with certainty whether, for instance, the journey I intend to undertake is included in the concept of myself. But, although experience cannot let me sense everything that is included in my individual concept, I can know, through a general consideration of the individual concept that ‘everything which pertains to me is included in it’.<sup>19</sup> In another instance, Leibniz holds that in considering the thought

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17 *ibid.*, 237

18 Leibniz, ‘Correspondence with Arnauld 1686-87’, in Loemker, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

19 *ibid.*

of myself, I may be led to the recognition of a difference between thinking of, for example, a colour, and realising that I think of it. When I further 'conceive' that there are other beings who have the right to say 'I', I 'conceive what is called substance in general.'<sup>20</sup>

These discussions do not yield a very clear account of what Leibniz means by substance, and this is typical of his writings as a whole. There is no real evidence of a fully developed view; instead, Leibniz uses terms like materia, prima, and corpus ambiguously. As Loemker suggests, it seems that Leibniz ascribed a matter to the soul itself, and a soul to living and conscious bodies only.<sup>21</sup> With respect to the self as substance, Leibniz says,

Every single self-state [Selbststand], such as I or you, is a unified, indivisible, indestructible thing and does not consist of three parts: soul, spirit and body. Yet there is a diversity of things which belong directly to the one being and are, as it were, embodied in it.

Although every single self-state is without parts, yet other things are impressed in it without thereby taking up any space in it. In each and every being there is everything - but with a certain degree of clearness.<sup>22</sup>

Such a belief in the diversity within unity of the self-state allows room for Leibniz to include within it the notion that the soul is a substance with modes - but, Loemker points out, substance only in the sense

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20 Leibniz, 'Letter to Varignon', in Loemker, *ibid.*, p. 549.

21 Loemker, *ibid.*, p. 40.

22 Leibniz, 'On the True Theologia Mystica', in Loemker, *ibid.*, p. 368.

that the soul's individual laws are the substantial sources of the force generating the existing series and their changes which make up each individual. For Leibniz the soul is a complex and dynamic process, fulfilling itself as a complete idea rooted in the universal harmony by its continuous relationship to its environment and to its own subsequent and preceding states. The soul is also the actual sum of these states, or series of acts, combined by their interdependence into one subject.

It follows that there are many levels in the human soul throughout its temporal and spatial dimensions. The deepest is the law of the individual series - so complex that it can be abstracted into many separate laws - and constituting the source of the innate ideas or logical principles according to which experience is ordered. The next level consists of the impulsions experienced as a basic restlessness, which give rise to the appetites and desires; this is also the level of the petites perceptions, which are innumerable in every conscious perception.<sup>23</sup> Drawing upon the mathematical analogy, Leibniz sees each perception as the expression of a plurality of relations in a simple unity of content. Every perception is related meaningfully to the preceding and succeeding events within the mind by the law of the individual. Further, each perception has an internal meaning related to the purposes of the individual and an external meaning representative of the universe.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the highest level of the soul is reflection, or the internal sense, penetrating into the soul itself in varying degrees, and illuminating its contents, its actions, and partially, its innate law, whilst an infinity of perceptions and laws remain dark and

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23 Loemker, ibid., p. 38.

24 ibid., p. 41.

beyond its scrutiny. It is this reflective power which supports memory and reasoning.<sup>25</sup>

In thinking beings, the soul is the source from which the ego is constituted, but the ego is not substantial in the sense of the real self. Rather, as a constituted entity, the ego is substantial only in the sense that it shares in all the aspects of the one subject, including the substantial. At the same time, whilst Leibniz drives a wedge between the ego and thinking substance, the separation between the observer and the thoughts observed becomes conspicuously entrenched, and with it, the importance of reflection. For Leibniz, reflection is much more than the inward scanning of the operations of the mind; rather, reflection becomes the highest level of the soul, able not only to penetrate its otherwise inscrutable layers - and thereby discover the inner law of the individual - but reflection also becomes the power which supports memory and reasoning.

At its most elementary level, the nature of reflection unfolds in the distinction Leibniz makes between perceptions and apperceptions, a difference which emerges most clearly in his writings after 1700. The distinction first appears in the New Essays, when Theophilus says,

I would prefer to distinguish between perception and being aware. For instance, a perception of light or colour of which we are aware is made up of many minute perceptions of which we are unaware.<sup>26</sup>

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25 ibid., p. 38.

26 Leibniz, New Essays on Human Understanding, P. Remnant and J. Bennett, op. cit., II, 9, 4.

Similarly, in an earlier translation of the New Essays which gives a more precise discussion of perception and apperception in the chapter 'Of the Modes of Thinking', Leibniz says,

I have shown that we always have an infinite number of little perceptions, without being conscious of them. We are never without perceptions, but we are necessarily often without apperceptions, viz.: when there are no distinct perceptions.<sup>27</sup>

For Leibniz, the ego is consciousness aware of its own perceptions in apperceptions (reflection), but such self-consciousness is intermittent and not a part of every mental act. In 'The Principles of Nature and of Grace, based on Reason', he explains that apperception is the experience of our own mental processes in reflection or internal sense.<sup>28</sup> But the 'I' that experiences those processes, the 'I' capable of apperception, is only implicitly present. The activities of consciousness itself are predominant in these passages, and the 'I' involved is little more than a formal principle. Not that this is without reason, as Leibniz explains in the correspondence with Arnauld of 1686-87. There he says,

To understand what this I is, it is not enough that I sense myself as a substance that thinks; I must also distinctly conceive that which distinguishes me from all other possible spirits. But of this I have only a confused experience.<sup>29</sup>

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27 Leibniz, New Essays Concerning Human Understanding, trans. by A. G. Langley, 3rd ed., (The Open Court Publishing Co., Illinois, 1949) p. 166.

28 In Loemker, *op. cit.*, p. 637.

29 Leibniz, in Loemker, *ibid.*, p. 334.

As Loemker adds in a footnote, the real self is therefore more than the object of reflection or self-awareness; self-knowledge involves the construction, as far as this is possible, of the law of the individual.<sup>30</sup> In the law of every individual there is expressed a distinctive point of view or perspective, not only of space and time in sense perception, but of Anlage or temperament in the deepest affective and appetitive levels of the soul. The mind, made up of many motor-affective-perceptive strands, corresponds to the various functions of the body, and out of the interactions between the two the dominant purposes of the individual arise in conformity to his individual law.<sup>31</sup>

Self-knowledge, then, is not so much an acknowledgement of myself as substance, but more an attending to that which underlies the changing series that makes me; in discovering the individual law shaping the series constituting me, it becomes possible for me to conceive how I differ from others. This is a dynamic process involving reflection, for reflection, as the highest level of the soul, is the source of the felt unity of consciousness. But reflection must not be understood as self-awareness in the sense of the awareness of an ego, actor, or self at every moment of experience. Rather, the experience of self grows gradually, and is often partial and confused. Leibniz always associates reflection with a kind of momentary memory and attention, in which the immediately past state is carried over into the present. Nevertheless, reflection is also supported by the capacity for analysis and synthesis, and so it can extend beyond the awareness of immediate but confused states of mind to an awareness of the mind's processes, and eventually to its structure or law. To know one's

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30 Loemker, *ibid.*, p. 349.

31 Loemker, *ibid.*, p. 39.

self is to perceive clearly the real unity from which the constantly changing states emerge, and this is possible only when reflection discovers the permanent law of the individual series. The ego, implicit in the acts and processes of the mind, and the source of the most profound metaphysical insights, is distinctly perceived only at an advanced level of reflection.<sup>32</sup>

Within this schema, there is no attachment to a Cartesian notion of 'I' as thinking substance. The sheer fluidity of the changing self-state ensures an intermittent rather than a constant awareness of the unity of consciousness, so that the most fitting characterisation of 'I' becomes that of a purely formal principle and not that of Descartes' immediately accessible entity. This is most noticeable in Leibniz's approach to his own distinction between perception and apperception, in that his discussions of it are generally slanted in such a way as to exclude any mention of the ego. Rather, we are left to assume that the 'I' is somehow involved in apperception, without being able to attribute anything at all to that 'I'.

The significance Leibniz attaches to reflection is evident from his conviction that reflection, accompanying all consciousness beyond the most confused qualities of feeling, makes human intelligence possible and determines the threshold between consciousness and the unconscious. Without reflection it would not be possible to discover necessary and universal truths, nor - more importantly for present purposes - would it be possible to construct, insofar as this is possible, the law of the individual. It is in this respect that Leibniz comes close to holding that

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32 Loemker, *ibid.*, p. 39.

the self emerges through reflection; however, although reflection is an essential factor in constructing the law of the individual, it remains the case that Leibniz - like Descartes - fundamentally regards reflection as revealing what is already there. Yet unlike Descartes, Leibniz explicitly links reflection with the self for the first time, whilst the heightened role he gives to reflection depends crucially on the polarity between the observer and the thoughts observed. Without that polarity, reflection in the way Leibniz envisages it would not be possible.

Nevertheless, he does present a rather paradoxical outcome. Given the flexibility of Leibniz's understanding of substance, it was at least plausible that the separation between the observer and the thoughts observed would collapse alongside the disintegration of the Cartesian notion of a thinking substance. After all, that separation had come into focus so prominently just because Descartes had said that 'I' is a substance, with modes like thinking, doubting, willing, imagining, perceiving, and so on. But if the self is thought to be a fluid self-state - a perpetual process - then it becomes harder to conceive of that self-state in the static terms of an observer analysing the dissected elements of the self, because that observer and that self are both part of the same changing process. So it would not have been inconsistent for Leibniz to abandon the polarity between the observer and the thoughts observed. But the very opposite happens, and that is because even in Leibniz the notion of the self as an entity persists. Underlying the constantly changing states, there is a real unity. Whilst it may not be enough to 'sense myself as a substance that thinks', the idea that 'I am a unified, indivisible, indestructible thing' is accepted without question.

So, whilst the concept of the self as substance is no longer dominant in Leibniz, the practice of an observer who considers the internal structure of the self, becomes even more significant. As more dimensions of the human self-state are acknowledged, the means for defining those dimensions rests increasingly on exercising inward contemplation. For that very reason, the polarity between the observer and the thoughts observed, as well as the concept of self-reflection shaped within that context could survive even as the idea of the self as substance collapsed - at least, this is the case in Leibniz, and, in a very different way, in Kant.

#### **Kant - and the Role of Introspection.**

Kant produces vigorous arguments against the idea of a substantial self; yet at the same time the distinction between an observer and the thoughts observed becomes enshrined in concepts like the transcendental unity of apperception, the 'I think', which, as Kant says, 'must be capable of accompanying all other representations'.<sup>33</sup> Here the unity of the 'I think' is not only regarded as a purely formal principle, which must be distinguished from the notion of personal or substantial identity in conformity with Leibniz, but it is totally divorced from all metaphysical conceptions. Even so, whilst Kant implicitly continues the development of Leibniz's position, his approach to reflection is very different.

Reflection, says Kant,

does not concern itself with objects themselves with a view to deriving concepts from them directly, but is that state of mind in which we first set ourselves to discover the subjective

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33 I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith, (Macmillan Press, London, 1980) B132, p. 153.

conditions under which alone we are able to arrive at concepts.<sup>34</sup>

Reflection performs this function through its awareness of certain relations in which concepts can stand to one another, such relations are those of identity and difference: of agreement and opposition: of the inner and outer: and of the determinable and the determination. For example, before we construct any objective judgement, we compare concepts to find in them identity (of many representations under one concept) with a view to universal judgements, difference with a view to particular judgements, agreement with a view to affirmative judgements, opposition with a view to negative judgements, etc. Kant calls this logical reflection; it is a mere act of comparison, in which no account is taken of the faculty of knowledge to which the given representations belong.<sup>35</sup>

However, at times the content of these concepts may be in question, and not their logical form. That is, the question may arise whether things are themselves identical or different etc. Since things can have a twofold relation to our faculty of knowledge - to the understanding and to sensibility - it is by means of transcendental reflection that we determine where they belong.<sup>36</sup> Transcendental reflection therefore deals with the objects themselves; it is the ground for the objective comparison of representations with each other, in the light of a full regard for the cognitive faculty to which they belong.<sup>37</sup>

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34 ibid., B316, p. 276.

35 ibid., B318, p. 278.

36 ibid., B317-318, p. 277.

37 ibid., A263, p. 278.

What Kant means is perhaps best illustrated by his own example of how two drops of water are apprehended differently by the understanding and by sensibility. If an object is presented to us on several occasions but always with the same inner determinations (of quality and quantity), then if it is taken as an object of pure understanding, it is always one and the same; only one thing, not many. But if that object is taken to be as it appears through the senses, then we are not concerned to compare concepts; even if there is no difference whatever in the concept of that object, difference in spatial position at one and the same time is an adequate ground for the numerical difference of the objects. So, in the case of two drops of water we have only one concept, abstracted from the same inner determinations shared by both drops, but the mere fact that the two drops of water have been intuited simultaneously in different spatial positions is sufficient justification for holding them to be numerically different.<sup>38</sup> That we can determine this at all is due to an act of transcendental reflection.

Kant uses this view of reflection to emphasise that our knowledge of objects is constituted both by the pure understanding and by sensibility. In that respect he differs from Leibniz. In fact, in the chapter on reflection in the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant takes the opportunity to give a detailed account of his disagreement with Leibniz on this issue. In short, Leibniz, as Kant sees it, did not trust the evidence of the senses, and so he intellectualised all appearances as concepts of the

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38 ibid., A263-64, B320, p. 278.

understanding, just as Locke, with his faith in sensory perception, sensualised the concepts of the understanding.<sup>39</sup> According to Kant,

Instead of seeking in understanding and sensibility two sources of representations, which, while quite different, can supply objectively valid judgements of things only in conjunction with each other, each of these great men holds to one only of the two, viewing it as an immediate relation to things in themselves. The other faculty is then regarded as serving only to confuse or to order the representations which this selected faculty yields.<sup>40</sup>

Leibniz - maintains Kant - through his misunderstanding of the true nature of reflection, was misled into making just such mistakes. He created a 'suppositious system of intellectual knowledge, which undertook to determine its objects without any assistance from the senses'.<sup>41</sup>

It takes only a casual acquaintance with Kant's view of reflection to see how utterly removed it is from any kind of self-awareness in the sense meant by Leibniz. In Kant, reflection remains confined to the concepts of the understanding, of which it is an integral aspect, functioning as that which imposes unity on appearances. But whilst these concepts alone can give us knowledge of an object of experience, it nevertheless remains the function of the concepts of the understanding to enable us to understand only. Reflection, restricted to these concepts, plays no part in the concepts of reason, which enable us to conceive the ideas of the soul, the world and God. Kant says quite emphatically,

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39 ibid., A271/B327, p. 283.

40 ibid.

41 ibid., A280/B336, pp. 288-89.

Whatever we may have to decide as to the possibility of the concepts derived from pure reason, it is at least true that they are not to be obtained by mere reflection but only by inference.<sup>42</sup>

As a consequence, reflection - intrinsic to the Leibnizean concept of the soul - becomes disconnected from the idea of the soul in Kant. By denying that reflection has a constitutive function in generating the concepts of reason - the transcendental ideas - Kant rejects the importance given to reflection by Leibniz.

This point requires some elaboration. The three transcendental ideas - the soul, the world, and God - 'are not to be obtained by mere reflection, but only by inference'. In saying this, Kant means to draw a distinction between the concepts of the understanding and those of reason. The concepts of the understanding, through which knowledge of objects is possible, provide the material required for making the inferences that lead to the concepts of reason. The concepts of the understanding constitute the intellectual form of all experience; their application to experience must therefore always be possible. But the concepts of reason cannot be confined within experience, since they concern a knowledge of which any empirical knowledge - perhaps even the whole of possible experience or of its empirical synthesis - is only a part. Such a concept is essentially a totalising concept, in that no actual experience has ever been adequate to it, yet to it every actual experience belongs. So, whilst the concepts of the understanding provide the material for making inferences, a concept of reason is one to which all inferences lead.<sup>43</sup> This means that there is a

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42 *ibid.*, A310, p. 308.

43 *ibid.*, A310-11, B367-8, pp. 308-309.

distinct difference between the two kinds of concepts, and, by confining the role of reflection solely to the concepts of the understanding, whilst holding firmly that the soul is a concept of reason, Kant ensures a separation between the idea of the soul and reflection.

Given that the soul is a concept of reason, and not a concept of the understanding, the dimensions of the soul cannot be discovered through reflection, as Leibniz thought. Kant stresses that if there were to be the least empirical element in my thought, or any special perception of my inner state that intermingled with the grounds of knowledge, then the doctrine of the soul would no longer be purely rational but empirical. In that case, the soul would be a concept of the understanding, and there would be a relation between it and reflection. But Kant resists this possibility. Anticipating those who might object that a doctrine of the soul can never be purely rational because it is always based to some extent on empirical principle, Kant insists that the doctrine of the soul is built on the single proposition 'I think', a bare representation with no empirical content at all.

Whilst the 'I think' is nothing more than a bare representation, which makes transcendental concepts like that of the soul possible, the 'I think' also facilitates the emergence of the concept of substance, because what is asserted in that concept is 'I think substance, cause, etc.' In discussing the judgement 'I think', Kant deliberately uses what sounds like a very Cartesian locution, but this is only in order to point up the differences between himself and Descartes. Unlike Descartes, for whom 'I think' became the very paradigm of indubitable knowledge, Kant regards the 'I think' as nothing more than a formal principle. To regard the 'I think' as a mental

substance, as Descartes had done, is to make a grave mistake, according to Kant, a mistake which occurs because we are able to say, 'I think substance, cause, etc.' Since we are able to do this, 'I' as a thinking being comes to be thought of as a given thing, represented through the category of substance.

In the First Paralogism, Kant develops the position he is taking against the concept of a mental substance by means of the following arguments. He begins by describing the common view, namely:- I can say of anything that it is a substance for I can make a distinction between a thing and its predicates and determinations. In our thinking, however, 'I' is the subject, in which thoughts inhere only as determinations whilst 'I' cannot be employed as the determination of another thing. Therefore, everyone must necessarily regard himself as a substance, and thought as a determination of his state. But, Kant then asks, what use can be made of this concept of substance? It is not possible to deduce from it that I, as a thinking being, persist for myself, without coming into being and perishing. Yet this is the only use to which this concept can be put.<sup>44</sup>

Since these properties cannot be deduced from the pure category of substance, perhaps an appeal to the idea of permanence, resulting from an object given in experience as permanent, provides an answer. Kant allows that to such an object the concept of substance can be applied in a way which is empirically useful. But he then objects, as Hume had done, that with respect to 'I', such experience is lacking; rather, all we have is an inference that all thought relates to a common subject - the 'I'. We can have no sure observation to demonstrate the permanence of 'I'. The 'I' is

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44 *ibid.*, A349, p. 333.

in all thoughts; but in this representation there is no trace of intuition, distinguishing 'I' from other objects of intuition. So, although we can perceive that 'I' is invariably present in all thought, we cannot see it as an abiding and continuing intuition wherein thoughts give way to one another.<sup>45</sup> This means that we cannot have knowledge of such a subject. Kant says,

Consciousness is, indeed, that which alone makes all representations to be thoughts, and in it, therefore, as the transcendental subject, all our perceptions must be found; but beyond this logical meaning of the 'I', we have no knowledge of the subject in itself, which as substratum underlies this 'I', as it does all thoughts. The proposition, 'The soul is substance', may, however, quite well be allowed to stand, if only it be recognised that this concept [of the soul as substance] does not carry us a single step further.<sup>46</sup>

There can be no doubt that Kant vigorously rejects the Cartesian view of mental substance. His position in this respect is much more clearly stated than that of Leibniz.

Yet, as in the case of Leibniz, the rejection of the ego as substance does nothing to prevent the separation between the observer and the thoughts observed from taking an even firmer hold. Throughout the whole of the Critique of Pure Reason Kant attempts to maintain a fundamental distinction between the transcendental idea of the soul, and the empirical data or experience - which 'determines me more specifically and in concreto'. At least, this is one of Kant's explicit projects. In this

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45 ibid., A350, p. 334.

46 ibid.

schema, the 'I think' becomes a pivotal point between this empirical data and the concept of the soul. Since the soul is a transcendental idea, since reflection is not a feature of these concepts of reason, and since reflection has a different meaning for Kant from what it had for Leibniz, the dichotomy between an observer and the thoughts observed has no connection with the idea of the soul. In this respect, Kant differs from Leibniz, for whom reflection was the highest level of the soul, and the source maintaining the separation between the observer from the thoughts observed.

Instead, this dichotomy in Kant rests on the distinction between the bare 'I think' and the experiential data sometimes referred to by Kant as 'empirical consciousness'. To support this point, it is necessary to firstly examine what Kant means by empirical consciousness. He begins his account of how empirical data constitute our understanding of ourselves by arguing in the first edition of the Critique of Pure Reason that although different perceptions occur separately and singly in the mind, they are not merely the contingently associated occurrences that Hume believed he had discovered. Hume was right, but only insofar as he recognised the impossibility of finding a substantial self by looking inwards amongst the multitude of perceptions in his mind. At least in this respect Kant agrees with Hume. He says,

Consciousness of self according to the determinations of our state in inner perception is merely empirical, and always changing. No fixed and abiding self can present itself in this flux of inner appearances.<sup>47</sup>

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47 *ibid.*, A107, p. 136.

But Kant then moves beyond Hume. The fact that Hume was able to observe his inner perceptions at all, must also be taken into consideration; this is a different point, and to mark the distinction Kant invokes the notion of 'transcendental apperception'. He says

What has necessarily to be represented as numerically identical cannot be thought as such through empirical data. To render such a transcendental supposition valid, there must be a condition that precedes all experience, and which makes experience itself possible.<sup>48</sup>

That is, empirical data, obtained from the observation of inner processes, cannot establish the necessity for a 'numerically identical' condition - a self - as Hume had shown. Nevertheless, it is also undoubtedly the case that certain perceptions do combine and interconnect with others, and this seems to be the very basis for our apprehension of any object. So there must necessarily exist a subjective ground which directs the mind to organise perceptions into a unity, otherwise we could never identify any object. Kant calls this unity the 'unity of apperception'. He appears to ascribe two functions to it - firstly, it is the purely subjective capacity for associating representations, so that they do not remain as a multitude of separate perceptions, with no connection to that which has the perceptions, such as a self; and secondly, the unity of apperception performs the necessary objectification of certain associated perceptions so that a definite object is represented, distinct from our own subjectivity.<sup>49</sup>

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48 ibid.

49 ibid., A121, 122, 123, pp. 144-145.

However, whilst the unity of apperception is synthetic, the fact that there has to be such a unity is a priori necessary - a necessity which draws on the indispensability of the 'I think'. Earlier, in the Transcendental Deduction (A) Kant says that all necessity is grounded in what he calls a 'transcendental condition'.<sup>50</sup> That condition is in this case represented by the principle of the unity of apperception, a principle that 'can be comprehended a priori, antecedently to all empirical laws of the imagination'.<sup>51</sup> So, since the unity of apperception is necessary, there must be a transcendental ground for the unity of consciousness. Kant calls this ground, 'transcendental apperception', describing it as a 'pure, original unchangeable consciousness'.<sup>52</sup> It forms out of all possible appearances, which can stand alongside one another in one experience, a connection of all representations according to rules. As such it must necessarily be represented as 'numerically identical', otherwise experience itself is not possible, since all experience presupposes the unity of the subject who has it, and for that reason transcendental apperception is represented by the simple 'I think'. Without this ground there could be no modes of knowledge for us.

Since transcendental apperception - or the 'I think' - is a purely formal principle, to be comprehended a priori, there is a marked distinction between it and the perceptions, representations, and so on derived from sensibility, which comprise the empirical data of consciousness. It is this distinction in Kant which encapsulates the polarity between the observer and the thoughts observed. Not only is the

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50 ibid., A106, p. 135.

51 ibid., A122, p. 145.

52 ibid., A107, p. 136.

'I think' entirely different from the activity of consciousness, but, as well as accompanying representations, the 'I think' also implicitly acts as an observer. That is, even though Kant frequently states that the function of the 'I think' is to 'accompany' all the representations, so that they can be thought in the first place, the fact that he calls those representations and perceptions derived from sensibility 'empirical' data, suggests that he has an observational model in mind. Since we are able to determine 'our state in inner perception' and this is 'merely empirical', Kant seems to imply that we can inwardly perceive our perceptions, representations, and so on, and, because we are able to observe the data of consciousness, that data is empirical. That is why Kant sometimes calls this observation of inner states 'empirical apperception'.

In turn, that presupposes that the 'empirical data' themselves are distinct from that which observes, a distinction brought out very clearly in Kant's detailed account of how the 'I think' differs from perceptions and representations. So, despite Kant's emphasis on accompaniment, it is clear that apperception, in the form of the 'I think', is also - as in Leibniz - the awareness of the data of consciousness. It is the implicit acknowledgement of this awareness by Kant, as well as the recognition that the 'I think' is distinct from the data of consciousness, which installs the dichotomy between the observer and the thoughts observed in his work.

This leads to an important consequence. It is clear that Kant is intent on distancing himself from what he considers to be the unwelcome consequences emerging from the Leibnizean view of reflection. As a result, he purposely attempts to limit the role of reflection, even though he implicitly admits the presence of a reflective element in that he allows an

awareness of the activity of consciousness by the 'I think'. This attempt to restrict the meaning of reflection can be seen in Kant's use of the term 'apperception' to name what is represented by the proposition 'I think'. The term 'apperception' was first coined by Leibniz to indicate the awareness of perceptions. In fact, 'apperception' is often synonymous with 'reflection'. However, unlike Leibniz, for whom apperception was not only the awareness of our perceptions, but also the very possibility of self-reflection, Kant quite clearly establishes that he is not regarding apperception as the basis for a developing notion of reflection. Rather, Kant denies a reflexive role to the 'I think', understanding it more in terms of that which observes and thinks the representations of objects as they are presented to the mind. So, as in the case against Descartes, Kant seems to employ the tactic of adopting the very same idiosyncratic terms coined by his opponents to express their view - a view he wants to oppose - in order to show how he differs from that view by giving those same terms a different meaning.

At the same time, as Guyer convincingly shows, Kant is ambivalent about what he means by apperception. Sometimes it represents the awareness of the rule-governed unity of the self in self-consciousness; at other times, it represents the awareness of the rule-governed unity of the representations of an object.<sup>53</sup> If this ambivalence in what he means by apperception is taken in conjunction with Kant's rejection of the Leibnizean model, and his restriction of reflection to the understanding, then there is reason to believe that in Kant the polarity between the observer and the thoughts observed shifts away from its previously

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53 Paul Guyer, Kant and the Claims of Knowledge, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987) pp. 47-51, especially pp. 83-84.

established source in reflection; rather than resting on the dynamics of reflection, that polarity becomes grounded in a much more static introspection.

The difference might be stated briefly as follows. In introspection, the field of vision that is gained can never be more than partial and incomplete because it always leaves the observer out of account. Introspection requires that we divert attention away from ourselves and towards what come to be regarded as the objects of our attention. This produces a view which is constituted almost entirely by our perceptions of what is before us, whilst our own impact on what is observed is ignored because we exclude ourselves from the picture altogether. For this reason, introspection reinforces rather than overcomes, the distinction between an observer and what is observed. In contrast, reflection involves a continuing reflexive movement from observer to what is observed and back again. In principle, this can lead to a more holistic view, since aspects of both the observer and what is observed are appropriated to constitute that view.

This difference between reflection and introspection can be detected in a comparison of the thought of Leibniz and Kant. Leibniz allows that it is possible to gain an ever fuller concept of myself, and therefore a better knowledge of myself, through advanced stages of reflection. I gather in more of myself in self-knowledge even as I reflect upon aspects of my thoughts or behaviour. But for Kant, there can be no knowledge of the self. Rather, that there is a subject who has a consciousness of mental processes can at best be inferred only. So, when he deals with the 'I think' in its role as observer of the empirical data of consciousness,

that observer is left entirely out of account - on the grounds that nothing can be known about it - and therefore Kant seems to rely implicitly on what would here be called introspection rather than reflection.

For example, in the Transcendental Deduction (B), it becomes clear that Kant sees the act of combining the 'manifold of intuition' - that is, the impressions of objects which we receive through sensibility - with the 'I think' as itself a representation, even though it is a representation different from all others because it is an 'act of spontaneity, that is, it cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility'.<sup>54</sup> In other words, it is not a representation grounded in the manifold of sensation; rather, it arises purely from within the mind. He calls this act of spontaneity 'pure apperception', describing it as,

that self-consciousness which, while generating the representation 'I think' (a representation which must be capable of accompanying all other representations, and which in all consciousness is one and the same), cannot itself be accompanied by any further representation. The unity of this apperception I likewise entitle the transcendental unity of self-consciousness, in order to indicate the possibility of a priori knowledge arising from it.<sup>55</sup>

The background to what Kant is saying here is his previously argued position that since empirical consciousness is the activity of thinking, that consciousness is itself diverse and not related to the identity of the subject. That relation comes about, not just because the 'I think' accompanies each representation, but because, in thinking, I connect one

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54 Kant, *op. cit.*, B132, p. 153.

55 *ibid.*

representation with another. Since I am able to unite all given representations in one consciousness, it is possible for me 'to represent to myself the identity of the consciousness in [i.e.throughout] these representations'.<sup>56</sup>

The process by which the 'I think' combines with the manifold of intuition, as well as the identity of consciousness underlying representations, are both presented by Kant as representations. Nor is this the only instance; Kant often describes aspects of the structure of the mind as representations: for example, thinking beings are nothing more than 'the transference of this consciousness of mine to other things, which in this way alone can be represented as thinking things'.

But a representation is not itself the real thing; rather, a representation prevents a showing of the real thing, which remains excluded from the overall field of apprehension. In this case it means that both the processes and the unity of the mind are in themselves inaccessible to direct and immediate grasp - that grasp is mediated because these features are re-presented. At the same time, a representation implies the presence of an observer; there is no point in there being a representation if there is no audience to acknowledge it. But in all the instances mentioned, and in others as well, the observer is left out of account. For that reason, introspection is the appropriate term to describe Kant's polarity between observer and what is observed. Kant presents an overall image of how some aspects of the mind - whilst springing from within the mind - can be objectified as something to be observed by the mind. As a result, the mind is spoken of as though it were split in half; one half becomes the object

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, B133, p. 153.

of attention for the other, whilst that other remains shrouded in obscurity.

Not that Kant means it otherwise; to articulate his position in terms of representations is one way of deliberately conveying that we can have no knowledge of the mind, or the self as a thing-in-itself. In the Transcendental Aesthetic Kant remarks that consciousness of self is gained through the 'inner perception' of a manifold of representations. These representations are themselves derived from sense perception, so they do not spring spontaneously from within the mind itself. But they affect the mind, by means of the forms of intuition - that is, space and time. 'Coming to consciousness of oneself'<sup>57</sup> is to seek, through the manifold of intuitions, what lies within the mind; only then can the mind 'give rise to an intuition of itself'.<sup>58</sup> But the form of that intuition - time - already exists antecedently in the mind, determining 'the mode in which the manifold is together in the mind'. Consciousness of self, Kant concludes, is not an intuition which represents the activity of the self, that would be to confuse self-consciousness with empirical consciousness. But, by seeking what lies in the mind, the mind,

intuits itself not as it would represent itself if immediately self-active, but as it is affected by itself, and therefore as it appears to itself, not as it is.<sup>59</sup>

The important point here is that the mind represents itself as it is affected by itself. In other words, it sees itself not as it is in itself,

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57 ibid., B68, p. 88.

58 ibid

59 ibid., B69, p. 88.

but as it appears to itself. Later, in the Transcendental Deduction (B) Kant again makes this same point - that inner sense (time),

represents to consciousness even our own selves only as we appear to ourselves, not as we are in ourselves. For we intuit ourselves only as we are inwardly affected.<sup>60</sup>

The basis for these arguments is to be found in the Transcendental Aesthetic, where Kant discusses how everything in our knowledge which belongs to intuition contains only relations. Since the forms of intuition are space and time, relations in the case of space - outer sense - are understood by Kant as,

locations in an intuition (extension), of change of location (motion), and of laws according to which this change is determined (moving forces).<sup>61</sup>

In the case of time - inner sense - these relations are of succession, co-existence, and endurance. But what an object is, apart from these relations, is not given through intuition. This is because a thing in itself cannot be known through mere relations, and, since both senses give us nothing other than relations, their representations contain only the relation of an object to the subject, and not the inner properties of the object in itself.

This bears on self-consciousness as follows. The form of inner intuition - time - does not represent anything, except when representations of sensibility are posited in the mind. It is this lack of intrinsic content which makes the form of intuition the most appropriate mode through

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60 *ibid.*, B153, p. 166.

61 *ibid.*, B67, p. 87.

which the mind, freed from absorption in its own activities, can become aware of how it is affected by that activity; in other words, of how it is affected by itself. That is what Kant means when he says that the mind intuits itself, in self-consciousness. Through inner sense the subject - the mind - becomes its own object. But, since this is done through the form of intuition, it means that the representation is determined by relations, and not by the object as it is in itself. Therefore, the object itself - the mind - can be represented only as appearance, and not as a human subject would judge itself if its intuition were different, for instance, if the subject was nothing other than pure self-activity, without being able to become an object for itself, mediated through inner sense.

Kant uses arguments such as these to draw the conclusion that the object as it appears, the phenomenon, is formally distinct from the object as it is in itself, the noumenon. Towards the end of the Transcendental Deduction (B) there can be no mistake that the overall theme proposes that we ourselves constitute the objects of knowledge, through the combination of the manifold of intuitions and the unity of consciousness. Likewise, the mind, too, can be objectified, constituted by the same means as any other object. But if we constitute objects in this way, then there is necessarily a distinction between a constituted object and the object as it is in itself.

In turn, this distinction relates significantly to the nature of our knowledge of objects. If, as Kant says, our knowledge of objects consists in 'the determinate relation of given representations to an object',<sup>62</sup> a difference between thinking an object, through the forms of thought Kant

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62 *ibid.*, B137, p. 156.

calls concepts, and knowing it, can also be drawn. In the first place, there has to be the concept, through which an object in general is thought; and then there has to be the intuition - the representation of appearance of an object - through which the object is given. If there were no intuition corresponding to the object, the concept would still be a thought, as far as its form is concerned, but, without the object, no knowledge of it would be possible by means of it.<sup>63</sup>

This is one reason why we cannot have knowledge of the self. What we see in 'inner perception' is how the self is affected by itself, but this does not hold out the promise of a continuing process whereby what is discovered can be appropriated into a growing, integrated view of self. The most we have is an a priori knowledge of certain principles, like the unity of apperception, expressed as 'I think', from which we infer that there must be a transcendental ground for the unity of consciousness.

What is missing from Kant's account is a sense of ongoing, dynamic movement; rather, we are presented with an essentially static, mechanistic picture of how the different component parts of the self fit together. This static quality ultimately ensures that Kant remains arrested at the level of introspection - as understood here. At the same time, Kant's understanding of reflection, and his own use of introspection, highlight the differences between these two forms of inward contemplation.

It is interesting to compare Kant with Leibniz in this respect. For Leibniz also, we can never have a complete concept of ourselves. Somewhat like Kant's idea that all we can see is how the self is affected by itself,

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63 ibid., B146, p. 161.

Leibniz similarly stresses the difficulty involved in discovering the law of the individual. But whereas in Leibniz, that discovery depends upon a reconstruction of the law of the individual through reflection, as far as this is possible, Kant attempts to lay out explicitly all the aspects of our concept of self, as though these aspects were bits and pieces to be looked at. Unlike Leibniz, Kant leaves no room for the possibility that our knowledge of ourselves is itself a moving dialectic between the observer and the thoughts observed.

Yet, though Leibniz pointed the way to how thought - in the form of reflection - continues to fulfil a crucial role in the discovery of the self, he could not articulate the movement of reflection, nor how it constitutes our awareness of self. That was a task not undertaken until Hegel turned his attention to the problem of the observer and the thought observed.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE DIVIDED SELF

One of the major challenges to the Kantian conception of the self was launched by Hegel. Kant - envisaging the transcendental ego in Cartesian terms - regarded the 'I think' primarily as an already given presence. Despite his denial of the self as substance, and despite his conception of the 'I think' as one of the transcendental ideas, Kant worked with the assumption that the 'I think' is the given, unified ground imparting coherence to the activity of consciousness. At the same time, Kant tacitly displayed a self divided into the polarity of an observer and the thoughts observed, incorporating within his essentially static and mechanistic view the element of self-consciousness. It was this latter feature which drew the criticism from Hegel that this self-consciousness is simply posited by Kant as given. As someone much later than Hegel, namely Habermas, says of Kant,

... nothing seemed more certain to him than the self-consciousness in which I am given to myself as the 'I think' that accompanies all my representations.<sup>1</sup>

This assumption is most obvious in those instances when Kant simply asserts, without further explanation, that the 'I think' is generated by the 'transcendental unity of self-consciousness'.<sup>2</sup> For Hegel, that

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1 Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, trans. J. J. Shapiro, 2nd ed. (Heinemann, London, 1978) p. 16.

2 Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason, *op. cit.*, B132, p. 153.

phrase suggested a 'monster in the background',<sup>3</sup> primarily because Kant attributed the character of a thing-in-itself to the 'I think'. Any thing-in-itself, including Kant's Mind and God, expresses, according to Hegel, the object when we leave out of sight all that consciousness makes of it, all its emotional aspects, and all specific thoughts of it. It is easy to see what is left - utter abstraction, total emptiness, only described still as an 'other-world'.<sup>4</sup>

Further, Hegel saw that Kant's understanding of the 'I think' sustains a dualism between the transcendental ego and the activity of consciousness. Hegel attributed this dualism to Kant's unfortunate insistence on the a priori nature of the transcendental ego as a thing-in-itself. If the transcendental ego - as thing-in-itself - can never be known, then it remains forever apart, separated from operations of consciousness which, in Kantian terms, seemingly can be known. In this state of isolation, all that can be known about the 'I think' is that it is simply ever present, as an observer.

In raising these objections to Kant, Hegel certainly had a point, for just because the 'I think' is an observer it does not follow that it is self-consciousness. If self-consciousness is understood as the consciousness the transcendental ego has of itself, then it is hard to see where and how Kant demonstrates that this ego has that kind of consciousness. Yet, from the whole tenor of his approach to the 'I think', and given his view that it is self-consciousness in the first place which

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3 Hegel, Logic, trans. W. Wallace, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978) p. 70.

4 ibid., p. 72.

generates the 'I think', Kant implies that he has already taken this issue into account. However, the only ground he could have for arguing that he makes out a case for the emergence of self-consciousness would be to point out that he makes provision, in the Critique of Pure Reason, for the possibility that whilst the self cannot know itself, it can see how it is affected by itself. This point - that Kant makes allowance for some degree of self-observation - emerged in the preceding chapter, and led to the suggestion that in Kant the self's awareness of how it is affected by itself rests on introspection and not on reflection. As a model for the emergence of self-consciousness, however, Kant's self-observation will not do, precisely because it is grounded in introspection.

That is, in Kant's inherently mechanistic view of the self, all the component parts fit together like clockwork, to be observed in objective contemplation. This detached, impersonal contemplation is a constant feature of Kant's approach; it shapes the view he has of his own project, and it informs the manner in which he treats the distinction he makes between the transcendental ego and the activity of consciousness. But it is most obvious in the way he writes of how the self can see how it is affected by itself. At that point, Kant reaches such a level of abstraction that he cannot but help convey the impression of an unbridgeable gulf between the observer and what is observed. It becomes only too clear that the phrase 'affected by itself' does not imply that the observer is involved in a process of appropriating and owning the activity of consciousness in self-recognition - which might be thought to be a basis for self-consciousness; instead, it becomes evident that Kant's observer always retains a certain detachment, as the thing-in-itself which can never be known.

Since the self remains divided into an observer and that which is observed, the observation concerned takes on an essentially static quality. The very rigidity of the division - between an 'I think' which, as a thing-in-itself can never be known, and the activity of consciousness which can be known - reinforces, and is in turn reinforced by, an observation which is nothing other than a looking, which never leads to a dialectic movement of consciousness capable of overcoming the polarity. Kant's kind of observation - introspection - can best be described as a simple onlooking that has no dynamic consequences. For that reason, the transcendental ego is not itself self-conscious. Since Kant implicitly relies on a model of introspection, it follows that to observe, to look at, in his context, leaves the observer who does the looking out of account, for it is not the case that the observer also looks at the impact that observation has on itself, thereby forming its own self-consciousness, its own self-understanding.

Hegel, discerning the significance of this point, wove an interactive element - between the observer and the thoughts observed - into his own alternative view of self-consciousness, one that he based not on introspection but on reflection. Whilst he himself never grounds his objections to Kant in an underlying distinction between introspection and reflection - as I am doing here - his whole approach to consciousness and self-consciousness is in terms of a dynamic, reflexive process, very different from the static picture that Kant presents. For this reason, it is not inconsistent to say on Hegel's behalf that Kant proves himself incapable of seeing a significant movement in consciousness - of the kind which shapes and ultimately leads to self-consciousness - just because he,

Kant, implicitly relies on introspection. Conversely, had Kant been able to acknowledge such a movement, introspection might have given way to an idea of reflection, and that would have made it impossible for Kant to leave the observer in a state of detachment.

In opposing Kant's position with his own view, therefore, Hegel can be taken to criticise not only Kant's thing-in-itself, but also, at another level, Kant's kind of observation - introspection. However, whilst Hegel explicitly expressed his objections to the former, his rejection of the latter remained an implicit undercurrent, and for that very reason, it proved to be a significant source of tension in Hegel's own thought, as I hope to make clear later in this chapter.

With respect to the thing-in-itself, Hegel regarded this aspect of Kant's thought as an insuperable obstacle to a genuinely relevant account of self-consciousness. As Kant conceives of it, the thing-in-itself remains unknowable. Yet, says Hegel, it does not require much penetration,

to see that this caput mortuum is still only a product of thought, such as accrues when thought is carried on to abstraction unalloyed.<sup>5</sup>

Since the thing-in-itself is nothing other than a product of thought, Hegel concludes that,

we can only read with surprise the perpetual remark that we do not know the Thing-in-itself. On the contrary there is nothing we can know so easily.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Hegel, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

6 *ibid.*

Hegel takes every opportunity to point out what he considers to be the unacceptable implications inevitably following from the notion of the thing-in-itself - implications and consequences which Kant certainly never intended. For Kant, the thing-in-itself is an idea, a hypothetical construct, meant to deal with that which is beyond empirical experience, but which is postulated in order to articulate what that experience points towards. In that sense, the thing-in-itself is an idea with objective content, because what it postulates is shaped by a set of observable phenomena, and not just posited as the result of some arbitrary figment of thought. Yet, because we have no way of experiencing that content it remains forever unknown to us. Therefore, it is the content of the thing-in-itself which is unknown, but we can nevertheless put forward an idea of it, with the proviso that such an idea can at best only approximate a possible reality.

Yet, even though it is hard to see how such a thing-in-itself could ever be self-conscious, Hegel's scorn for the alleged unknowableness of the thing-in-itself is also connected with his own view of reflection. In Hegelian terms, Kant fails to account for self-consciousness because he does not acknowledge the reflexive relation between the activity of consciousness and the transcendental ego. Even if Hegel were to grant that there is a point - or at least some plausibility - in understanding Kant's transcendental ego as the kind of thing-in-itself proposed just now, that ego nevertheless remains limited to its role as an observer, locked in a position of detachment from the activity of consciousness - an observer watching, without being altered by, the movement of consciousness. As such, the transcendental ego always eludes any grasp of it. Although the

activity of consciousness is postulated as dependent on it, the transcendental ego is always beyond, over and above these operations of consciousness; it is an ego which performs its function of integration without itself ever being affected, shaped or altered by that activity.

The differences between Kant and Hegel on this issue are fundamentally based on differing conceptions of what constitutes the link between the observer and the thoughts observed, or, to put it another way, between subject and object. I have argued that Kant sees that link in terms of introspection, but Hegel sees the same link in terms of a reflection which shapes and alters the observer, or the subject, as well as its object in an interactive relation. This difference between introspection and reflection - and its consequences for a self divided into an observer and what is observed - will be taken up again in the next chapter. In the remainder of this chapter, however, Hegel's views of consciousness, self-consciousness, and reflection will be explored so that the contrast between Kant and Hegel becomes clear enough not only to expose the tensions just mentioned in Hegel, but also to begin a study of the nature of reflection that will continue to the end of this thesis.

### **Hegel's Conception of Consciousness and Self-consciousness.**

Hegel - in contrast to the Kantian conception - develops the idea of phenomenological experience, by means of which self-consciousness unfolds as a result of the formative process of consciousness. How this happens is outlined in sections 82 to 89 in the Introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit. Briefly, Hegel begins by drawing attention to the way in which consciousness both distinguishes itself from what it encounters, and also relates itself to it. This relationship, in which something exists for

consciousness, is a relation of knowing. At the same time, to be something for consciousness is to have the character of being-for-another. But, since whatever is involved in a relation of knowing is also distinguished from it and posited as existing outside this relationship, that which exists for consciousness also has a being-in-itself.

Hegel calls being-in-itself - which is also a being-for-itself for consciousness - truth, because,

in what consciousness affirms from within itself as being-for-itself or the True we have the standard which consciousness itself sets up by which to measure what it knows.<sup>7</sup>

That is, consciousness is not only able to acknowledge that what is before it has a being-in-itself; it can also determine what this being-in-itself is, and this becomes the measure by which consciousness examines the truth of its own knowledge of the object. Hegel more than once emphasises the point that consciousness is both consciousness of the object, of what for it is the True, and consciousness of its own knowledge of the truth. Since both the object and the knowledge of the object are for the same consciousness, this consciousness is itself their comparison. It is this double aspect which makes possible the dialectic movement of consciousness, for it is up to this one consciousness to know whether its knowledge of the object corresponds to the object or not.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, Hegel recognises that consciousness can only grasp the object in its own peculiar way; consciousness cannot step outside of

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7 Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A. V. Miller, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977) p. 53.

8 ibid.

itself in order, as he says, to 'get behind the object as it exists for consciousness so as to examine what the object is in-itself, and hence too, cannot test its own knowledge by that standard'.<sup>9</sup> This somewhat Kantian concession is soon dismissed by Hegel, for he points out almost immediately that the distinction between the in-itself of the object, and the knowledge consciousness has of the object, is already present in the fact that consciousness knows an object at all. Upon this inbuilt distinction - already present as a fact, for Hegel - rests the possibility of comparing the two aspects, to see if they correspond. If they do not, then consciousness must alter its knowledge to conform to the object.

This alteration involves a dialectic movement which results in a modification in both the object and knowledge of the object. Since the knowledge that was present was very particularly that of a certain object, then, when that knowledge changes, the object cannot remain the same, it must also change. Hegel explains in Chapter 1 of the Phenomenology that at the beginning of the dialectical movement, consciousness merely grasps the object in simple apprehension - this particular 'I', am certain of this particular thing. At this stage the thing is, and this pure being, or this simple immediacy, constitutes its truth. At this stage also, certainty - a connection between 'I' and the particular thing - is an immediate, pure connection; consciousness is 'I' - nothing more than a pure 'This', and this consciousness immediately knows a pure 'This', or the object.<sup>10</sup>

But actually, what appears to be pure, simple and immediate is really constituted by two 'Thises' - one 'this' as 'I'; the other 'this' as

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9 ibid., p. 54.

10 ibid., pp. 58-59.

object. So it soon emerges that neither consciousness nor the object are present in an immediate connection, but that both are mediated by each other. As a result, a different kind of knowledge evolves, which recognises that the object is not purely a 'this'; instead, the question can be asked, 'What is the this?', and with this question a different kind of object emerges. As a result, it becomes clear that what consciousness took to be the in-itself of the object, a pure 'this', is not an in-itself, it was only an in-itself-for-consciousness.

When Kant reached a similar point, he drew the conclusion that the in-itself is therefore something which consciousness can never know, but Hegel refuses to take this route. He concludes that,

Since consciousness thus finds that its knowledge does not correspond to its object, the object itself does not stand the test.<sup>11</sup>

So what Kant saw in terms of a failure on the part of consciousness to know the object, Hegel sees in terms of an evolving transformation of both object and consciousness. The dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object, is what Hegel understands by phenomenological experience.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, Hegel admits that his way of looking at the relation between consciousness and its object is not the usual one. Usually it seems to be the case that the experience of error, regarding knowledge of the object, comes about when another object appears on the scene, seemingly by chance and externally, by which the first object can be compared. In

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11 ibid., p. 54.

12 ibid., p. 55.

that case, consciousness simply apprehends only, trying to perceive correctly what the object is in itself. But Hegel objects to this view; rather than needing the appearance of another object on the scene to realise its mistake, consciousness itself brings forth a 'new true object' through what he calls 'a reversal of consciousness'.<sup>13</sup>

What he means is that the original relation was an immediate connection between a pure 'this' as 'I', and a pure 'this' as object. Consciousness grasped the object in immediate sense-certainty. But once the question 'What is the this?' is asked about the object, that relation becomes reversed. The object, which was originally supposed to be the essential element, since its in-itself provided the measure of truth, now becomes the unessential element. 'This' is a universal, but that is not how the object appears before consciousness - that object is a 'here' and 'now'. So there appears to be a contradiction in the object itself, and certainty can no longer be found in the object; rather, it is to be found in the opposite element, namely in knowing, which was previously the unessential element. Truth is now no longer in the object, but in the object as my object, in its being mine. So the force of the truth of the object now lies in the 'I', and no longer in the object. In this sense there has been a reversal of consciousness, which brings about a 'new true object'.<sup>14</sup>

But consciousness cannot rest at this point, for it is soon clear that 'I' is also a universal. When I say 'I', I mean this singular 'I', although I say all 'I's' in general, since everyone is what I say, everyone

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13 *ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

14 *ibid.*, p. 61.

is 'I'. So both the object and the 'I' are universal, and therefore the truth of the object cannot lie in consciousness. 'I' is not the essential element after all, rather, both the object and consciousness are unessential. This discovery occurs through perception, which leads consciousness away from immediate sense-certainty. Perception emerges as the logically necessary next step because, once the universal character of 'this' is acknowledged, it has become impossible for consciousness to remain confined within the immediacy of its original apprehension of the object. In fact, two aspects of the same movement can now be distinguished - the act of perceiving and the object perceived.<sup>15</sup>

So a new cycle begins, which follows the pattern of the first. Since the Truth has been shown not to be in consciousness - because the 'I' is as universal as the original object - the truth once more transfers to the in-itself of the new object. In perception, the new object emerges as the thing-of-many-properties. This salt, for example, is a simple Here, and at the same time manifold; it is white,, and also tart, also cubical in shape, of a specific gravity, and so on.<sup>16</sup> Perception is much more complex than immediate sense-certainty; by means of perception the Truth of the object is now:- (a) an indifferent, passive universality, the Also of many properties: (b) the negation of that state of affairs, for the object is also the One, from which opposite properties are excluded: and (c) the many properties themselves.<sup>17</sup>

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15 ibid., p. 67.

16 ibid., p. 68.

17 ibid., p. 69.

Meanwhile, the role of consciousness has from the start been one of pure apprehension. If consciousness were to do anything at all at the stage of sense-certainty, it would be like adding to or subtracting from the object, and that would alter the Truth of the object. Even though the first stage of sense certainty has been superseded, this second cycle involving perception is nothing other than a repetition of the earlier pattern. The Truth is again in the object, whilst consciousness is alterable and unessential, for it is always possible that consciousness apprehends the object incorrectly and deceives itself. The possibility of deception is clear, for example, from the fact that through perception the object appears as both diverse and self-identical.

What consciousness experiences is that it apprehends the object purely as a One. But consciousness also perceives a property in the object which is universal, the Also of many properties, and this transcends the singularity of the object. So the first apprehension of the objective essence as a One was therefore not its true being. Nevertheless, since the object is what is true, it seems that untruth must fall in consciousness - its apprehension was not correct. The object must instead be seen as a community of properties. But this way of seeing the object proves equally inadequate, for consciousness also perceives the object to be determinate, opposed to others and excluding them. So the objective essence of the object is not correctly perceived when apprehended as a community, that community must be broken up so that the objective essence as a One that excludes can be posited.<sup>18</sup>

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18 *ibid.*, p. 71.

In experiencing these contradictory shifting moments, consciousness repeats the original cycle. However, the cycle supersedes itself in each moment and as a whole. This time, for instance, consciousness experiences that in perception the outcome and the truth of perception is its dissolution. Thus, as Hegel says,

it becomes quite definite for consciousness how its perceiving is essentially constituted, namely, that it is not a simple pure apprehension, but in its apprehension is at the same time reflected out of the True and into itself. This return of consciousness into itself which is directly mingled with the pure apprehension (of the object) - for this return into itself has shown itself to be essential to perception - alters the truth.<sup>19</sup>

That is, in its quest for the truth of the object, consciousness is forced back on itself as a result of its own experience. It discovers that its own pure apprehension of the object could not capture the truth, for the object is not merely a 'this' but an object-of-many-properties. But this change in the object, which now constitutes the True, causes a change in consciousness, which now sees how its own perception is constituted. That is, as well as purely apprehending the object, consciousness also reflects back into itself in perception. Such reflection occurs during the movement of perception described above, when consciousness distinguishes its apprehension of the truth from the untruth of its perception, it corrects this untruth, and it does this by looking back at itself from the new standpoint of the new object - now as the thing-of-many-properties. Since consciousness undertakes to make this correction itself, the truth, qua truth of perception falls within consciousness. As a result, consciousness

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19 ibid., pp. 70-71.

becomes so constituted that it no longer merely perceives, but through perception it begins to see how it reflects into itself.<sup>20</sup>

This kind of perceptual consciousness is a perpetual alternation between determining what is true, and setting aside this determining. Hegel says,

What the nature of these untrue essences is really trying to get perceptual understanding to do is to bring together and thereby supersede the thoughts of those non-entities, the thoughts of that universality and singular being, of 'Also' and 'One', of the essentiality that is necessarily linked to the unessential moment that yet is necessary. But the Understanding struggles to avoid doing this by resorting to 'in so far' and to the various 'aspects', or by making itself responsible for one thought in order to keep the other one isolated as the true one.<sup>21</sup>

Given the fluctuation and alternation of consciousness, the True once more becomes invested in the object, and the whole cycle recurs again, this time at the level of Force.

What has just been described as the beginning of the dialectical movement, are the first steps in a series of repeated patterns in the self-formation of consciousness. Pressing 'forward to its true existence', consciousness reaches a point where it is no longer burdened by an alien 'other', where appearance becomes identical with essence, and where, finally, consciousness grasps its own essence as absolute knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

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20 ibid., p. 72.

21 ibid., pp. 78-79.

22 ibid., pp. 56-57.

Once the pattern of consciousness presses ahead to the point where the reversal of consciousness is no longer an adequate concept, once that concept is made obsolete, by the collapse of the appearance of the 'otherness' of objects which still plagues consciousness in these early stages, then consciousness will have become transparent to itself in full self-consciousness. This, then, is phenomenological experience - a process in which the dimensions of consciousness and the object change within a dialectical movement, in which both are shaped and reshaped in and through each other in constant interaction.

Even in this brief exposition, however, the difference between Kant and Hegel is obvious. Instead of a passive observation by the 'I think', Hegel's movement of dialectic becomes the medium for self-unfolding, and ultimately, for gaining self-consciousness. What is absent in Kant, from Hegel's perspective, is the recognition that true self-consciousness is based on a notion of an ego which acknowledges not only its role as observer of the operations of consciousness, but also its awareness of its own movement as a result of those operations. As Hegel saw it, in the end Kant's transcendental ego remains essentially distinct from the activity of consciousness within a dualistic framework, precisely because it is never engaged in a process of reflection which would allow it to become accessible and transparent to itself in self-consciousness.

To explain this more fully requires some account of the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness. For Hegel, self-consciousness is reached when the features of the previous developmental stages are summed up and preserved, but only as insubstantial phases. In the new self-consciousness there must be traces of, for instance, the pure, immediate

object of sense-certainty, the object-of-many-properties of perception, and so on, even though these are now given as mere appearances. In discovering itself in these varied aspects and internal tensions, consciousness begins to feel the unity of itself with itself.<sup>23</sup>

Hegel illustrates this by adopting the first-person standpoint; I distinguish myself from myself, and in doing so I am directly aware that what is distinguished from myself is not different from me. I, the selfsame being, repel myself from myself; but what is posited as distinct from me is immediately not distinct from me. Further, consciousness of an 'other' is itself necessarily self-consciousness; it is a reflectedness-into-self in order to be able to distinguish what is other than self. Consciousness of the other is therefore consciousness of itself in otherness.<sup>24</sup> But in this newly evolving state, consciousness is not yet aware of this last point; rather, it only senses its unity with the 'other' world of the object, and this sense of unity takes the form of a desire to abolish the apparent otherness and to discover itself in this alien content.<sup>25</sup>

That is, self-consciousness is at first aware of itself as a pure ego. As such, it strives to assert itself by overcoming that which stands, or appears to stand, opposed to it. The ego, in order to attain full self-consciousness, must express itself, and that requires abolishing whatever hampers this expression. It attempts this by assuming, with complete certainty, the nothingness of the 'other'; it explicitly affirms that this

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23 *ibid.*, p. 105.

24 *ibid.*, p. 102.

25 *ibid.*, pp. 101-105.

nothingness is for it - for consciousness - the truth of the other.

However, experience makes consciousness not only aware of the independence of the other, but also that its own self-certainty comes not from the nothingness of the object, but from superseding it. Consciousness must supersede the object, and it can only do that if the object is something rather than nothing. As Hegel puts it,

Thus self-consciousness, by its negative relation to the object, is unable to supersede it; it is really because of that relation that it produces the object again, and the desire as well...On account of the independence of the object, therefore, it can achieve satisfaction only when the object itself effects the negation within itself; and it must carry out this negation of itself in itself, for it is in itself the negative, and must be for the other what it is.<sup>26</sup>

That is, self-consciousness can only achieve satisfaction in so far as the object abolishes, from within itself, any hint of nothingness. The object has to show itself to self-consciousness as also being self-conscious. As Hegel says, 'self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness'.<sup>27</sup> The attempt to achieve this satisfaction is seen by Hegel in terms of a life and death struggle - the struggle between master and slave. But this too is only another moment, to be superseded as consciousness moves towards experiencing what Spirit is - 'this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'.<sup>28</sup>

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26 ibid., p. 109.

27 ibid., p. 110.

28 ibid., p. 110.

### Hegel's Concept of Reflection.

The progress of the dialectical movement just described relies on reflection (reflexion). At the ultimate development of each stage consciousness 'reflects back into itself', and sees an additional feature to which it was previously blind. It is to this aspect of Hegel's thought that Habermas draws attention. He raises the point that Hegel makes clear how unaware consciousness is of what is happening whilst it is completely involved in phenomenological experience. Consciousness goes through no less than a reversal, yet, in Hegel's words, 'this way of looking at the matter is something contributed by us, as observers, it is not known to the consciousness that we are observing'.<sup>29</sup> So the experience at first exists only for us, as observers. Hegel says,

the origination of the new object, that presents itself to consciousness without its understanding how this happens...proceeds for us, as it were, behind the back of consciousness. Thus in the movement of consciousness there occurs a moment of being-in-itself or being-for-us which is not present to the consciousness comprehended in the experience itself. The content, however, of what presents itself to us does exist for it; we comprehend only the formal aspect of that content, or its pure origination. For it, what has thus arisen exists only as an object; for us, it appears at the same time as movement and a process of becoming.<sup>30</sup>

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29 *ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

30 Hegel, *op.cit.*, p.56

In commenting on this passage, Habermas says that the dimensions of in-itself, for it, and for us mark out the grounds in which the experience of reflection moves. But, he points out, during this process the values change in all the dimensions, including the third. The phenomenologist's perspective - the for us - can therefore only be adopted in anticipation, until this perspective is itself produced in phenomenological experience.<sup>31</sup>

But, whilst this comment is entirely in keeping with Hegel's own point of view, Habermas believes that it clashes with what Hegel actually attempts to demonstrate. By its very nature, phenomenological experience as Hegel understands it, cannot assume what its next stage is to be, that can only emerge through the experience itself. This is the whole burden of Hegel's point that things happen behind the back of consciousness. Yet the logical necessity of each stage is not merely anticipated by Hegel, Habermas says it is presupposed and explicitly asserted. This ambiguity might be explained, says Habermas, by attributing to Hegel the presumption that phenomenological experience always keeps and has kept within the medium of an absolute movement of the mind - in the sense that the movements of consciousness follow a given pattern absolutely - and therefore necessarily terminates in absolute knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

Habermas claims that Hegel does presume this, and he has a point, for it is certainly the case that Hegel attempts to demonstrate how consciousness moves necessarily through all its stages of self-formation to self-consciousness, which in turn is the ground for critical consciousness

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31 Habermas, op. cit., p. 17.

32 ibid., pp. 19-20.

- and necessarily so - because critical consciousness can only criticise itself in the act of knowing if it has a measure of self-consciousness. Further, critical consciousness, Hegel asserts at the end of the Phenomenology of Spirit, is absolute knowledge. But, concludes Habermas, this assertion remains just that - an assertion; it cannot be substantiated because phenomenological experience has not yet produced the state of affairs which would confirm it; only the presupposition of an absolute movement of the mind could serve as some support for that assertion. But such a presupposition is itself doomed, because that would mean that phenomenological experience - which is that movement - has an absolute character, determinable even before consciousness moves through its various phases, and that does not agree with what Hegel says about the nature of phenomenology.

Habermas contends that this fateful ambiguity remains in Hegel. He says, referring to phenomenology as Hegel understands it,

It had to assume as uncertain the standpoint of absolute knowledge to which it was supposed to give rise...Yet in fact it presupposed absolute knowledge with such certainty that it believed itself exempted from the labour of this critique from its first step.<sup>33</sup>

The ambiguity that Habermas lights upon is primarily of interest to him in connection with the issue of scientific knowledge in Hegel. But, on further considering Habermas' point, it becomes clear that what he regards as an ambiguity has its source in how Hegel thinks of reflection.

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33 ibid., p. 23.

Reflection, says Hegel in the Logic,<sup>34</sup> is thinking things over. In that sense all thought is reflective.<sup>35</sup> But this belies an underlying complexity, for Hegel in fact works with two senses of reflection. Firstly, there is reflection (reflexion) as shining, or throwing light back upon an object. This is the sense Hegel uses in the Phenomenology of Spirit when consciousness, towards the culmination of each developmental stage before reaching self-consciousness, turns back to itself in a reflection which is nothing other than a simple revealing illumination. An example of this occurs when perceptual consciousness, by turning back to itself in reflection, becomes aware that its own perceptions are being corrected.

This kind of reflection holds no hint of a dawning self-consciousness. Perceptual consciousness is not aware that it corrects its own mis-perceptions, only that they are corrected. Hegel, working with a notion of reflection as throwing light back upon the object, can quite easily claim what for Habermas seems so strange, that the movements of consciousness go on, as it were, behind the back of consciousness despite the fact that consciousness reflects back into itself. For Hegel, when consciousness reflects light upon its own movements it does not necessarily mean that it recognises those movements as its own. Habermas himself, however, understands reflection in terms of self-reflection, the re-appropriation of lost or forgotten thoughts or ways of thinking which he believes invariably leads to enhanced self-consciousness. What he fails to take into account is that Hegel uses two senses of reflection - as shining into (reflexion)

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34 Hegel, Logic, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

35 H.S.Harris, Hegel's Development, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983) p. 13.

and as after-thought (nach-denken) - whilst he, Habermas, uses only one, roughly equivalent to Hegel's after-thought. In the present context, for example, Hegel quite clearly uses the notion of reflection in the sense of illumination.

This use is even more apparent in the Doctrine of Essence in the Logic. There, Being and Essence are two aspects of one whole, for Essence is Being 'reflecting light into itself.'<sup>36</sup> The description of reflection as shining, as throwing light back upon that which is reflected, conjures up the image of a mirror which captures its object. This is not accidental. Hegel has a particular point to make, for just as a mirror image is dependent on its object, so, in the same way, can the mind reflect only by being dependent on its object. This kind of reflection is important for Hegel, because, as Harris says much better than Hegel himself:

Knowledge is the possession by the mind of the truth about something that exists as an object in the world. In this correspondence of thought and thing, it is thought that must follow the thing. Truth is the accurate reflection of the thing in our thought. This subjection and obedience of our thinking to the way things are is what leads us to speak of cognition as essentially 'reflective'. Use of the word is suggested by the physical analogy with the way that a mirror reflects the image of what comes before it; and to say of any kind of knowledge that it is reflective is to say that it is dependent on its object in the way that a mirror image is. However, the 'true' reflection

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36 Hegel, op. cit., p. 162.

of a real state of affairs in the mind is a very different matter from the mechanical reflection of a room in a mirror.<sup>37</sup>

Hegel is aware of this too. Reflection as mirroring has an unwelcome consequence for him, because the object captured in this kind of reflection is marked by a certain rigidity. Just as the reflected image in a mirror can only remain reflected as long as there is not so much movement in the object that it leaves the mirror's range, so also must the object of thought remain fixed and in that sense passive if it is to be reflected. That produces problems for Reason, although it is clear from the Logic that the Understanding requires just such clear-cut entities. As Hegel says,

Thought, as Understanding sticks to fixity of characters and their distinctness from one another: every such limited abstract it treats as having a subsistence and being of its own.<sup>38</sup>

Reflection, in the sense of throwing light upon an object, is a suitable adjunct to the Understanding, for both can deal only with objects which have stable parameters. For that reason, this kind of reflection is characterised by Hegel as,

that movement out beyond the isolated predicate of a thing which gives it some reference, and brings out its relativity, while still in other respects leaving it its isolated validity.<sup>39</sup>

What Hegel means here can be applied in the Doctrine of Essence. If Essence is, as Hegel says, Being reflecting light into itself, then Essence functions like a reflecting mirror. Essence casts back an image which

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37 Harris, op. cit., p. 20-21.

38 Hegel, op. cit., p. 111.

39 ibid., p. 116.

directly refers to Being, but it also brings out what Being is in relation to that image, for Being itself is different from its image in the mirror. In all other respects, however, Essence might be said to give Being its 'isolated validity' precisely because it reflects the image of Being passively, without altering it in relation to something else. Just as a mirror, if it is a true mirror, shines forth my image without distorting or changing it.

Yet to throw light upon an object is also to make distinctions. In this case, Essence and Being, though really one whole, are prised apart into two aspects - Being and reflected being. This kind of reflection, then, divides a unity into two parts, and this produces contradiction, for the unity is now at once part and whole. Thought, however, cannot rest here. Hegel's second sense of reflection (nach-denken) takes into account that the truth for consciousness is established once consciousness grasps the nature of the object and actively transforms it from the form of being into the form of thought.

This is what the process of phenomenology makes clear; the differences between the way that a thing is on its own account, and the way it is known to consciousness, are transformed and resolved by an ongoing process of reflection (nach-denken) which cannot rest in contradiction. Such reflection takes into account how the object becomes an object for thought; it is reflection upon the mind's activity in reflecting. In this sense, reflection is after-thought. The result:- to quote again from the Logic,

By the act of reflection something is altered in the way in which the fact was originally presented in sensation, perception or

conception. Thus, as it appears, an alteration must be interposed before the true nature of the object can be discovered.<sup>40</sup>

and a little later, Hegel says,

The real nature of the object is brought to light in reflection; but it is no less true that this exertion of thought is my act. If this be so, the real nature is a product of my mind, in its character of thinking subject.

What Hegel says here is consistent with his account of phenomenological experience in the Phenomenology of Spirit. But what is missing from Hegel's work as a whole is the integration of both reflexion and nach-denken into a coherent concept of reflection. In Hegel's articulation of the movement of dialectic, reflection seems to be understood in two different senses, in two different ways; yet, Hegel is never entirely straightforward on this point. He sometimes uses one sense, sometimes the other, and sometimes he seems to run the two together, without ever making this clear. The problem is further compounded because Hegel expects philosophy - which he regards as essentially reflective - to play the major role in undoing its own wrong-doing, as Harris points out.<sup>41</sup> That seems to indicate - given the above exposition of the two senses of reflection and how Hegel regards them - that reflection as shining light upon an object is not enough, it leads to error because it freezes part of a moving whole. But whether that reflection has to be augmented or superseded by reflection as after-thought is far from clear.

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40 ibid., p. 34.

41 Harris, op. cit., p. 13.

Hegel's intention might be understood in this way:- the movement of dialectic is necessarily reflexive; it incorporates a turning back to a previous level of consciousness, which is then appropriated into the formation of a new consciousness. In the early stages of the development of consciousness, this kind of reflexivity is understood by Hegel as throwing light upon an object, but what it cannot do is yield self-consciousness because it is an adjunct to the Understanding, which can only render objects fixed and distinct, which can grasp and freeze each stage of consciousness but without knowing that the overall movement is its own. So, for self-consciousness to emerge, reflection as simple illumination has either to give way to, or be filled out by a notion of reflection as after-thought.

This seems a very simple requirement, which might have been easily worked out had it not been for the troublesome fact that Hegel links the idea of reflection as illuminating, with the Understanding, which means that both need to be overcome by a more adequate notion of Reason as after-thought. So the supposition that Hegel intended reflection as illumination to be augmented and filled out by reflection as after-thought cannot be sustained. Rather, it is clear that Hegel believed that this kind of reflection must be superseded. But, if the quality of shining light upon an object has to be superseded by after-thought, a problem immediately arises.

That is, after-thought is essentially a movement of turning back and re-appropriating previous thoughts, ways of thinking, or reflecting upon the mind as it reflects. To do this requires not just a movement back to each activity, but also a recognition that that particular activity has

been grasped again. For example, the idea that consciousness moves back to itself rests on the presupposition that consciousness can recognise itself, otherwise, in turning back it might mis-take itself; it might grasp something other than itself.

This element of recognition, however, relies on that aspect of reflection which throws light upon the object, because this is what catches consciousness, arresting its movement for long enough to make recognition and identification possible. So Hegel's understanding of reflection as throwing light upon an object is very important, for it momentarily freezes movement, so that consciousness can catch sight of itself, and not of something else. Once consciousness has caught itself in the light of reflection - much like I catch my own image, and not someone else's in a mirror - then consciousness can impose, by means of after-thought, that alteration which is necessary before its true nature can be discovered, as Hegel says with reference to after-thought. This means that for after-thought to be reflective it must depend on illuminating its object in the same way as a mirror does. Therefore, in order for consciousness to render itself transparent to itself in self-consciousness, there has to be both an illumination of its own activity and a re-appropriation of ways of thinking in after-thought.

But if anything, Hegel seems to underestimate the quality of shining light back upon an object, by giving it low priority because it is an adjunct to the Understanding. What Hegel needed to do, but what he never did, was to produce a synthesis of these two aspects - reflexion and nachdenken. The lack of a synthesis results in tensions and ambiguity. For example, in the Phenomenology, a gulf exists because the movement of

consciousness depends on reflection as shining light upon an object, whilst the dimension of for us - that is, the perspective of the phenomenological observer - seems to depend on reflection in the sense of after-thought. This appears to be the case because we, as phenomenological observers, see what consciousness itself cannot see. We know that when consciousness reflects back into itself it sees itself, even though consciousness attributes what it sees not to itself but to the 'other'. We also know that the drive towards self-consciousness involves the recognition by consciousness that the 'other' is itself. But how we, the phenomenological observers, know this, seems to be the result of reflection as after-thought, for the phenomenological perspective is one of reflection on consciousness as it reflects back into itself. This much is clear. But whether this reflection has the quality of shining light upon an object remains unclear.

The lack of synthesis therefore affects the status of the phenomenological observer. Since Hegel means us to understand that the phenomenological observer relies on reflection as after-thought to see what consciousness itself cannot yet see, it can only mean that the reflection of this observer is much further advanced than that of the consciousness under observation. But how this distance is to be explained remains a problem. Do we assume that the phenomenological observer has already experienced the movements which consciousness is now going through, and can therefore reflect back in after-thought from a position beyond those movements? That would explain why the observer is set apart from the experience consciousness is engaged in, but it would also mean that the observer has reached the standpoint of absolute knowledge, and is simply re-tracing rather than anticipating the phases of consciousness. Or do we

assume that the perspective of the observer emerges out of phenomenological experience as it progresses? But if that is the case, then there should be no distance between the developing consciousness and the phenomenological observer at all. Either way, Hegel provides no real answers to these questions.

So there is at least an unevenness, a discrepancy, dividing the flow of reflection as it progresses through phenomenological experience. Reflection is at the very heart of phenomenology; it is what drives the dialectical movement onwards because the fixity it imposes on each phase produces distinctions that become contradictions which must be overcome. Hegel, it is true, sees the solving of contradictions as the work of Reason, but Reason is also philosophical thinking, which he regards as reflective. To allow there to be an ambiguity, a distinction, in how reflection is to be understood, therefore, is to permit a gulf in phenomenological experience as a whole.

Since the tensions generated as a result cannot be wholly eliminated, Hegel, in a very different way from Kant, preserves the distinction between the observer and the thoughts observed, at least in the early stages of the Phenomenology of Spirit. That he does so is, I believe, rooted in another consideration which implicitly - though significantly - influenced him. That is, each stage of consciousness emerges from the reflection intrinsic to the dialectical movement. But this illuminating aspect of reflection not only has the unwelcome side-effect of rigidifying an object in the manner of the Understanding, but further, this kind of rigidity is too reminiscent of Kant's system to be comfortably incorporated into Hegel's own. A reflection which only illuminates, by throwing light upon various

aspects of consciousness, is like the introspection of Kant's approach, it is static and defies all movement, even whilst it is indispensable as the starting point for identifying the object. Something more is needed if the movement of consciousness to self-consciousness, and beyond, to absolute knowledge, is to be established.

But Hegel could not simply say that both features of reflection are essential, because he had never explicitly acknowledged to himself that part of his quarrel with Kant concerned Kant's use of introspection. Yet - I suggest - that disagreement, unconscious and unacknowledged though it is was, caused Hegel to instinctively shy away from admitting the necessity for the introspective element of reflection. It would have been very easy for Hegel to show how shining light back upon an object, and after-thought, are both elements constituting the structure of reflection. Just because that would have been so simple, his omission is all the more telling. But as a result of his own blind spot, Hegel's account of reflection in the Phenomenology of Spirit and also throughout his entire work remains riddled with unresolved problems.

It is this consequence which leaves Hegel open to the claim made by Habermas:- that he - Hegel - was supposed to assume as uncertain the standpoint of absolute knowledge to which phenomenology was supposed to give rise, whilst in fact, he presupposed absolute knowledge with complete certainty. Habermas himself, however, never recognises that the ambiguity he picks up has its source in Hegel's use of reflection as reflexion and as nach-denken.

Habermas' point bears immediately on Hegel's claim that the movements of consciousness are a rational necessity. Since the development of consciousness is supposed to emerge as a result of phenomenological experience, it would seem more appropriate to articulate this from the perspective of the first person instead of the third, which is the style adopted in the Phenomenology. After all, consciousness is supposed to proceed by facing only openness before it, which becomes filled with the uncertainty of constantly shifting parameters. That means it must move forward by looking ahead into the unknown, without the support of an already known direction.

To capture the immediacy of this lack of direction for consciousness, Hegel sometimes does take up the standpoint of the first person, but this is not his consistent approach. If it had been, then Habermas' criticism would have been wholly inappropriate; but, also, if he had done so, Hegel would have robbed himself of the means for insisting that the steps in phenomenological experience are logically necessary. It is just because he uses the medium of the third person that he can make objective comments, which serve not only to anticipate the way consciousness will develop, but also to assume that that development will necessarily culminate in fully transparent self-consciousness. So the method he adopts is intended to demonstrate the rational necessity inherent in the stages constituting the self-formation of consciousness.

For that reason, Hegel had to rely on the presence of the phenomenological observer - whose reflection has the character of after-thought, rather than of simple lighting up - because by means of after-thought Hegel was able to introduce a rational core to the heart of the

dialectical movement of consciousness. Through after-thought it becomes possible to recognise that the progression of phenomenological experience has a logical structure. The phenomenological observer, therefore, only has to think logically along the lines of the experience consciousness is directly involved in, to predict in advance each stage which will subsequently be confirmed by experience. Since the structure of consciousness is universally rational it must be demonstrable by means of universally applicable logical rules. For that reason, Hegel holds that he, and we ourselves, all conscious creatures, can distinguish what consciousness is aiming at, what it is meant to be on the one hand, and what it effectively is on the other. We can do this with some predictive force, based on a reflective after-thought, which brings to light a rational necessity, even as consciousness itself experiences the very movements that confirm the predictions.

The question is:- does this kind of after-thought presuppose an absolute movement of the mind or not? The answer must be that in one way it does not; Habermas' criticism can be met by pointing out that an absolute movement of the mind is not presupposed by the consciousness which undergoes phenomenological experience, and that the phenomenological observer only sees the necessity of the movements of consciousness after they have been made. But even if this is accepted, it still remains the case that Habermas can argue that the observer is necessarily always one step ahead, otherwise the observer would not be able to see what consciousness cannot yet see, and, to be ahead must mean that the observer already knows what the next step for consciousness is, and that does presuppose an absolute movement of the mind. So in the end, this whole issue remains resistant to a clear-cut resolution, because there is a gulf

between the observer and the consciousness observed, a gulf which has its source in the different kinds of reflection Hegel attributes to the observer and to consciousness.

In the end, Hegel himself dissolved these problems by means of nothing less than the self-destruction of philosophical reflection - though that issue will have to wait for a later chapter. Here, it is only necessary to note that Hegel's early attempts to heal the breach dividing the self into an observer and the thoughts observed were not unambiguously successful. As the result of his efforts to distance himself from Kant, Hegel could not allow himself to acknowledge the value of introspection; yet paradoxically, that very refusal led him to preserve the polarity between the observer and the thoughts observed. For that reason, Hegel remained poised for a time between his vision of self-consciousness in which all oppositions between subject and object are resolved, and an account of reflection which reinforced the distinction between an observer and the thoughts observed. At the heart of this dilemma lies the difference between introspection and reflection, but to deal with the implications of this for the main themes of this thesis requires another chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### **REFLECTION AND THE CREATION OF SELF**

In the previous chapter I undertook to return to the distinction between introspection and reflection once Hegel's views had been considered. Having presented some of the difficulties in Hegel's position, the point has been reached where it is possible to pause and survey the more important qualities of reflection that now stand out. Looking back over the last two chapters brings out in hindsight how much Kant's introspective approach foreshadows the mirroring that features so strongly in Hegel's reflexion. Looking back further still, to Descartes and Hobbes, it becomes evident that their debate about the nature of reflection could not really be settled until Kant and Hegel had uncovered significant elements in its structure. In their different ways, Kant and Hegel stretched the scope of reflection by exploring, or bringing to light, certain characteristics which, influencing and determining the very concept of the self, had nevertheless been left unconsidered by previous philosophers. So it will be useful for the present study of reflection if the more important influences directing the disagreement between Kant and Hegel are gathered up, drawn together and discussed in the following few pages.

#### **The Structure of Reflection - Introspection and After-thought.**

So far, it has been suggested that Kant's attitude to reflection was shaped by what is essentially a passive gazing inwards, a suggestion advanced on the grounds that Kant relied on a purely objective observation at various levels of the Critique of Pure Reason. This detached inner

attention is noticeable in the way Kant argues that reflection, restricted to the Understanding, remains limited to the role of comparing concepts; it is also present in the attitude of the observer - the transcendental ego - and in Kant's own approach to his subject. In chapter 3, I suggested that this internal contemplation can best be seen in terms of introspection, and not reflection, because the idea of introspection need not include a self-consciously acknowledged awareness of the involvement of the observer.

Further, in relation to the self, introspection in Kant is similar to mirroring, because the observer - the transcendental ego - is none other than part of the divided self, observing an activity of consciousness which, in another sense, is itself. Fundamentally, Kant reveals a static picture, like that drawn by someone who, looking into a mirror, is primarily intent on the reflected image, on what is objective, and not on what is subjective. So, in a Kantian context, introspection takes on an aspect of mirroring because it divides self into an observer and the thoughts observed.

This identification of mirroring with forms of inner contemplation - such as introspection or reflection - appeared widely in the writings of the period, and may therefore have been absorbed unconsciously in Kant's vision. For example Fichte, writing shortly after Kant, captured an image which remained covert in Kant, but which Kant revealed indirectly through his introspective approach. For Fichte,

The subjective appears as the still and passive mirror of the objective; the latter floats before it. That the former should reflect images generally, lies in itself. That precisely this

image and none other should be reflected, depends on the latter.<sup>1</sup>

In Hegel, the early experiences of consciousness have a similar quality, in that consciousness merely reflects itself as in a mirror; it floats before itself as that which is objective, without any subjective self-recognition. The difference is that Kant never questioned the aptness of this analogy between inner contemplation and mirroring, whereas Hegel recognised its rigidity, and how it falsifies by neglecting the dynamism inherent in reflective consciousness.

Both Kant's introspection and Hegel's reflexion capture an object by rendering it passively defined. Yet, for reasons explained in the last chapter, Hegel could not bring himself unambiguously to value introspective mirroring as that indispensable feature of reflection ensuring the recognition of the same object in the movement of after-thought. Hegel resorted to the idea that there are two senses of reflection, and thereby introduced a distinction, a degree of mutual exclusivity, which has the effect of making credible the idea that one of the senses - after-thought - can compensate for the inadequacy of the other sense - that of throwing light back upon an object, in a simple mirroring. That is, by regarding introspective mirroring and after-thought as two distinct senses of reflection, Hegel could uphold a structural independence for each, an independence that would collapse if, for example, mirroring and after-thought are understood as two qualities intrinsic to the one movement of reflection.

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1 Fichte, The Vocation of Man, trans. by W. Smith, (Open Court Publishing Co., Illinois, 1965) pp. 67-68.

Nevertheless, despite his efforts to break away from what he regarded as an overwhelmingly static picture, Hegel at the same time approved of Kant's distinction between the Understanding and Reason. He gave Kant credit for being the first to define the object of the Understanding as the finite and conditioned, and the object of Reason as the infinite and unconditioned. But, as well as wholeheartedly approving this distinction, especially Kant's definition of the finite character of the Understanding, he also criticised Kant for making the mistake of limiting the unconditionality of Reason to 'an abstract self-sameness without any shade of distinction'.<sup>2</sup>

For Hegel, to conceive of Reason as Kant did, left no way open for thinking to draw towards the freedom of genuinely 'self-apprehending thought'.<sup>3</sup> It is not that this possibility for thought was unrecognised by Kant; rather, he emptied it of all significance. Any opportunity for thought to grasp itself in a process of after-thinking was already forestalled at one level by the finite range of a reflection restricted to the Understanding, which could only light up the world of sensation, of objects that are sensible and defined, so that any cognitive process confined within the categories necessarily falls short of 'the truth'.<sup>4</sup> But even at the level of Reason, Kant left no scope for thinking to apprehend itself, since Reason 'is divested of every specific form, and thus bereft of all authority'.<sup>5</sup> According to Hegel, the emptiness of

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2 Hegel, *Logic*, trans. by W. Wallace, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978) p. 73.

3 *ibid.*, p. 93.

4 *ibid.*

5 *ibid.*

Reason in Kant, the very abstraction built into the concept, prevented Kant's insightful recognition of the inwardness of thought from developing into anything at all, let alone into such special forms as cognitive principles or moral laws.

What all this meant, in Hegel's view, is that in Kant thought cannot be self-reflective. Reflection certainly supplements the work of the Understanding, and rightly so, according to Hegel, but Kant's conception of Reason left no room for reflection as after-thinking. Hegel explained this omission by pointing to Kant's inability to accept the age-old idea that reflection can penetrate to the heart of things and discover their truth, that by means of reflection what is fixed and permanent can be discovered beneath the fleeting particulars, since reflection can transmute the given phenomena. Leibniz had understood this, but Kant, perturbed by Leibniz's 'intellectualisations' - as we saw in chapter 3 - threw doubt upon this long-accepted conviction by divorcing the thought from the thing, by alleging that there is a difference between the products of our thought and the things in their own nature.<sup>6</sup> But for Hegel himself the idea survived the test of time precisely because it captures what we naturally believe:- that thought coincides with the thing, and that to think is to bring out the truth of the object. For Hegel, that required a thinking characterised by reflective after-thought.

Even so, the notion of reflection as apprehending the truth is acceptable to Hegel only with the qualification that 'in this way of finding truth, absolute truth has not yet found its appropriate form'.<sup>7</sup>

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6 *ibid.*, p. 35.

7 *ibid.*, p. 41-42.

That is because reflection can only define truth in intellectual terms of 'condition and conditioned'.<sup>8</sup> But this implies a separation which, in Hegel's system, had to be overcome by the emergence of a new unity. Reflection must therefore be superseded by the 'most perfect' method of knowledge, which proceeds from the 'pure form of thought' - that is, from a Reason in which the human attitude is one of complete freedom. In the realm of pure thought the mind is in its own home element, free from the limitations imposed by a reflection necessarily confined to two poles. Only this form of thought presents truth as it 'intrinsically and actually is'.<sup>9</sup> Placed within the context of Hegel's overall system, reflection occupies the middle ground between immediate sensory knowledge and the movement of pure Reason.

This point is of interest here because it shows that despite his attempt to emancipate reflection from the narrow confines allotted it by Kant, Hegel undoubtedly recognised one severe limitation:- reflection begins by dividing consciousness into subject-object, into observer and the thoughts observed. Ever since Descartes' invention of the self, the fact that such a dichotomy intrinsically accompanies any introspective, and to a lesser extent, any reflective appraisal had not been seriously addressed. In Kant, this separation between the observer and the thoughts observed remained not only unquestioned, but reached its ultimate development. At the same time, Kant's highly refined introspection brought to completion one aspect of a debate that had never been conclusively settled, and of which the disagreement between Descartes and Hobbes discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis formed part.

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8 ibid.

9 ibid.

That debate centred around the problem of whether the mind can observe thoughts instantaneously or only progressively; whether it is possible for the mind to attend to several thoughts at once, or whether the mind can only attend to one thought at a time for the reason that thoughts form a continuous progression. This problem had a particular bearing on reflection, for it raised the question:- can I know that I am thinking certain thoughts at the very time that I am thinking them - that is, instantaneously - or is this impossible on the grounds that the mind can only attend to one thought at a time, since thought is progressive and not instantaneous.

This debate was never satisfactorily settled between Descartes and Hobbes, perhaps because neither of them had the benefit of considering the issue in the light of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason and Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit. From our own twentieth century perspective we can see what they could not:- that, instead of seeing the issue in terms of mutually exclusive and opposing theories of the mind and reflection, both theories need to be regarded as part of a single conception of self-reflection. For example, in taking up one side of the debate - that of Descartes - it becomes quite clear that when the mind is regarded as the instrument for passively looking inwards - as in Descartes' self-observation, or Kant's introspection - it seems incontrovertible that thought is instantaneous, for many different thoughts can be captured in one instant of looking inwards. One moment of inward contemplation becomes a mirror, reflecting many images. That, in essence, is what Descartes wanted to uphold. But then Kant went on to develop the importance of this kind of observation to such an extent that it completely overshadowed other

factors - most significantly, the role of the observer - and in the end, for all his insightfulness, this aspect of Kant's thought could only crumble as a result of its own inadequacy to bear the theoretical weight placed upon it.

However, in taking up the other side of the debate, it seems equally clear that if the mind is approached as though it were active thought, thinking over previous thoughts in Hegel's sense of nachdenken, then it seems much more plausible to regard thinking and reflection as a process in which thoughts follow one another - like Hobbes wanted to suggest, and Hegel believed. But as the last chapter made clear, Hegel, in emphasising the importance of after-thought, succumbed to his inclination to de-value the relevance of Kant's introspective mirroring, and so this side of the debate suffers equally, because it was extended to a point at which a crucial feature came to be excluded.

So what Descartes and Hobbes had disputed, could not fully be resolved until Kant and Hegel pushed each side of that debate to its limit. As a consequence of their work, a synthesis can now be achieved which salvages points of relevance from each side of the debate. That is, one moment of inner reflection does become a mirror, reflecting many images. But the mind is not merely a faculty of observation; rather, it is the source of action itself, and like all action, the movement of thought can only be briefly frozen in introspection in order to be analysed, otherwise its continuity is denied and any understanding of thought runs the risk of falsification.

However, in the light of this conclusion, the suggestion that emerged in chapters 3 and 4 - that in relation to the self, introspection is a different form of observation from reflection - requires modification. As a result of showing how Hegel's two senses of reflection - mirroring and after-thought - generate tensions, it has become clear that introspective mirroring is just as important as after-thought to an adequate conception of reflection. Further, instead of regarding introspection and reflection as different, and mutually exclusive, Hegel's struggles demonstrate that introspective mirroring is intrinsic to reflection, and so the inevitable conclusion must be that, like after-thought, it is an important element of reflection. Therefore, introspective mirroring and after-thought belong together as elements of the one structure:- reflection.

With this conclusion, two important features of reflection have been identified and integrated into a notion of reflection that will be fully unfolded only in the final chapter. But this study has involved a particular conception of the self. The elements of reflection that have been brought to light relate directly to the idea of a self which, as a given entity, has undergone a division into an observer and the thoughts observed. But, referring back to the first chapter, it was there pointed out that there has been an ongoing dialectic between conflicting notions of the self, a dialectic which has moved within a context shaped by disputes about the 'being' of the self, and by the idea that there is a special relation between thought and the self. That other, opposing view - of a self that is created, or constituted, rather than given - has not received much attention in the last chapters, since it was overwhelmed by Descartes' invention of the self as an entity. Nevertheless, it needs to be pointed out now that the same elements of reflection discussed just now also bear

upon ideas of self-constitution and self-creating, as the work of Fichte shows.

### **Fichte - and Self-making versus Self-creating.**

Fichte, long before Hegel, attacked Kant's notion of the thing-in-itself by attempting to collapse the distinction between subject and object. In the Vocation of Man he argues that when an object first comes before consciousness, it moves before it as an objective reality. The initial consciousness involved is therefore a simple consciousness of the object. Soon, however, by 'free reflection', consciousness becomes aware of the object as an act of its own; that is, consciousness perceives that consciousness of an object is really an unrecognised consciousness of the creation of a presentation of an object.<sup>10</sup>

This is what Kant had said. But for Fichte, it does not follow from this that consciousness can never fully grasp the real nature of the object, that the object cannot be known as it is in itself, as Kant had held. Rather, Fichte asks, since the thing cannot know itself, how can a knowledge of it arise? How can a consciousness of it arise in me? How does the thing reach me? There must be some tie between me - the subject - and the thing which is the object of my knowledge. Fichte's answer is that our own nature is this tie. I am subject and object; this 'subject-objectivity' - which is nothing other than a return of knowledge upon itself - is what Fichte understands by 'I'. It is in the identity of subject and object that our nature as intelligence lies.<sup>11</sup> He says,

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10 Fichte, The Vocation of Man, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

11 *ibid.*, p. 66.

In all consciousness I contemplate myself...to the subjective, conscious being, consciousness is self-contemplation. And the objective, that which is contemplated and of which I am conscious, is also myself...floating as an objective presentation before the subjective.<sup>12</sup>

It is the condition of our consciousness that what we are conscious of appears separate and distinct. If we are asked how this one consciousness separates into two - into consciousness and what it is conscious of - we can only reply that we cannot explain this. Our consciousness first becomes possible in and through this separation, whilst it is our consciousness itself which brings about the separation.<sup>13</sup> I can freely determine myself to think of this or that - of Kant's thing-in-itself, for example. But when I abstract from what is thought, and observe only myself, I become to myself an object whose content is a specific presentation. I appear to myself to be determined precisely so and not otherwise; as thinking, and as thinking of all possible thoughts, the thing-in-itself. That means that my thinking the thing-in-itself is an act of self-determination, I could have been thinking other thoughts. I have therefore made myself into such an object - an object which thinks the thing-in-itself - but this object is not an unknowable thing-in-itself. On the contrary, argues Fichte, I am compelled to presuppose myself - to know myself - as that which is to be determined by self-determination; and he concludes,

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12 *ibid.*, p. 70.

13 *ibid.*

I myself...am an object for myself whose nature depends, under certain conditions, on the intellect alone, but whose existence must always be presupposed.<sup>14</sup>

Given that I can be an object for myself, and that, by an act of 'free reflection' I can know that this object is my own creation - in that it comes to be because I present it to myself - it is not surprising that Fichte should hold that,

By reflection I have discovered that I myself, by my own act alone, produce my whole system of thought.<sup>15</sup>

This statement must be seen in the light of Fichte's conviction that 'I myself' am nothing other than thought. In holding this view, Fichte is the first to make explicit what had only remained in the shadows for Descartes; for Fichte, there can be no self whatever in the absence of reflection,<sup>16</sup> in the sense that through reflection I discover that 'I am wholly my own creation'.<sup>17</sup> But he expresses this last point much more eloquently when he says,

I am beforehand as a thinking what I am afterwards as an active being. I create myself:- my being by my thought, my thought by thought itself.<sup>18</sup>

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14 Fichte, The Science of Knowledge, ed. and trans. by Peter Heath and John Lachs, ( Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982) p. 10.

15 ibid., p. 104.

16 ibid., p. 258.

17 Fichte, The Vocation of Man, op. cit., p. 103.

18 ibid., p. 30.

What Fichte is saying here connects strikingly with Pico's words in the Oration. But Fichte articulates even more explicitly the idea which, I have argued, drove Pico:- the age-old notion of creation by the word. If we look back now to Descartes, we can see how he deflected this notion by obstructing it with the idea of the self as a mental substance. As long as the self was regarded as a substance there could be no scope for the notion that thought itself actually constitutes the self. In the kind of dualism introduced by Descartes, thought could have no creative function; it could only be the means for an introspective mirroring.

The effect of Descartes' ideas was so powerful that even when the notion of the self as a substance was no longer a coherent idea - as its rapid disintegration in Locke and Hume soon testified - the role of thought still remained arrested within the framework of the observer and the thoughts observed. Leibniz briefly recovered the value of reflection as the means for penetrating to the truth of how things are, but he suffered the vehement objections of Kant, who brought the conviction that thought is separate from its object to its highest level of development. It was not until Fichte rebelled against Kant's thing-in-itself that he became free to reveal the creative function of thought in constituting the self.

Fichte comes closer to Pico's position than anyone else considered so far. In fact, Fichte appears to toy just as ambiguously as Pico did with a conception of creation ex nihilo. At one level, his talk of self-creation is more like a self-making within certain limitations; Fichte says, for instance,

I myself will make myself whatever I am to be. I must then,- and this is what is most surprising, and, at first sight, absurd in

the idea, - I must already be, in a certain sense, that which I shall become, in order to be able to become so; I must possess a twofold being, of which the first shall contain the fundamental determining principle of the second.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, whilst this sounds more like a self-making than a creating of self ex nihilo, Fichte would not be faced with what he recognises as a paradox - that I make myself, yet I must already be what I shall become - if he were not writing in the shadow of a connection between the idea of creation ex nihilo and the self. If it is just a question of shaping what I will become, then 'making' merely involves something like following an already given pattern - in the form of a set of determinables, or potentialities - in me, which is adaptable enough to enable me to become whatever I choose to be. All I have to do is to decide which way of being is most appropriate for actualising what lies dormant within me. In that sense I already am what I will become, and there is nothing absurd about this idea - as Fichte claims; it is merely a question of developing something - akin to Pico's seeds - already implanted in me. Fichte himself captures this sense when he says that we must possess a 'twofold being', of which the first contains the fundamental principle of the second.

But if 'make' means that I 'create' myself, in the sense that 'I' am nothing until 'I' originate from, and am brought into being by thought, then there cannot be an already existing pattern, and to say that I already am what I will make myself to be, does strike a note of absurdity. In that case Fichte faces a paradox, and the fact that he acknowledges this himself, and that he uses the word 'create' rather than 'make' more than

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19 ibid., p. 29.

once in similar contexts, strongly indicates that he is toying with some sense of creating.

The question is:- what sense? One way of resolving what Fichte means might be to say that the word 'create' is misunderstood in the contexts already quoted. Whilst 'create' usually entails the notion of 'making out of nothing', what Fichte - and Pico too - really mean is a making, a fashioning or constituting out of something already to hand; they are using the word 'create' in this latter sense rather than in the former. But this argument is not altogether satisfactory, for it remains the case that they do link creation with thought. That is, whilst it can be argued that thought is already to hand, as it were, it is not a material of any kind that can be fashioned into any thing, like the clay used by the potter. In an important respect, then, thought is akin to the Word of God; if God created ex nihilo - out of nothing, by the Word, then it follows that when humans create out of nothing but thought, they create ex nihilo.

All this presents very real difficulties for how Fichte should be read. All the more so because he himself would not have intended to convey the impression that he implicitly accepted a parallel between human self-making and God's creating ex nihilo; his strong religious commitment would have been too powerful an obstacle. Yet, he does convey the impression that he is speaking of self-creating in the sense of ex nihilo; so there is at least a problem of interpretation here, a problem that is even more evident in what he writes after the passage quoted above. For example, Fichte goes on to say that if I consult my immediate self-consciousness on how it is that I make myself into what I already am, I discover that I have the knowledge of various courses of action, from which I may choose. I

then consider very carefully all the various courses, and finally decide upon one, and this resolution of my will is followed by corresponding action. Here, then, 'I am beforehand, in the mere conception of a purpose, what subsequently, by means of this conception, I am in will and action'.<sup>20</sup>

Again, as in the example given before, this strongly suggests that our self-making consists in following a certain pattern, in the form of 'the knowledge of various courses of action'. I am free to choose whichever course I prefer, and, after careful consideration, I select one and put it into action. Whilst I might be fashioning myself through the choice I make and live out, this does not necessarily mean that I am creating myself, since I am both restricted and facilitated by a knowledge of various courses of action, a knowledge that already exists, which I have not necessarily created (I may have accepted it from others in the form of advice). I may be further restrained because the 'courses of action' open to me have resulted from circumstances beyond my control. We often face difficult choices just because they have come about as a result of circumstances not of our own making. Under these conditions, I fashion myself within certain limitations, and, even though my newly fashioned being may transcend those limitations, it cannot be said that I have 'created' myself; rather, I have 'made' myself. There is no difficulty in interpreting Fichte's words in this way.

However, in choosing, I am 'beforehand, in the mere conception of a purpose, what subsequently, by means of this conception, I am in will and action'. That seems to suggest that through thought - through the

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 30.

conception of a purpose - I have created what I will later instantiate through action. This is consistent with Fichte's earlier statement:- 'I create myself; my being by my thought, my thought by thought itself. In this light, it seems that to say I will make myself into what I already am means that the pattern which I will follow has not been given - implanted like Pico's seeds. Rather, the pattern is created by my own 'conception of a purpose' which I will translate into action, and in that sense I become afterwards what at present I conceptualise myself to be. Hence Fichte can say that by my thought I create myself, and this is not logically different from creation by the Word.

So it seems that Fichte is as ambiguous as Pico before him. We can, however, form a clearer view of what Fichte means by 'create' than we can from Pico's thought. Fichte is working with a conception of consciousness as that which arises from the original unchangeable unity of our intelligent activity. This unchangeable unity would never know itself were it not accompanied by a capacity to be conscious of - other objects and itself. Without intentionality, without this capacity to be conscious of, intellectual activity could not become aware of itself. But this capacity could never be exercised if consciousness, as pure activity, did not move through various transitions. Since the transitions do occur - any activity implies transitions - consciousness is enabled to recognise its own capacity to be conscious of, and with that it can also recognise that to be conscious of involves the creation of a presentation of an object. This has already been made clear in the case of the thing-in-itself discussed earlier.

'I' emerges in the same way. When consciousness abstracts from what it thinks, it becomes to itself an object whose content is a specific presentation. This is called 'I'. Consciousness therefore presents 'I' to itself - an 'I' which is compelled to presuppose itself as that which is to be determined by itself, or, what amounts to the same thing, 'I' is determined by the self-determination of consciousness. That is why Fichte can say, 'I myself am an object for myself whose nature depends, under certain conditions, on the intellect alone, but whose existence must always be presupposed'. That is, the existence of 'I' must always be presupposed because as soon as I say 'I' that existence is posited absolutely, even though 'I' is nothing other than the creation of consciousness. I myself, then, am a mixture of what is given, the intellect, and what is created; I am an embodied consciousness, capable of creating, supremely amongst other things, I myself.

In this light, Fichte seems far less ambiguous. Rather, his position emerges as one which incorporates a notion of creation ex nihilo within a conception of the intellect as absolute activity of pure thought. This self-active force is compelled to express itself, and thereby create; its very activity implies that expression, for activity cannot be non-expressive. From Herder through Fichte to Hegel and beyond, the conviction that there cannot be a force without its outward manifestation was taken for granted. In Fichte, the self-active force we know as our intellect has its source in an original, active, thinking power, which exists through nature, a power which manifests itself when 'the thinking being arises and develops himself according to the laws of Nature'.<sup>21</sup> But this is only one

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21 ibid., p. 14.

of the forces in nature; the other is an original formative power, which manifests itself as the 'man-forming' power. He says,

I am that which the man-forming power of Nature - having been what it was, being what it is, and standing in this particular relation to the other opposing powers of Nature - could become...I am not the man-forming power but one of its manifestations.<sup>22</sup>

Fichte's thinking at this point must be set against the background of a movement of thought that has been called Expressivism by Charles Taylor - a current of thought moving towards an idea of human action and life as expression. According to Taylor, there were two essential strands characterising Expressivism. First, the conviction that in the act of realising the human form, an inner force imposes itself on external reality; that is, the ideal realisation of each human essence must not only conform to the idea of the form human - as in the Aristotelean sense - but it is also internally generated. The internal momentum required for this is an inner power that expresses itself by striving to realise, and maintain, its own shape in the face of others the external world might impose. From this point, the notion of a self-unfolding subject developed.<sup>23</sup> The second strand of Expressivism was the understanding that the realisation of a form expresses that form, in that to realise is to make manifest, and so, to express, to clarify and make determinate what that form is.<sup>24</sup>

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22 *ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

23 Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983) p. 15.

24 *ibid.*, p. 16.

Against this background - of a climate of thought in which to express means to clarify, to make determinate through manifestation, and in that sense to create - Fichte's apparent ambiguity can be resolved in a way that is not possible in the case of Pico. This can be explained as follows. In Fichte, my intellect is a manifestation of an original thinking power - a manifestation, not a creation, for my intellect has not been produced as a result of the creativity of this power in the sense in which I might create a work of art, or in the common understanding of God's creating me. In both these senses there is an assumption that creativity results in a creation which has a nature or character different from that of its creator, as in the case of a painting which is quite different from the painter. In the case of myself, even though I may be created by God in such a way that I am free to choose how I shall become, I have nevertheless already been created that way and not any other. I am therefore limited by certain constraints, and my nature is different from God's. To be a creation, therefore, invites the possibility that my intellect is not so much an act of pure autonomous activity, capable of forming a self, than a product with certain features such as self-determination built into it.

But if my intellect is a manifestation, rather than a creation of a power, then the nature of my intellect cannot be different from that power. If that power is an original thinking power, then its manifestation - my intellect - must also be a thinking power; a power moreover, in which 'I' emerge. This is not to say that manifestations cannot be different; the sun's manifestations - its rays - are many, and they change during successive times of the day but the sun remains the same. Similarly, there are many different embodied intellects - I am different from you - but my

intellect and yours are the same in that both are manifestations of the one original power. At the same time, we are also manifestations of the 'man-forming power'; together, these two powers manifest as separate embodied intellects. Each intellect - each pure activity of thinking - in turn forms itself into 'I'.

The point being made here is that if my intellect is a creation, then it is likely to be a product distinct from its creator, and if that is so, then it becomes more difficult to explain how it is that the creative capacity of that intellect is of the same order as that of its creator. If I am a creature, then it is not so easy to establish that I too can create ex nihilo by the word, in the same manner in which God created me. Yet I do create ex nihilo by the word; as Fichte says, 'I create myself; my being by my thought, my thought by thought itself'. But if my intellect manifests an original thinking power, and is therefore itself purely an act of thinking, then the problem disappears, for then the coming into being of 'I', ex nihilo by the word, is not at all inconsistent with the nature of my intellect. So by holding that my intellect is a manifestation, Fichte avoids the problem inherent in the notion of creation in this context.

Still, it might be objected that whilst this is all very well, it cannot be ignored that Fichte talks in terms of creation, and not only manifestation. So at first sight these differences between creation and manifestation, far from clarifying the issue, appear to confuse it. Fichte's position now seems more, rather than less, problematic, for there is no way of escaping the fact that he explicitly uses the term 'create' as well as 'manifest' in this particular context.

However, it is also the case that Fichte is above all intent on steering clear of any hint of the Cartesian notion that the self is some kind of given entity; so it is more convincing to understand him to be making a simple logical point. That is, if I owe you a dollar, then you will be satisfied only when you receive a dollar from me, but there is no particular dollar such that I owe it. Similarly, I am essentially active; I am a manifestation of power, a capacity to do, and what I do is create a self. But there is no predetermined self such that I make it. Rather, whilst I cannot help but make the power I manifest determinate somehow, it is nevertheless up to me to determine how it shall be made determinate. This 'making determinate' - which is not pre-determined in any way other than its having to be determined somehow - is not unreasonably called creation, since it is not out of anything; it is a far cry from the manufacturing model of the potter modelling clay into a predetermined form. At the same time, the pre-condition for such creation is the original thinking power, which manifests itself as each individual intellect. In this sense, both manifestation and creation contribute to the emergence of I myself.

Fichte's conception of self-creating can, therefore, be rendered consistent within his own scheme of thought. But this means more than just an advance from Pico's position; more significantly for the major themes of this thesis, it means that there need not be an opposition between self-making and self-creating, that in certain contexts, such as in Fichte's thought, a reconciliation between two ideas that were regarded as contrary in the case of Pico discussed in chapter 1 can be effected. Yet for all his innovative thinking, Fichte is caught in the net of a past legacy, that of the distinction between the observer and the thoughts observed. Despite

his attempt to collapse the subject-object distinction, his manner of conceiving how thought creates a presentation of itself as an object remains bound within a dichotomous framework. The source of this dichotomy is the nature of reflection, for reflection and the self are inextricably linked in Fichte's work.

### **Reflection as the Medium for Self-Creating.**

Originally, according to Fichte in The Science of Knowledge, Das Ich - hereafter referred to as the self,<sup>25</sup> - posits itself through its own activity; the self exists merely by virtue of self-assertion. It is therefore at once agent and the product of action; the active, and the activity brought about, and so 'I am' expresses an act, not a thing.<sup>26</sup> Above all, as pointed out earlier, the self presents itself to itself, and to that extent imposes on itself the form of a presentation - called 'I'. Through this action, the self becomes for the first time a something, an object. In this form, consciousness acquires a substrate, which exists, and is generally thought of as having bodily form.<sup>27</sup>

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25 To translate Fichte's Das Ich as the self does introduce a degree of distortion in interpreting him; for instance, Das Ich is a term used by Fichte to represent his denial of the Cartesian idea of the self as an entity, a connotation that the term the self still has. But in spite of this, to use the term Das Ich may prove more confusing, in that a question of the relation between Das Ich and the self we have been discussing so far in the preceding chapters might emerge. So, in the interests of consistency, Fichte's Das Ich will here be referred to as the self, whilst I will attempt, as far as possible, to guard against the impression that Fichte's self is to be understood as an entity of some kind.

26 Fichte, The Science of Knowledge, *op.cit.*, p.97

27 *ibid.*, p. 98.

Therefore, argues Fichte, the self begins by an absolute positing of its own existence. Further, the self also posits the not-self - the arguments for this will be given in the next chapter, all that needs to be noted here is that they are similar to those Fichte uses to establish that the self posits itself. However, once self and not-self are posited, an opposition is brought about, which threatens the identity of consciousness. So the opposites must be taken up into the identity of the one consciousness.<sup>28</sup>

The question now is:- how can self and not-self, being and non-being, reality and negation, be brought together without mutual elimination and destruction? Fichte's answer is that they will mutually limit one another, and in that act the opposites will be united. He explains that to limit something is to abolish its reality - not wholly but only in part - by negation. This means that apart from reality and negation, the notion of a limit also contains that of divisibility. The act in which each opposite limits the other entails positing the divisibility of both self and not-self. If both were not divisible, their reality could not be limited. Fichte claims that limitation and divisibility occur immediately within and alongside the act of opposition; they are one and the same, distinguished only in reflection.

Since this is the case, he believes, it is possible to conclude that the self is not posited in the self with that measure of reality with which the not-self is posited. That is, a certain measure of reality is abolished in the self and attributed to the not-self. Similarly, since the not-self is posited, the self must be also. Both in general are posited as

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28 *ibid.*, p. 107.

divisible in respect to their reality, and this concept of divisibility provides the form of the unity of these opposites. As long as each limits the other, neither one can destroy the other, thereby destroying the unity of the one, identical consciousness which contains both as opposites.

But this whole account arises from concepts, from certain notions that are posited, and from careful deductions made from them; all of it on the basis of reflection. Fichte himself points this out, he says, concerning the self and not-self,

Only now, in virtue of the concept thus established, can it be said of both that they are something. The absolute self of the first principle is not something (it has, and can have, no predicate); it is simply what it is, and this can be explained no further. But now, by means of this concept, consciousness contains the whole of reality; and to the not-self is allotted that part of it which does not attach to the self, and vice versa. Both are something; the not-self is what the self is not, and vice versa. As opposed to the absolute self (though - as will be shown in due course - it can only be opposed in so far as it is presented, not as it is in itself) the not-self is absolutely nothing; as opposed to the limitable self it is negative quantity.<sup>29</sup>

This passage needs some explication. The concept Fichte refers to which establishes that both self and not-self are something, is the concept of divisibility. The absolute self, however, is not something, for this self is the one originally posited, about which nothing further can be

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29 ibid., p. 109.

said, because if I think that self I destroy its unity by introducing a separation through the very act of thinking. Still, if we ask the question:- how does the self exist for itself, which, according to Fichte, is the same as asking what is the mode of construction of the self,<sup>30</sup> we are driven inwards, and then we find that in thinking of this question our intelligent activity reverts into itself and makes itself its own object. This activity cannot help but proceed by means of concepts which further partition that object. For example, self and not self come into being through the concept of opposition. Yet this partition has to be overcome in order to restore the original unity. So by means of the concepts of limitation and divisibility, consciousness can be conceived as containing the whole of reality.

But all this is nothing other than the work of reflection. It is reflection which discovers that in consciousness the self is both equal and opposed to itself. Further, reflection reveals that in consciousness, the absolute self is posited as indivisible, whilst the self to which the not-self is opposed is posited as divisible. Hence, Fichte concludes, 'insofar as there is a not-self opposed to it, the self is itself in opposition to the absolute self.'<sup>31</sup> The intricacies of these oppositions need not concern us here. Fichte requires the concept of the not-self because that will become the source for representations of the world, so that, in keeping with his Idealism, he can ground the science of knowledge in the self, but for present purposes that issue is irrelevant. What is much more significant is that Fichte shows himself to be aware that reflection

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30 *ibid.*, p. 33.

31 *ibid.*

partitions the primordial unity of the intellect because it analyses by generating different and finite concepts.

This primordial unity - the absolute self - of which he speaks, is the 'intellectual intuition' of 'the absolute self-activity of the self';<sup>32</sup> an intuition not at first separated from the 'entire enterprise of the intellect'. This intuition which the intellect has of its own activity is not yet endowed with self-consciousness; self-consciousness comes about by a further act 'upon an act itself', that is, by a further act upon the original act of intellectual intuition. This further act occurs when the intuition 'reverts into itself' by turning towards the self-activity of which it is a part, at that point something more happens, the possibility arises of conceiving that the activity intuited is self-activity.

Once this act of conception occurs consciousness comes into play, a consciousness which recognises that the conception the intellect has of its own self-activity is the concept of the self, and so consciousness is at first self-consciousness before becoming consciousness of everything else which is not-self. So it is not that the self originates in consciousness; it originates in the intellect, for at first there is only intellectual intuition with merely the possibility of self-consciousness. Rather, the self comes to exist for itself through conceiving itself at that point when intellectual intuition reverts into itself - a reflective act which for Fichte signals the creation of the self. This act of conception is closely allied to consciousness;<sup>33</sup> at that point the self asserts itself, it posits itself. All this relies heavily on the assumption that intellectual

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32 ibid., p. 44.

33 ibid., pp. 33-36.

activity does not always entail consciousness; it can remain pure intuition with only the possibility of consciousness. Consciousness itself is distinguished from intellectual activity by a special characteristic, namely, consciousness is always consciousness of something.

This distinction between the absolute self and the self as it is for consciousness is an important feature in Fichte's account. By means of it, he can preserve the indivisible unity of the absolute self whilst acknowledging that the reflected self of consciousness is necessarily a divided and restricted self. This is clear from his assertion that as surely as I posit myself, I posit myself as something restricted, and because of this I am finite. This restrictedness of mine, which conditions my own positing of myself, is primordial in character.

One might wish at this point to account further, either for the restrictedness of myself qua object of reflection, as due to my necessary restrictedness as the reflecting subject, so that I would be finite to myself because I can only think the finite; or conversely, for the restrictedness of the reflecting subject, as due to the restrictedness of the object reflected upon, so that I should be able to think the finite only, because I myself am finite; but such an account would explain nothing; for initially I am neither the reflecting subject nor the reflected object, and neither of the two is conditioned by the other, since I am both in combination; though this union I cannot indeed think, since in the act of doing so I separate the reflected from that which reflects.<sup>34</sup>

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34 ibid., pp. 60-61.

The reflected self of consciousness is a restricted self because it is a constricted image of an unthinkable unity. In this case, the reflecting subject and the object reflected upon are one and the same, but as soon as the attempt is made to think this unity, the separation into subject and object inevitably occurs. The reason is that the self comes into being through that capacity of consciousness to be essentially consciousness of something - and this is the source of what has so often been encountered before in this thesis as the gulf between the observer and the thoughts observed. But such a created self can only partially represent the whole entity, or what Fichte calls the absolute self. Yet, whilst Fichte knows this, the way he nevertheless casts it is that the original unity divides itself into two - the self posits itself through its own activity. In consciousness, one part can observe the other, and even become aware of how it creates a self out of what its own other part represents to it, but that part which actually performs this activity is a part which is not observed, which remains as an obscure but real shadow in the background.

Fichte himself is aware of this, otherwise he would not hold that as surely as I posit myself, I posit myself as restricted, and therefore I am finite. That he addresses this point, implies his recognition that a self created in the way he articulates cannot fulfil the claim to wholeness that we intuitively attribute to self; after all, when I say 'I', I instinctively and absolutely indicate a complete entity. What might offset this difficulty somewhat is his conviction that whilst thought, in reflection, can only divide, since it is the source of the gulf between subject and object, it is also through thought that there arises a connection between subject and object. Fichte maintains that though this last point is purely logical - since it is neither directly felt nor

intuitively perceived - it is nevertheless impossible that the connection between subject and object could be conceived of as other than through thought.

Throughout his work, Fichte strives endlessly in pursuit of a point of balance between the simple unity of the self about which nothing can be said, and the reflected, and thereby created self of consciousness, of which a great deal can be said because it has been created by nothing but thought. Yet despite his efforts to re-unify a self divided into subject and object, the inescapable conclusion has to be that Fichte casts his whole perspective into the mould of the observer and the thoughts observed. In that respect, he is unable to escape the dominant current of his immediate past. Almost the first principle with which he begins is that the self posits itself, and from that point a breach comes into being which is never fully overcome. Yet, he himself is aware of this, an awareness that flows into an acceptance that there is no solution to the problem of the unity and division of the self. Faced with this problem, Fichte's answer was to invent a notion of the self as the interplay of the finite and the infinite, and that invention in turn cast a long shadow over major thinkers like Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche too.

## CHAPTER 6

### **SELF - A RELATION BETWEEN THE FINITE AND THE INFINITE**

The dilemma posed by the idea of a self at once united and divided, drove Fichte to accept that certain contradictions in how the self is structured remain inevitable and unresolvable. His interpretation of the elements coming to light through his analysis gave rise to two opposing views:- one, a picture of the self as a quantum of force, as the primordial wholeness of the self-activity of the intellect, a unity heedless of that self-activity and therefore unknown to itself; the other, an image of a self created, but also divided, by consciousness - one part always contemplating itself as the reflected object, whilst another part, the reflecting subject, remains in shadow. Since both views had their foundation in his own analysis, Fichte proposed that the entire complexity could only be expressed by balancing one with the other in a union of opposites, a union cast within a context of the finite and the infinite.

For Fichte, the self is an 'infinitely outreaching activity'<sup>1</sup> of unbounded self-assertion. To this there occurs a resistance in the form of the not-self. If the self yielded to this obstacle, its activity would be contained within bounds, and it could never move beyond those bounds; any activity of the self beyond the obstacle surrounding it would be impossible. To that extent, the self would not posit at all,<sup>2</sup> but that means that it would not be a self. In other words, if the self yielded to

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1 Fichte, The Science of Knowledge, ed. and trans. by Peter Heath and John Lachs, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982) p. 193.

2 ibid., p. 192.

resistance it could no longer be a self because it would no longer be able to posit itself as self-positing; rather, contained within bounds, it would be defined by something other than itself, namely, the not-self.

Yet the self must posit itself - there can be no self without self-positing. The self is, when it posits itself to be, and it is also what it posits itself to be - so the self cannot yield entirely; it must posit itself beyond the line of resistance. This point becomes the basis for Fichte's argument that the activity of the self extends into the infinite. If it did not, Fichte argues, then the self could not itself set limits to this activity; the self could posit no boundary. However, the self is obliged to posit a boundary, because it encounters a resistance in the form of the not-self. This boundary with which the self must limit itself when confronted by the not-self, takes the form of not positing itself beyond the limit it sets itself. What needs to be noted especially is that this restraint comes from within the self; it is not imposed externally. Fichte makes clear that no agent other than the self sets the boundary that limits it.

The boundary lies wherever in the infinite the self posits it to be. The self is finite, because it is to be subjected to limits, but it is infinite within this finitude because the boundary can be posited ever farther out, to infinity. It is infinite in its finitude and finite in its infinity.<sup>3</sup>

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3 ibid., p. 228.

The self, then, sets 'the indeterminate, unbounded, infinite limit'<sup>4</sup>, and the very fact that the self can set such a boundary at whatever limit it chooses, proves to Fichte that it reaches into the infinite. He says,

The self is only what it posits itself to be. That it is infinite, is to say that it posits itself as infinite; it determines itself by the predicate of infinite; hence it bounds itself (the self) as substratum of infinitude; it differentiates itself from its infinite activity (both of which, as such, are one and the same); and so it was obliged to behave, if the self was to be infinite.<sup>5</sup>

In bounding itself, the self differentiates itself from its own activity, even as this activity must again be re-appropriated as its own, an event which Fichte describes as 'one and the same undivided and indistinguishable act'.<sup>6</sup> In being re-appropriated into the self, however, the activity is determined, and so not infinite; yet the activity must be infinite, otherwise the self could not set bounds around itself. What Fichte presents here is a continual, restless fluctuation between finite and infinite. He describes it as the

interplay of the self, in and with itself, whereby it posits itself at once as finite and infinite - an interplay which consists as it were in self-conflict, and is self-reproducing, in that the self endeavours to unite the irreconcilable, now attempting to receive the infinite in the form of the finite, now, baffled, positing it again outside the latter, and in that

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4 *ibid.*, p. 192.

5 *ibid.*, pp. 192-193.

6 *ibid.*

very moment seeking once more to entertain it under the form of finitude.<sup>7</sup>

This conflict is never-ending; it can never be finally resolved, only dissected and analysed for the purpose of understanding why there is a partition at the heart of what is also whole.

It needs to be added here that the appearance of the not-self follows from Fichte's idea that the self posits itself as self-positing.<sup>8</sup> The self posits itself in this way because it is compelled by an inner drive to express itself. The reason for this became clear in the last chapter - in that any force can only be if it manifests itself. This means that the not-self is itself a product of the self-positing self. That is, the self would not be able to posit itself as self-positing if it did not distinguish itself from what it conceives as its opposite, the not-self. The act of self-positing is only possible on the assumption by the self of a not-self. Simply by the act of positing, the self concedes the possibility that there might also be something within it that is not actually posited by itself. Fichte explains,

The self posits itself absolutely, and is thereby complete in itself and closed to any impression from without. But if it is to be a self, it must also posit itself as self-positing; and by this new positing, relative to an original positing, it opens itself to external influences...Both types of positing are conditions for an operation of the not-self; without the first,

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7 *ibid.*, p. 193.

8 *ibid.*, p. 195.

there would be no activity to undergo limitation; without the second, this activity would not be limited for the self.<sup>9</sup>

With this, it also becomes clear how Fichte envisages the relation between self and not-self. When the self admits the presence of the not-self it is no longer absolute and infinite; now, limited by the not-self, the self becomes determined and finite. The idea that the self cannot posit itself as self-positing unless it posits itself as determined by the not-self, implies that the self not only posits itself as determined, but that it also posits itself as the determinant. It is the determinant because the limiting factor - the not-self - is its own product. From this, Fichte draws the model of the self as the interplay of the finite and the infinite that has already been outlined.

This brief outline - of what is really a position Fichte argues for at considerable length - bears on his attempt to close the gap between the subjective and objective elements of the self. Even Fichte, intent as he was on presenting the wholeness of the self, could not do otherwise than acknowledge that such a gap opens inevitably as the result of reflection and consciousness. How he saw this, and how he tried to resolve the breach between the observer and the thoughts observed by collapsing the subject-object distinction was summarised in the last chapter. However, since Fichte's perspective proved significant for others, not the least of whom were Hegel and Kierkegaard, who also feature in this chapter, his analysis of consciousness and reflection - only glanced at in the last chapter - needs to be considered here in somewhat greater detail.

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9 *ibid.*, pp. 243-244.

Fichte's vision is that in general the self is absolutely one and the same self, but insofar as the self presents itself to itself - when consciousness creates a presentation of itself as an object - it is by no means the same as the absolute self. For one thing, the self that presents itself to itself is determined.

For we could in no way think of presentation in general as possible, save on the assumption of a check occurring to the infinitely and indeterminately outreaching activity of the self.<sup>10</sup>

So the presented self is determined, made so by the not-self. Therefore, in presenting itself to itself, the self presents itself as finite. At the same time, the very ability to present itself to itself involves a division of the self. Reflection and consciousness are fundamental to this division, as are reason and intelligence. Fichte claims that as intelligence, the self is dependent on the not-self.

The reason is as follows:- the absolute self is infinite and unbounded. Given that it is self-positing activity, it means that everything the self posits is posited as itself. From this point of view, therefore, the self includes everything; that is, the self includes an infinite, unbounded reality. But this activity is not self-conscious, it simply is all there is; everything is in one, and one in everything, so there is no distinguishing between self and anything else. In such a context, self-consciousness is impossible.

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10 ibid., p. 220.

It is only when the self opposes to itself a not-self, thereby necessarily positing limits to itself, that self-consciousness emerges.

As Fichte says,

It (the self) apportions the totality of posited being in general to the self and not-self; and to that extent necessarily posits itself as finite.<sup>11</sup>

The moment these limits have been posited, recognition of what is self and what is not self becomes possible for the first time, and so self-consciousness arises. Regarded in this way, the self

is an intelligence simply to the extent that a non-self exists.<sup>12</sup>

Fichte claims that consciousness is possible only through reflection, and reflection only through determination.<sup>13</sup> Reflection is a movement between subject and object, between the presenting and the presented self. Fichte sees this movement as involving two types of activity on the part of the self. The positing activity of the absolute self relates only to itself, because all that is posited by it, is posited as itself. Therefore, the whole activity of the absolute self is directed towards itself, and this activity engenders and encompasses all being. In this sense also the self is infinite, since its activity returns upon the boundlessness of itself. But insofar as the self posits limits - in the form of the not-self - its activity does not relate immediately to itself, but rather to a not-self. This is because the self determines itself within the limits bounded by the not-self, and so its activity is no longer

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11 *ibid.*, p. 225.

12 *ibid.*, p. 231.

13 *ibid.*, p. 237.

pure, but objective activity - an activity which posits, which creates, an object for itself. Fichte uses the word Gegenstand for this object, because it is an object in the sense that every object of an activity is necessarily opposed (gegen) to that activity, for it rejects or objects to that activity.<sup>14</sup>

The two types of activity - one moving from the centre of the self (objective activity), the other moving towards the centre of the self (pure activity) - form the structure of reflection. Fichte argues that the infinitely outreaching activity of the self is checked at the point where the not-self offers resistance; at that point the self's activity is driven back upon itself, and so the self does not exhaust the infinite. Fichte describes the outreaching activity, which was to extend to infinity, as centrifugal. The point at which this activity is checked, is the point where this activity is reflected, and so it becomes centripetal. In this way, Fichte fills in the details of his vision of the self as outreaching activity, which is checked by the operation of the not-self, and therefore forced to return to itself.

That this description applies to the very movement of reflection is not insignificant, for it allows Fichte to claim - in a way somewhat reminiscent of Leibniz - that reflection is an inherent aspect of the self's law. In reflection, a centrifugal tendency can be discerned in the reflecting subject, and a centripetal tendency which resists it, in the form of the reflected object. The self must reflect upon itself, and it must demand that in this reflection, it - the absolute self - is found to be the whole of reality. This necessary reflection of the self upon

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14 ibid., pp. 226-227.

itself, is the basis of all its going beyond itself.<sup>15</sup> Fichte explains that since the self posits itself as self-positing,

it must have the principle of life and consciousness solely within itself. And thus, as surely as it is a self, it must contain unconditionally and without any ground the principle of reflecting upon itself; and hence, from the beginning, we have the self in a dual aspect; partly, insofar as it is reflective, and to that extent the direction of its activity is centripetal; partly, insofar as it is that upon which reflection takes place, and to that extent the direction of its activity is centrifugal, and centrifugal out to infinity at that.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, although it strives to fill out the infinite, the self is at the same time compelled to reflect upon itself, and it cannot do this without being limited, so its drive outwards must be halted and turned back. In this lies the ultimate ground of consciousness, which is nothing other than an interaction of the self with itself, by way of a not-self that has to be regarded from two different points of view - a not-self at once created by the self, and alien to it. Fichte thinks of this as a circle from which the 'finite spirit cannot escape, and cannot wish to escape, unless it is to disown reason and demand its own annihilation'.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, says Fichte, the idea of an infinity to be completed, floats as a vision before us, and is rooted in our innermost nature. The self is infinite, but merely in respect to its striving; it strives to be infinite. But the very concept of

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15 *ibid.*, p. 243.

16 *ibid.*, p. 241.

17 *ibid.*, p. 248.

striving already involves finitude, for that to which there is no counter-striving is not striving at all. If the self did more than strive...it would not be a self: it would not posit itself, and would therefore be nothing. But if it did not endlessly strive in this fashion, again it could not posit itself, for it could oppose nothing to itself; again it would be no self, and would therefore be nothing.<sup>18</sup>

Fichte himself strives to fit all the details of his arguments together into one coherent whole, so that the self he is articulating retains its absolute wholeness and infinitude even as its finitude is presented in terms of the structure of reflection and consciousness. As for the gap between subject and object, between the observer and the thoughts observed, Fichte attempts to close it by adhering to the concept of the absolute wholeness of the self despite its divided state. But this wholeness is not achieved through an evolved concept of reflection, such as Hegel later presented; rather, in Fichte reflection remains a dividing force, unable to resolve the dichotomy to which it gives shape. The inevitable conclusion must be that despite Fichte's attempt to collapse the subject-object distinction, and despite his stress on the wholeness of the absolute self, there is no way open to heal the breach brought about through reflection by means of reflection itself. Instead, what we are left with is a reflection so fundamental that it is a law of the self, and the very source of a never-ending conflict between the finite and infinite aspects of the self.

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18 *ibid.*, p. 238.

This theme of the self as an uneasy interplay of the finite and the infinite proved to be a powerful provocation to several thinkers after Fichte. The two who are most important for present purposes are Hegel and Kierkegaard. Fichte, as already noted, had put forward the view that consciousness and intelligence arise from the division within the self. But for Hegel, such a division had to be resolved into a final unity of a kind far more convincing than any provided by Fichte himself. Hegel, taking into account the strife and the conflict inherent in Fichte's conception of the self, saw the relation between the finite and infinite as a process in which,

In thinking, I raise myself above all that is finite to the absolute and am infinite consciousness, while at the same time I am finite self-consciousness, indeed to the full extent of my empirical condition. Both sides, as well as their relation, exist for me [in] the essential unity of my infinite knowing and my finitude. These two sides seek each other and flee from each other. I am this conflict and this conciliation.<sup>19</sup>

Some commentators like Fackenheim hold that Hegel in the end let go of the conflict, for the infinite finally triumphs over the finite.<sup>20</sup> But it is not so much the case that Hegel let go of the conflict as that he never took the conflict as a permanent state of affairs in the first place, as Fichte did. From what was said in the last chapter, it is clear that whilst Hegel conceded that reflection begins by dividing consciousness, a

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19 Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, ed. P. C. Hodgson, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984) Vol. 1, p. 212. The passage occurs in Hegel's own Lecture Manuscript.

20 Emil L. Fackenheim, Metaphysics and Historicity, (Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, 1961) p. 69.

new unity must evolve, which will fully incorporate the reflective consciousness gained. Given his project, Hegel could not rest in the kind of contradiction tolerated by Fichte. Hegel's resolution of these problems provided a degree of completeness not achieved before or after him. Since this places him in a unique position, it is useful to glance first at someone whose position, in significant respects, came closer to Fichte's own than Hegel's ever did.

### **Kierkegaard - and the Self as a Relation.**

Kierkegaard also utilised ideas about the finite and the infinite, applying them to the nature of human being rather than to the self. In The Sickness Unto Death, his agreement and disagreement with Fichte forms a continuous undercurrent. The very beginning provides a good example of this, for Kierkegaard claims here that 'Man is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite'.<sup>21</sup> But the immediate impression given by these words, that Kierkegaard agrees entirely with Fichte on this issue, soon collapses when Kierkegaard says that as such, man is not yet a self.

His reason is that a synthesis is a relation between two factors, but the self is not such a relation, rather, the self is that in a relation which enables the relation to relate to itself. In tortured language that has often been taken as a parody of Hegel - although the target must surely be Fichte also - Kierkegaard writes,

The self is a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation [which accounts for it] that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not the

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21 Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death, trans. by W. Lowrie, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey) p. 146.

relation but [consists in the fact] that the relation relates itself to its own self.<sup>22</sup>

The notion that the self is that element in a relation which relates itself to its own self has something in common with Fichte's idea that the self is that which must posit itself as self-positing, for self-positing is not unlike self-relating in structure, in that to posit itself as self-positing presupposes a degree of self-relatedness on the part of the self. But that is as far as Fichte's influence goes; Kierkegaard is clearly uncomfortable with the unresolvable conflict between the finite and the infinite, which Fichte so vividly portrays and accepts as inevitable. Given that Fichte's influence on Kierkegaard is so obvious in many places, I want to suggest that Kierkegaard understood Fichte's interplay of opposites as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, that he objected to this, for reasons which will soon become clear, and that he proposed instead that man, and not the self, is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of soul and body.

Kierkegaard's reasoning for this can be reconstructed as follows:- if the self is regarded in Fichtean terms as self-positing then the self is not necessarily a synthesis of two opposing factors. In fact, it might prove difficult to hold that both propositions - that the self is self-positing, or a relation, and that the self is a synthesis of the finite and the infinite - are true of the self, for there is nothing in the nature of a synthesis which predisposes it to relate itself to itself so that it can be said to be a self. That is, a synthesis is not necessarily a blending and consolidating of two opposing factors, which, as a newly integrated

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22 ibid.

unity, relates itself to itself fully as a whole. Rather, a synthesis is a 'relation between two factors', in which 'the relation is the third term as a negative unity'.<sup>23</sup>

In saying this, Kierkegaard seems to be drawing upon the Hegelian notion of the absolute irreducibility of opposites which results from philosophical reflection. Hegel argues in an early work, The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy, that philosophical reflection can only deal with a synthesis in the form of an antinomy of absolutely dualistic terms. Philosophical reflection, linked as it is to the Understanding, can only continue the separating activity of this mode of thought. Hegel writes,

Infinity and finitude, indeterminateness and determinateness, etc., are reflective products ... There is no transition from the infinite to the finite, from the indeterminate to the determinate. The transition as synthesis becomes antinomy; for reflection, which separates absolutely, cannot allow a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, of the determinate and the indeterminate to be brought about, and it is reflection which legislates here.<sup>24</sup>

For Hegel, philosophical reflection 'aims at thorough-going determination', but determination proceeds through negation, in the sense that determination leads to the positing of an opposite to what is given. For example, if something is determinate, it must have an indeterminate before

23 ibid.

24 Hegel, The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy, quoted in The Tain of the Mirror, by Rodolphe Gasché, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, 1986) p. 37.

and after, so that the determinate is bounded by an indeterminate. Yet, from the perspective of the Understanding, that indeterminate is nothing, it is a mere beyond. Therefore, the determinate rests on nothing.<sup>25</sup>

It must have been with these points in mind that Kierkegaard claims that in a relation between two, the relation is a third term as a negative unity. Without taking on board the Hegelian distinctions between kinds of reflection, Kierkegaard nevertheless adopts the idea that a relation which comes into being through the linking of two determined and irreducible factors is an antinomic synthesis, in which opposition is preserved rather than overcome. This kind of synthesis cannot resolve the opposition, for there is a constant oscillation from one opposite to another - in fact Fichte's account of how the finite and the infinite aspects of the self interact could be regarded as a good example of this - and so the relation itself is not an integrated unity. Rather, the unity of such a relation remains indeterminate, and so there is nothing to facilitate its relating itself to itself. But if it cannot do this, then there is no self. In the present context, then, it is contradictory to hold that the self is both self-positing - in that it relates itself to itself - and a synthesis of the finite and the infinite.

On this basis - on understanding Fichte's interplay of the finite and the infinite in terms of a synthesis - Kierkegaard dismantles the connection Fichte had made between a self-positing self and a self which is also an interplay of the finite and the infinite - only to re-assemble it in a different way. If the self is self-positing, then it cannot be a synthesis, for a synthesis implies that the self has not yet come into

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25 *ibid.*

being. From this point of view - and this is exactly the position Kierkegaard takes up - it is more plausible to hold that human being, and not the self, is a synthesis of the finite and the infinite. Such a synthesis, according to Kierkegaard, is already present in the common understanding of human being as body and soul. But as long as human being is regarded only as such - as body and soul - there can be no self; therefore, it is the task of each human being freely to become a self.

For Kierkegaard, a self is constituted when a relation relates itself to its own self. When this happens, the relation is a 'positive third term'<sup>26</sup>, and not a negative unity. But this capacity to relate itself to itself is an extra factor, not to be drawn, as we have just seen, from the nature of a synthesis. To account for this extra factor, Kierkegaard analyses the nature of despair. Instead of offering an objective account of the constitution of the self in conceptual terms somewhat in the style of Kant and Fichte, Kierkegaard draws the rigour of his thinking from passionate commitment to his belief that any concern we might have with the nature of the self immediately touches our very existence, and is therefore of deep ethical significance. Consequently, he avoids a quality of detachment in his writing, demanding instead a personal, subjective involvement from himself and his reader, and a suitable medium for generating such involvement is the phenomenological approach initiated by Hegel.

By using this method, Kierkegaard explores what it means for a relation to relate itself to its own self. To begin with, such a relation 'must either have constituted itself or have been constituted by

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26 Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

another'<sup>27</sup>. Since the self is capable of experiencing several forms of despair - and Kierkegaard lays out what these forms are, and how they become manifest - it must be the case that the self is constituted by another. This is because there is one form of despair, that of despairingly willing to be oneself, which is only possible on the assumption that the self has not constituted itself. If the self had constituted itself, it would be more a question of not willing to be one's own self, of willing to get rid of oneself.

But to despairingly will to be oneself is possible only in defiance of what has been given; it would make no sense to despairingly will to be myself if I can make myself according to my own will. Rather, this state of despair suggests a will to be oneself according to one's own desires, and yet being unable to become such a self. Since, according to Kierkegaard, we are capable of experiencing the frustration of this condition, it must mean that we have been constituted by a Power other than ourselves. So what he calls the 'formula' - that the self is constituted by another - is

the expression for the total dependence of the relation (the self namely), the expression for the fact that the self cannot of itself attain and remain in equilibrium and rest by itself, but only by relating itself to that Power which constituted the whole relation.<sup>28</sup>

Given this, the human self is, ideally, 'a relation which relates itself to its own self, and in relating itself to its own self, relates

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27 ibid.

28 ibid., p. 147.

itself to another'.<sup>29</sup> I take it that Kierkegaard, in saying this, clearly believes he can avoid what he saw as the difficulty Fichte faced and never successfully resolved:- that of the self as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite which has the character of continual fluctuation. Kierkegaard attempts to overcome the oscillation between the two opposites by grounding the relation that is the self not in itself, but in something other than itself, namely:- in the power that constituted it. By holding that the self can only return to a state of equilibrium and rest by relating itself 'to that power which constituted the whole relation', that power becomes the unifying force encompassing and thereby stilling the flux and conflict of a self struggling with both the finite and the infinite.

But to achieve that state of equilibrium is no mean feat; the self has to strive for it, and a crucial element in this struggle is the presence of despair, because despair comes from

the relation wherein the synthesis relates itself to itself, in that God who made man a relationship lets this go as it were out of His hand, that is, in the fact that the relation relates itself to itself. And herein, in the fact that the relation is spirit, is the self, consists the responsibility under which all despair lies, and so lies every instant it exists.<sup>30</sup>

Released by the power which posited it, the potential self is a synthesis of the finite and the infinite. Left on its own, this synthesis - human being - is driven to relate itself to itself, but this is the root of its despair, for the human will comes into play, willing that in

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29 *ibid.*, p. 146.

30 *ibid.*, p. 149.

relating itself to itself the emerging self might be fully independent, fully its own creation. Yet the self can never quite convince itself that it has accomplished this complete independence; in unguarded moments, the self experiences its own inability to truly create itself, and then despair becomes manifest. Yet to be a self, the original synthesis must relate itself to itself, only it must do so not in accordance with its own will, but in such a way that in relating itself to its own self it relates itself to another. Kierkegaard suggests that the only way to eradicate despair is for the self to relate itself to its own self with a will to be itself as a self 'grounded transparently in the Power which posited it.'<sup>31</sup>

This is not as simple as it sounds, however. It involves becoming a self from out of factors that have been given; a process aided powerfully by reflection. Kierkegaard is just as sensitive as Kant, Fichte and Hegel to the element of mirroring in reflection, but unlike the other three he purposely uses this element as a basis for exploring what the infinite and finite might mean in relation to the self. So he begins by asserting that when the self is first constituted by the power which posited it, the self is - in the Aristotelean sense - in potency. Once the self is in this sense,

then in order to become it reflects itself in the medium of imagination, and with that the infinite possibility comes into view. The self...is just as possible as it is necessary; for though it is itself, it has to become itself. Inasmuch as it is itself, it is the necessary, and inasmuch as it has to become itself, it is a possibility.<sup>32</sup>

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31 *ibid.*, p. 147.

32 *ibid.*, p. 168.

For Kierkegaard, the greater the capacity of the imagination, the greater the openness to the infinite. The potential self, reflecting itself in the medium of imagination, absorbs more of the infinite and is expanded thereby. This is because imagination gives access to the limitless possibilities of the infinite. So when the self reflects itself in imagination, it is enhanced by the awareness of those possibilities. On this account, any self, in confronting its own image in reflection, sees a greater self in accordance with the depth and scope of the imagination which carried it beyond itself. In a crucial sense then, the self is constructed by reflection, and in this context it is quite appropriate for Kierkegaard to claim that 'The self is reflection',<sup>33</sup> for such an enlarged image presents the self with possibilities it can appropriate and actualise.

In short, when the self is carried beyond its immediate awareness by an imagination that is far-reaching rather than one more limited in scope, the return to self is effected by an equally far-reaching reflection. Imagination and reflection are therefore closely linked as elements of the same process, and the intensity of one is affected by the degree of intensity of the other. Kierkegaard says,

The self is reflection, and imagination is reflection, it is the counterfeit presentment of the self, which is the possibility of the self. Imagination is the possibility of all reflection, and the intensity of this medium is the possibility of the intensity of the self.<sup>34</sup>

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33 *ibid.*, p. 164.

34 *ibid.*,

Out of the possibilities that confront it, the self chooses how it will become. The self 'can look so, and so, in the mirror of its possibilities', but becoming involves actualising certain possibilities whilst passing up others. This process, however, is fraught with difficulties. For example, once the self is it can simply remain caught in the immediacy of just being. There is the 'immediate man'<sup>35</sup>, for instance, who remains immersed in, and cannot see beyond, whatever has been actualised. In one sense there is a self here; Kierkegaard points out that the 'immediate man' considers himself to be a self, and that others who know him also regard him as such. The only tell-tale sign that there is something wrong is betrayed by the despair that even an immediate self sometimes experiences, for in another sense the 'immediate man' falls short of being a self.

The immediate man does not recognise his self, he recognises himself only by his dress...he recognises that he has a self only by externals. There is no more ludicrous confession, for a self is just infinitely different from externals.<sup>36</sup>

'Externals' come to be mistaken for self, because 'externals', whether they are deliberately meant to create a certain image, or adopted unconsciously, have a specific form and content. They are something, in which the immediate man, caught wholly by what is immediately and concretely at hand, can feel at home. That is, immediacy can only be if it grasps something; there is no immediacy if there is not something - such as a mood, a feeling, or dress - which can be immediately presented. So in

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35 *ibid.*, p. 187.

36 *ibid.*

that sense, without something to present, immediacy is nothing at all. Further, inherent in the notion of 'something' is a certain level of awareness; 'something' always has presence of some kind, and presence generates awareness. But at the level of immediacy it is only the primitive awareness of simply being.

The 'immediate man' then, believes he can be a self only if he grasps something, if he attaches himself to tangible 'externals'; only from these can he grasp that he is. They represent all that has been actualised and therefore all that is definite, and in that sense finite. For that very reason, it is a mistake to equate them with a self. Against the background of finiteness, the self is thrown into sharp relief as 'infinitely different'. It is the infinite which makes the difference, since the initial elements constituting the possibility of the self are both the finite and the infinite. To recognise the self only in 'externals', is therefore to mistake the self as being wholly finite.

Infinitude, on the other hand, is expressed in the possibility of the self. But Kierkegaard warns,

Even when looking at one's self in a mirror it is requisite to know oneself; for, if not, one does not behold one's self but a man. But the mirror of possibility is not an ordinary mirror, it must be used with the utmost precaution. For of this mirror it is true in the highest sense that it is a false mirror. That the self looks so and so in the possibility of itself is only half truth; for in the possibility of itself the self is still far

from itself, or only half itself. So the question is how the necessity of the self determines it more precisely.<sup>37</sup>

Once the self is initially constituted, 'it is necessary' in the sense that, being actualised, it is what it is and nothing other than what it is. But now its task is to become itself. In this it is aided by possibility. The self can see how it might become in the 'possibility of itself'. It might be thought then, that there is a self here, otherwise this kind of possibility would have nothing to which it could be relevant. But Kierkegaard makes clear that in the possibility of itself, the self is still very far from being a self. Without actualisation, the infinite, in the form of endless possibilities, predominates until, Kierkegaard says,

At last it is as if everything is possible - but this is precisely when the abyss has swallowed up the self.<sup>38</sup>

When the limits imposed by actualisation are absent, and all is possible, there can be no stable point that anchors possibility sufficiently to provide a basis for making actual what is possible. Possibility in this case involves a directedness away from, rather than towards a self. Then, Kierkegaard points out,

the misfortune is that the man did not become aware of himself, aware that the self he is, is a perfectly definite something, and so is the necessary. On the contrary he lost himself, owing to the fact that this self was seen as fantastically reflected in the possible.<sup>39</sup>

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37 *ibid.*, p. 170.

38 *ibid.*, p. 169.

39 *ibid.*, p. 170.

In the one case, that of the 'immediate man', there is no self because self is identified with all that is purely finite. In the second case, where all is possibility only, the self is nothing but a phantasm. In neither case as it stands is there any question here of being a self. But this situation cannot be redeemed simply by taking into account the infinite and the finite. Kierkegaard stresses that even if the 'immediate man' and the self that is swallowed up in the abyss of possibility were to take note of the infinite and the finite respectively, in the awareness that these aspects formed part of their constitution, even if that awareness led to the realisation that man is a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, it would not be sufficient to become a self.

The difficulty lies, as already discussed, in the particular nature of a synthesis. The self is not a synthesis, in the sense that a synthesis is a relation in which two opposite factors are brought together and by that fact alone conjoined. For Kierkegaard, the self comes into being when it is a relation which is constituted when the self interacts with its own awareness that this is what it is. That is, it is not enough for me to acknowledge that I am a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, I have to actively relate all I think and do to that synthesis; I have to see all the choices I make in the light of that synthesis, so that the self I become during the course of my life emerges from the interaction between a heterogeneous ground - the original synthesis - and the exercise of my own free will. The self that Kierkegaard conceives of is free to acknowledge or deny that it is a relation which did not constitute itself, but was constituted by another. However, if the self denies this, then it remains

a self in potential only, and full self-realisation becomes impossible to achieve.

Returning briefly to the 'immediate man' and the fantastic self, the knowledge of man as a synthesis is not enough to be a self. Each can know the factors that make up their constitution; each can know that such and such elements make them what they are, and the behaviour and attitudes of each towards themselves and the rest of the world may even be modified in accordance with this knowledge. But this knowledge is not the same as what Kierkegaard means by self-awareness, for that, something more is needed: what is required is self-reflection, acting as the medium which allows the transition from knowledge of man as a synthesis towards becoming a self as that kind of relation which relates itself to itself. Self-reflection, then, is the source for becoming a self.

But it is a reflection which performs its task through its mirroring function. It is just because the self can see itself reflected in the endless possibilities of the infinite, as though in a mirror, that it can actualise how it will become by choosing from amongst those possibilities. So the self is reflection, in Kierkegaard's sense, because it is in reflection that it can see an enlarged image of itself, an image which then becomes transformed into reality, and the process of this transformation is the source of Kierkegaard's paradoxical view that the self both is and has to become.

However, whilst his concept of reflection does not have the static quality of Kant's introspection, the very mirroring involved entrenches the polarity between the finite and infinite aspects of the self. Despite the

continual movement of a process in which the self appropriates some of the infinite for the enhancement of its own finiteness, a gulf between the infinite and the finite is reinforced because the mirroring function of reflection temporarily arrests and forces apart the moments in the process. At the same time, the gulf is never closed by means of reflection; rather, the process which brings about the gulf is repeated at each stage as the result of the mirroring function of reflection. In this respect, Kierkegaard comes closest to Fichte's position, for the wholeness of the self cannot ultimately be brought about through reflection itself. Rather, like Fichte, Kierkegaard looks for the principle of wholeness elsewhere, in the Power which constituted the whole relation, just as Fichte sought the absolute unity of the self in its own activity. But the final result in both cases must be that the self is in the paradoxical state of being at once whole and divided.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE PLURALITY AT THE HEART OF UNITY

It was Hegel who had proposed a way of overcoming the divisive impact of reflection. Rejecting the possibility of finding a unifying principle for the self outside reflection - as Fichte had done, and Kierkegaard did later - Hegel evolved the concept of reflection to that point where, as Gasché has pointed out, the self-destruction of reflection takes place.<sup>1</sup> This rather startling outcome had its source in Hegel's awareness of the inadequacy of philosophical reflection. Regarding philosophical reflection as an adjunct to the Understanding, Hegel took it that such reflection could only deal with what is determined. However, in seeking the determined in all there is, philosophical reflection necessarily generates oppositions without being able to resolve the resulting contradictions. This is one of the great limitations of philosophical reflection, and it is related to another, even more serious shortcoming, that of - in a Hegelian way of putting it - reflection's neglect to recognise that separation into polarities is only possible on the assumption of a totality.

The direction of Hegel's thought can be articulated as follows. Despite its partitioning role, reflection presupposes that the object reflected is an original unity; there has to be wholeness before reflection can perform its essential function of separation, by representing what is reflected in its own reflection. Without this condition

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1 Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986) ch. 3, esp. pp. 41-42.

of wholeness, reflection itself would be impossible, since to reflect implies the re-presentation of what is self-same.

But just in this necessity lies the problem. Reflection always throws some aspect, if not the whole of the object reflected, back onto itself. By operating on what might originally be indeterminate and throwing that back on itself, something determinable as self comes into being, distinct from the indeterminate which surrounds it. That must mean that some sort of self is generated in reflection, and that some sort of unity is present, because the very idea of 'self' presupposes unity. But as Hegel saw it, philosophical reflection becomes so intent on generating self and its other - on the determinate in opposition to the indeterminate - that it overlooks the original condition of wholeness which makes its activity possible in the first place.

Most thinkers up to and including Hegel himself unconditionally accepted the assumption that there is an original unity involved in the act of reflection. In the wake of Descartes, the view prevailed that if there is an activity of thinking, then there must be something which performs this activity, an agent, or a self. Further, whilst it required Hegel to articulate just how reflection deals only with what is determined, with what is self, the basic presupposition had long been held that if thinking is, as it seemed to be, a coherent activity, then, that which does the thinking must also be an organised and systematic totality.

So for many, the idea of totality - or unity - formed the ground for their interpretation of the self; it was therefore an idea that was not to be seriously questioned. The sense of that wholeness is present, for

instance, in the unity of Descartes' Cogito, in Kant's unity of transcendental apperception, in Fichte's original intellectual intuition, in Kierkegaard's Power, responsible for constituting the relation that is self, and in Hegel it becomes the foundation of his whole system. Further, up until Hegel, it was more or less accepted that reflection is capable of revealing this unity in its original form - Leibniz, for one, upheld this assumption. But to use reflection for this purpose inevitably split the original oneness into the polarity of subject/object. Despite various efforts to re-integrate the oppositions brought about by reflection, no one other than Hegel succeeded in giving a coherent account of their re-grounding.

Given that this is so, it is useful to briefly look at how Hegel envisaged this re-grounding. He insisted that the oppositions generated by reflection must be reflected back into the common source from which they came. But this must not to be seen as a return to an original simplicity; rather, it is more like a re-assembling of reflective oppositions in such a way as to encompass both the oppositions and that which can bring about their re-unification.<sup>2</sup> Hegel saw this kind of re-grounding in terms of a fully developed concept of reflection, in which the movement of dialectic finally leads reflection to reflect upon itself. This position - from which he never deviated - was initially presented in 1801, in his first published book, The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy. In this work, his arguments concerning reflection are already structured around the notion of the Absolute. The key points are that reflection - ultimately grounded in the Absolute - is governed by Reason,

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2 How Hegel envisaged that re-unification is particularly well explained in the first section of Rodolphe Gasché's, The Tain of the Mirror, p. 33.

but, as philosophical reflection, it is attached to the Understanding and is thereby placed in opposition to Reason. Reflection, then, is at once opposed to, and ruled by, Reason.

The only way this opposition can be overcome is for reflection to accept the 'law of self-destruction'. This 'supreme law' of reflection is given to it by Reason, and is 'moving it to become Reason'.<sup>3</sup> Hegel conceived of the self-destruction of reflection as the culmination of that movement in which reflection becomes its own object, when it turns upon itself in self-reflection, for then it recognises its own connection with Reason, and can reflect that it is itself Reason. Once this move is made, a move in which reflection identifies itself with Reason, the truth for reflection becomes clear, a truth which is 'the truth of its nullification'.<sup>4</sup> That is, by recognising its connection with Reason - and thereby adopting the standpoint of Reason - reflection makes itself its own object, destroying itself by throwing itself 'into the abyss of its perfection'<sup>5</sup>.

This abyss is the negative image by which Reason appears to and in reflection. By destroying itself, reflection becomes this abyss, which is at the same time its goal, for this abyss is Reason, and so Hegel writes,

Reason thus drowns itself and its knowledge and its reflection of the absolute identity, in its own abyss; and in this night of mere reflection and of the calculating intellect, in this night

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3 Hegel, The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy, trans. by H. S. Harris and W. Cerf, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1977) p. 96.

4 *ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

5 *ibid.*, p. 140.

which is the noonday of life, common sense and speculation can meet one another.<sup>6</sup>

In the abyss of Reason, all opposites are re-united, for common-sense, reflection and speculation first meet here in indifference. That is why reflection is destroyed here, because reflection throws itself into this abyss as a self, that is, as a self standing in opposition to Reason. The very act of throwing itself into the abyss of Reason is therefore a gesture of self-destruction on the part of reflection, and so the abyss becomes the medium for the annihilation of self and everything opposed to self. This state, therefore, is one of nullification for reflection, a state in which reflection, common sense and speculation meet in indifference, rather than in opposition.

Gasché makes this comment,

since this sublation takes place when reflection destroys itself by making itself its own reflective object, the process of the becoming of Reason coincides with the overcoming of the last possible opposition, that of the self to itself. With this total identity of subject and object, an identity in which neither a subjective nor objective synthesis of the subject-object relation prevails, all separation is overcome, and the realm of the Absolute is reached. The self-destruction of reflection represents a re-grounding of reflection in the Absolute. This re-grounding takes place in reflection's self-annihilation - that is, by its destruction of itself as standing in opposition to all objects, and to itself as well.<sup>7</sup>

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6 *ibid.*, p. 103.

7 Gasché, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

In this comment, Gasché rightly implies that, for Hegel, all that we might understand by self - all kinds of self, including the self we each believe we are - must undergo annihilation once reflection throws itself as a self into the abyss of Reason. Since philosophical reflection generated the concepts of self and other in the first place, its nullification as a self also implies the nullification of all the kinds of self that emerged from such reflection.

In presenting this view of the development of philosophical reflection, Hegel offered a solution to the previously unsolvable problem of a reflection which necessarily divides an original unity, separating it into subject and object, into the observer and the thoughts observed. Both Kant and Fichte could do no more than rest uneasily at the point where - falling far short of presenting a coherent unity - each had exhausted the resources in their own systems to close the gulf generated by reflection. Nor did Kierkegaard succeed, after Hegel. Rejecting the whole Hegelian system, he had no alternative but to defiantly accept a conflict between opposites, a state of living contradictions, in the midst of which the self becomes through a reflection which, in its mirroring function, recalls the problems of Kantian introspection.

But Hegel, by pushing on to the point where the self-destruction of reflection results in speculation, or absolute reflection in the form of Reason, could formulate the idea of a reflection in which opposing positions are reflected into identity. That he was able to do so, rested on an understanding of identity which is not merely that of bare mathematical equality. Rather, he invoked that sense of identity - manifest, for example, in the course of a person's life - in which

differences are held together within the unity of 'the same'. In such a context, philosophical reflection could evolve into an absolute reflection which, in Hegel's words, is 'the activity of the one universal Reason directed upon itself, in which it 'grasps its own grounding within itself'.<sup>8</sup> This kind of activity is the very self-begetting of Reason; Hegel says,

In this self-production of Reason the Absolute shapes itself into an objective totality, which is a whole in itself held fast and complete, having no ground outside itself, but founded by itself in its beginning, middle and end.<sup>9</sup>

From this summit there is nowhere else to go. Having unfolded the course of thought as it rises from the world of sense, tracing its passage from the finite to the infinite, Hegel rests in the completeness of his vision of what will be attained. Healing the breach caused by reflection, by overcoming the opposites generated by reflection through reflection itself, Hegel in the end arrived at a non-reflexive philosophy, in his sense. That is, reflection now no longer divides the totality of all there is into fixed polarities, into an unresolvable opposition of self against other, but reflects fully the complete identity of the whole. Reflection has become speculation, or absolute reflection - absolute because reflection now represents the most complete type of reflection, the concept of reflection itself reflecting the totality of its formal movements. In this reflection, the very self-production of the Absolute is grounded, a production which requires that 'the philosophy of the system and the system

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8 *ibid.*, p. 88.

9 *ibid.*, p. 113.

itself do...coincide',<sup>10</sup> that 'the product...correspond to the producing',<sup>11</sup> and that 'the result of the system...return to its beginning'.<sup>12</sup>

Such a philosophy, with its totally subjectivised concepts, cannot be other than radically immanent. As Gasché has pointed out,<sup>13</sup> it must be seen above all as the completion of Cartesian thought, even as it presented a major challenge to a philosophy of reflection rooted in Descartes and developed by Kant and Fichte. But from the point of view of this thesis, the challenge to philosophical reflection is at the same time a challenge to the self which arose out of that reflection. That is why the implication in Gasché's comment - that the self-annihilation of reflection represents the annihilation of all oppositions between any self and its other - is so relevant.

That is, in discussing the emergence of self-consciousness, culminating in the master-slave struggle, Hegel produced insights into our notions of self-hood that we can either accept as illuminating, or dispute as inadequate in some way. But what we cannot do is dismiss that account as irrelevant, for too much in it connects with our own perceptions of what it is to be a self. However, Hegel's account of the wresting of self-consciousness from the confrontation of self with its other, is superseded as soon as that phase of the dialectic is reached in which any kind of

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10 *ibid.*, p. 114.

11 *ibid.*, p. 131.

12 *ibid.*, p. 132.

13 Gasché, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

selfhood, and its opposites, are annihilated in the self-destruction of reflection. The dialectical movement of thought, gathering up and affecting all its constructs without exception, moves irrevocably towards the unfolding of all there is in the Absolute. Therefore, any conceptions we have at present about the self will be superseded; they are only small steps to be incorporated in a widening reflection in which the totality of its own formal movements - including the opposition between self and its other - is itself reflected. As Hegel's development of the notion of reflection makes clear, self-hood as we think we understand it, will be nullified within a much wider synthesis. The overcoming of reflection by reflection coincides with the self-begetting of an Absolute which, encompassing all there is, including ourselves, is totally unlike the self we each imagine we are. Ultimately, what this amounts to is that the fulfilment of reflection means the destruction of the individual self.

This is what Kierkegaard could not accept. Protesting that it is the task of each one of us to become a self, he turned away from the mystical wholeness argued for by Hegel. For Kierkegaard at least, not all oppositions can be resolved; rather, we become a self by living the conflict between the finite and the infinite. Yet, although his thought spun off in another direction, in reaction against Hegel's elaborate system, it was not yet representative of the kind of philosophy that was to move away from long accepted classifications. That Kierkegaard remained a traditionalist in important respects, is noticeable not only in his conception of reflection along Kantian lines, but also in his fundamental metaphysical framework. Whilst contradiction and opposition hold sway in that framework, his position is nevertheless weakened because he cleaved to his own construction of the traditionally conceived unity:- the self will

have become itself when, in relating itself to itself, it relates itself to the Power which constituted it. In this respect, Kierkegaard continued to adhere to the belief in a metaphysical unity which, in one guise or another, had dominated Western thought since its beginnings.

Yet in his acceptance of life as paradox, ceaselessly injecting strife into the attempts of each of us to become a self, Kierkegaard had the means to push his thought consistently to the point of envisaging not an ultimate metaphysical state of unity but of plurality. However, he did not make such a move, and this conservatism marked him off from the kind of philosophy that was to come.

#### **Nietzsche - and the Contradiction at the Heart of the World.**

Instead, the radical break came with Nietzsche. For him, the fundamental ground of all there is cannot be characterised as a unity; rather, it is a complex of unity and fragmentation, in that there is partition at the core of what is whole. In his first book, The Birth of Tragedy, before his anti-metaphysical stance had hardened, Nietzsche mingles what amounts to a metaphysical position with a theory on aesthetics. With youthful conviction he writes of how the primordial unity suffers 'dismemberment into individuals'.<sup>14</sup> At the heart of the world there is contradiction, represented in nature by two opposing forces:- the Apollinian and Dionysian. Whilst Nietzsche discusses these impulses in the context of the art of the ancient Greeks, there is no doubt he is also expressing a larger conception of life itself as grounded in two opposing forces.

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14 Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, (Vintage Books, New York, 1967) p. 40.

Of these, the Apollinian represents the urge to weave 'the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy'. Apollo, 'the deity of light', guides, through dreams, our attempt to come to terms with an incompletely intelligible everyday world, by imposing order upon chaos, by making rational that which is not. The Apollinian dream world heals, making life not only worthwhile but possible.<sup>15</sup> Apollo therefore represents the world of appearance, portraying 'the joy and wisdom of "illusion"'.<sup>16</sup>

But he is also the divine image of the principium individuationis. Our very being, in fact the existence of all beings, entails the fragmentation of nature - the primordial unity - into individuals. For Nietzsche, this state becomes the horror of existence, generating an 'abysmal and terrifying view of the world',<sup>17</sup> impossible to endure because it involves the irretrievable loss of union. So in order to be able to live at all, the Apollinian principium individuationis moves us to attempt to transform ourselves into perfectly self-sufficient individuals. Only in a state of being in which we adhere to the 'most forceful and pleasurable illusions'<sup>18</sup> that life is intelligible after all, can we induce ourselves to cleave to life and its continuation.

But occasionally, the supremely rational world we have spun from illusion suffers an exception, and then the horror of existence is once again laid bare. Even so, to those who can discern it, this horror is also

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15 ibid., p. 35.

16 ibid., p. 36.

17 ibid., p. 43.

18 ibid.

accompanied by a 'blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depths of man' because 'at this collapse of the principium individuationis we steal a glimpse into the nature of the Dionysian'.<sup>19</sup> The Dionysian impulse - inducing self-forgetfulness through an intoxication which re-affirms the union of all humanity with all of nature - is that state of being in which nature 'celebrates once more her re-union with her lost son, man.'<sup>20</sup>

Nietzsche writes,

Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled and fused with his neighbour, but as one with him, as if the veil of maya had been torn aside and were now fluttering in tatters before the mysterious primordial unity.<sup>21</sup>

The Dionysian impulse seeks to destroy the individual and 'redeem him by a mystic feeling of oneness'.<sup>22</sup> But the Apollinian impulse urges redemption through illusion, through the dream that our own 'reality' is actually how we imagine it, and through the belief that we can make perfectly intelligible what is not, and can never be, wholly comprehensible. These two forces are opposed, but their ground is also the mysterious ground of our being; we are the phenomena of this struggle.

Nietzsche goes on to draw the assumption that not just ourselves, but even nature - that 'truly existent primal unity' - might need the Apollinian illusion for its continuous redemption. That is why we,

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19 ibid., p. 36.

20 ibid., p.37.

21 ibid.

22 ibid., p. 38.

composed of and entirely wrapped in this illusion, are compelled to consider it as an empirical reality, which takes the shape of a perpetual becoming in time and space. But if, for a moment, we conceive of our empirical existence as a continuously manifested representation of the primal unity, then we have to look upon what the Apollinian dream produces as a 'mere appearance of mere appearance', an even higher appeasement of the desire the primal unity has for its redemption through illusion.<sup>23</sup>

This is one aspect of what can be regarded as Nietzsche's metaphysical conception; the other is projected onto the thought of the 'contemplative Aryan', who sees the 'contradiction at the heart of the world',

as a clash of different worlds, e.g., of a divine and human one, in which each, taken as an individual, has right on its side, but nevertheless has to suffer for its individuation, being merely a single one beside another. In the heroic effort of the individual to attain universality, in the attempt to transcend the curse of individuation and become the one world-being, he suffers in his own person the primordial contradiction that is concealed in things, which means that he commits sacrilege and suffers.<sup>24</sup>

This deeply tragic condition of existence can be transcended and overcome by the middle world of art, that 'medium through which the one truly existent subject celebrates his release in appearance', for, Nietzsche writes,

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23 ibid., p. 45.

24 ibid., p. 71.

to our humiliation and exaltation, one thing above all must be clear to us. The entire comedy of art is neither performed for our betterment or education nor are we the true authors of this art world. On the contrary, we may assume that we are merely images and artistic projections for the true author, and that we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art - for it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified - while of course our consciousness of our own significance hardly differs from that which the soldiers painted on canvas have of the battle represented on it.<sup>25</sup>

The essential elements of Nietzsche's later positions on metaphysics, art, existence, the value of illusion and invention, and the appearance/reality dichotomy are all present in the ideas of this early work. As for metaphysics, whether or not some of Nietzsche's ideas are metaphysical is open to discussion. Whilst that discussion is not relevant to this thesis, I would, on the whole, agree with Karl Schlechta and Stephen Houlgate that Nietzsche remains remarkably consistent in what might be called a metaphysical position. In particular, as Houlgate points out more than once,<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche's fundamental belief in the dichotomy between reason and life was never shaken, and this 'despite the unsystematic twists and turns of his mature philosophy'.<sup>27</sup>

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25 ibid., p. 52.

26 Stephen Houlgate, Hegel, Nietzsche and the Criticism of Metaphysics, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986) see, for example, pp. 21,37,38.

27 ibid., p. 38.

I think this is right; the divorce between life and reason, for example, is rooted in the early philosophical position in The Birth of Tragedy, outlined above. It is a divorce that is presented with decidedly metaphysical overtones in terms of the conflict between the Dionysian urge to self-forgetfulness in a mystical re-union with the primordial unity, and the Apollinian urge to spin the illusion - with the aid of reason - that life is intelligible. After that, there are clear connections throughout Nietzsche's mature philosophy between chaos, life and the Dionysian impulse on the one hand, and order, illusion and reason with the Apollinian impulse on the other. In any case, Nietzsche himself testifies to a continuing commitment to the ideas encapsulated by the terms Apollinian and Dionysian in as late a work as the Twilight of the Idols, where, referring to these two conflicting forces, he writes of how, in the end, he returns to 'the place from which I set out - The Birth of Tragedy'.<sup>28</sup> Given that this is so, it is reasonable to suppose that Nietzsche continued to subscribe to the notion of the fragmentation of nature into individuals, which, in The Birth of Tragedy, constituted the tragedy of existence.

But in doing so, he instigated a way of thinking in opposition to the Western tradition, which had long taken for granted that the cosmos has an inherent order and harmony, that it is a unified whole consisting of a concordant blending of parts. Hegel himself had given the finest philosophical articulation of that vision, which had encompassed all that thought can produce, without exception. But just herein lay a problem for subsequent thinkers, for Hegel's inclusion of the concept of the self within a tightly integrated framework had the effect that, for those

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28 Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale, (Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1981) p. 110.

immediately after him, the idea of the self would be linked to the metaphysical convictions of the thinker. Nietzsche provides the first major example that this is so. Even though it is controversial just how much of Hegel he had read, Nietzsche's conception of the self is thoroughly influenced by what I have called his own metaphysical position.

What complicates the matter, however, is that, in Nietzsche's own terms, his thinking does not imply a metaphysical position, since for him metaphysics involves that belief in a world 'beyond' the one of ordinary human experience. Metaphysics, for Nietzsche, implies a Platonic view of a world of being, eternally unchanging, a realm of truth and 'reality', free from the contradiction and contingency of the world humans inhabit. Compared with that world, the human world of becoming is accidental and therefore less real, since the values, ideas, and the very essence of what it is to be human are all subject to the change wrought by the passing of time. Yet this world of becoming is, for Nietzsche, the only real world, for there is no other behind this apparent one. For this reason, Nietzsche sees his own view as profoundly anti-metaphysical.

Nevertheless, the term 'metaphysics' need not always be understood as some form of Platonism. If metaphysics is not so narrowly defined, if it is taken to roughly designate those ideas concerning the nature of all there is, but which lie outside the determinations of empirical science, then it can be argued, as I would do, that Nietzsche's whole world-view of becoming, in which life and reason are in conflict, is actually deeply metaphysical.

Perhaps Nietzsche himself suspected that this is so. Perhaps, in the light of his anti-metaphysical stance, he was particularly careful to protect his later published work against the possible charge of succumbing to metaphysics after all. Whatever the reason, it is striking that he transferred essentially metaphysical ideas from the cosmic context in which they appear in The Birth of Tragedy and in the unpublished notes 1062 to 1067 in the Will to Power, to his attack on such major philosophical concepts as those of the thing-in-itself, the Cartesian ego, and the prevailing view of the self. For example, it is arguable that the dichotomy between life and reason lies behind a position he re-iterates again and again in his published work: that we project 'being' onto a world which is actually characterised by becoming. That idea is consistent with the view he unfolds in The Birth of Tragedy, concerning the Apollinian urge as the principium individuationis, imposing selfhood - and therefore being and stability - onto the Dionysian chaos that is life.

In the light of all this, it seems reasonable to suggest that when Nietzsche is dealing with traditional philosophical concepts, his meaning must be understood in the context of his metaphysical ideas, otherwise the risk of distorting interpretations is increased. That suggestion applies to his concept of the self, and also to his view on thinking and reflection, a view that can perhaps best be dealt with by throwing it into sharp relief against the background of the polemic Habermas sets up between himself and Nietzsche. By means of that polemic, Nietzsche's ideas concerning reflection and the self can be disclosed, even though the consequences for the main theme of this thesis will not be developed until the following final two chapters.

**Habermas versus Nietzsche - the Self-Refutation of Self-Reflection.**

In his book, Knowledge and Human Interests, Habermas says, Nietzsche - and this puts him above all others - denies the critical power of reflection with and only with the means of reflection itself.<sup>29</sup>

The context of this claim is Habermas' own development of the notion of self-reflection. He explores the phenomenon of self-reflection in what he sees as three areas of knowledge-constitutive interests. For example, in the sphere of the natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften), thinking is commonly conducted according to objectivist analytic/empirical criteria acceptable to current scientific method. If self-reflection takes place, it happens when thinking attempts to understand itself qua thinking scientifically. Insight into its own nature occurs when there is a referring back, and appropriation of, implicit views and assumptions that were previously unacknowledged, and this, ideally, leads to a re-interpretation of present thinking and shapes future thought. So, when Habermas writes about reflection in his last chapter - which is where he deals with Nietzsche - he has in mind a particular type of thinking in which thought mirrors itself, and reviews itself. Reviewing, with the possibility of re-interpreting, are crucial aspects of Habermas' understanding of self-reflection, because it is these aspects which indicate critical evaluation.

With this in mind, he confronts Nietzsche. From Habermas' point of view, Nietzsche employs self-reflection whilst at the same time denying its power of critical appraisal. It is this power of evaluating, of assessing,

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29 Jürgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, trans. by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Heinemann, London, 1978) p. 299.

comparing, and so on, which Habermas esteems as the capacity for producing a type of knowledge, that is, critique. But it is precisely such a move, from critical evaluation to the establishment of knowledge, which is resisted by Nietzsche. For Habermas, Nietzsche uses self-reflection not in order to support the view that it is an appropriate instrument for gaining knowledge but to refute the claim that knowledge is arrived at in this way.

But there is a further step. Habermas, convinced that self-reflection leads to knowledge, uses that conviction as a basis for his concept of self-constitution. The knowledge emerging from self-reflection makes possible a process in which the self of self-reflection is re-formed, because knowledge reveals aspects of that self which were previously ignored, repressed or unknown. To support this point, Habermas draws an analogy with the psycho-analytic process in which lost or repressed psychic contents are re-appropriated. The acknowledgement of these aspects therefore involves a retrieval of lost possibilities, which, if they are taken up, produce a re-construction or re-formation which is at the same time a self-formation, or self-constitution, since it is a process going on within the self whilst also involving the self as agent. It should be noted that 'self' is used here in all senses, from the broader notion of an area of interest reflecting back upon itself, such as a sphere of science, to a narrow, personal sense of self-reflection. On that understanding, reflection is a mode of self-formation for Habermas, if not the only one.

Therefore, if it is denied that self-reflection yields critique, a certain type of knowledge, then, on Habermas' own ground, no self-constitution can take place. Herein lies the real force of Habermas'

claim against Nietzsche, although he never explicitly acknowledges that this is so. Whereas for Habermas self-reflection is self-constitution, he is convinced that for Nietzsche self-reflection becomes self-refutation.

Habermas uses Nietzsche as a foil to unfold his own position regarding the status of knowledge. He points out that Nietzsche understood knowledge in positivist terms and he supports this assumption by taking into account two aspects of Nietzsche's thought. First, Nietzsche's conviction that the traditional critique of knowledge, from Kant to Schopenhauer, rests on a claim that cannot be fulfilled, namely: that the knowing subject is capable of criticising or evaluating its own faculty for knowing. Nietzsche opposes that claim by raising the question of how it is possible for a tool to criticise itself, because, as a note in the Will to Power makes clear,

One would have to know...what certainty is, what knowledge is, and so forth, but since we do not know this, a critique of the cognitive faculty is absurd. How could the instrument criticise itself, if it can only use itself for this critique. It cannot even define itself.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, Habermas attributes a Comtean positivism to Nietzsche. He assumes that Nietzsche holds the view that only those facts emerging from empirical scientific investigation can be regarded as knowledge in a rigorous sense. As science develops, other areas previously regarded as knowledge, such as religious interpretations and metaphysical explanations, lose that status.

Drawing these two points together, Habermas becomes intent on showing that the way Nietzsche thinks about epistemology influences his view on

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30 Quoted in Habermas, ibid., p. 298.

self-reflection. The fact that a tool cannot criticise itself means, according to Habermas, that Nietzsche believes that there is no useful power of criticism inherent in self-reflection. If self-reflection possesses the function of critical appraisal at all, it is not of a kind that can be turned back on itself as a mirror, enlightening sufficiently to produce critique. Further, Habermas represents Nietzsche as believing that if knowledge emerges only when the criteria of scientific investigation are stringently applied, then whatever it is that is yielded by self-reflection, it cannot be termed knowledge.

From his own point of view, Habermas is quite happy to accept the connection between reflection and knowledge without serious question. He is more interested in arguing for a new kind of knowledge, as he traces the process and refinement of the notion of self-reflection from Kant to Freud, via the contributions of Hegel, Marx, Dilthey, and others. Eventually he leaves no doubt concerning his own position. Self-reflection possesses a certainty in a way that other cognitive processes do not. When engaged in empirical analytic work, for instance, the main object is to produce empirically testable results. But the procedures used in pursuit of this objective can always be suspended in favour of a critical evaluation of the criteria involved in such an exercise. Once this move is made, however, a shift has taken place, from the gathering of objective information to self-reflection. However, the criteria for self-reflection themselves defy critical evaluation; the process of self-reflection cannot be suspended in the sense mentioned above whilst its criteria are evaluated. That attempt would only lead to another piece of self-reflection, and so on. This is not to say that self-reflection cannot correct itself; but that the

standards by which it is conducted have a certainty in that, whilst always operative, they themselves defy critical assessment. Habermas writes,

It is no accident that the standards of self-reflection are exempted from the singular state of suspension in which those of all other cognitive processes require critical evaluation. They possess theoretical certainty.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, Habermas means that those standards have an a priori character; on this understanding they have certainty. The use of the term 'certainty' is interesting in this regard, because it is indicative that theoretical certainty is here understood in a truth-bestowing sense, so that certainty becomes knowledge-conferring. When the process of self-reflection takes place, it becomes a knowledge-conferring process due to the certainty of its standards. The product of self-reflection is therefore self-knowledge; all the more so because for Habermas, self-reflection is able to appropriate itself, to correct itself, and to evaluate its own product. Therefore, it is critique, a form of knowledge, in Habermas' view.

Furthermore, he believes, in self-reflection the objectification which is frequently regarded as a desirable feature of knowledge, is itself examined. That is, when knowledge is purely objective, the knowing subject, an undeniable factor in that knowledge, may no longer recognise itself in it; but, according to Habermas, through self-reflection the subject can know this. Self-reflection therefore emancipates, it sets the subject free in order to recognise itself. Emancipation, fostering heightened self-awareness, also encourages self-determination, so an

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31 *ibid.*, p. 314.

interest in autonomy and responsibility drives the process of self-reflection. In Habermas' words,

In self-reflection, knowledge for the sake of knowledge attains congruence with the interest in autonomy and responsibility. The emancipatory cognitive interest aims at the pursuit of reflection as such. My fourth thesis is thus that in the power of self-reflection knowledge and interest are one.<sup>32</sup>

Nietzsche, however, would find this alleged connection between self-reflection and knowledge highly questionable. There is the objection Habermas has already mentioned, that the cognitive faculty cannot possibly criticise itself. Habermas in a sense agrees with this, he admits as much in saying that the standards of self-reflection possess certainty in that they are beyond criticism, but, he would claim, that in no way damages his thesis that self-reflection is knowledge. Self-reflection is capable of correcting itself, of being transparent to itself, and that indicates a form of knowing.

He would further point out that the fact that Nietzsche regards the cognitive faculty in terms of its use, as a tool, betrays his - Nietzsche's - assumption that knowledge cannot be critique but must be instrumental. Nietzsche is making the mistake of requiring that 'facts' emerge from self-reflection, in keeping with his positivist tendencies. For this reason Nietzsche cannot recognise the self-correction which takes place as a form of knowledge, as self-knowledge.

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32 ibid.

Nevertheless, Habermas admits, Nietzsche was keenly aware of the interest inherent in knowledge. What he failed to realise is that different types of interest function to shape knowledge in different ways, that, for instance, the interest in autonomy and responsibility produces a different mode of knowing from the knowing motivated by the interest in survival and self-preservation. Nietzsche could not see this, according to Habermas; he reduced all interest to one single interest - that of self-preservation. Consequently, he regarded all knowledge as instrumental, since its aim is control over nature.

In response, Nietzsche might have objected that his point is finer than this. To repeat his position again, in the case of the cognitive faculty, the only means for critically evaluating whether the product of that faculty is knowledge, is the faculty itself. But such an evaluation involves judging the criteria for knowing in the act of knowing, and, Nietzsche would claim, this is not possible; it only leads to a regress in which further acts of knowing are always required in order to evaluate the criteria for previous knowing. To define what knowledge is, therefore, a metacritique is necessary, but for that we would have to be 'higher beings with absolute knowledge',<sup>33</sup> according to Nietzsche.

What seems to be happening in this debate is that Habermas falls back on the certainty of the standards of self-reflection, whilst that very certainty is in question for Nietzsche. Nietzsche's question is:- if the cognitive faculty cannot criticise itself, how can there be certainty in the standards of self-reflection? This prior question cannot be evaded by

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33 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, (Vintage Books, New York, 1967) Note 473, p. 263.

accounting for knowledge as different forms of knowing in terms of different interests. Yet, in the judgement of Habermas, such a move is legitimate; in fact, he claims that Nietzsche is misled when he attempts to psychologise knowledge, and the interest inherent in knowledge, by connecting it to a faculty in the mind. Instead of judging what knowledge is in terms of a faculty for knowing, it should be judged in terms of human interests. However, it might be argued, in holding this view he is still evading Nietzsche's real question, for the fact remains that he takes for granted as given that which Nietzsche questions.

In order to tighten his grip on his own objection to Nietzsche, Habermas locates a tension rising out of Nietzsche's alleged positivism. Habermas does concede that Nietzsche's understanding of knowledge is more complex than the bald positivist one mentioned before. The crucial purpose of knowledge for Nietzsche, Habermas admits, was always to connect theory with practice. In the case of advancing scientific knowledge, however, Nietzsche sees that connection as broken, for as scientific knowledge increases, all other forms previously regarded as knowledge lose that status. In Habermas' words,

Scientific theories can disempower the claim to validity asserted by traditional interpretations, which were always related to practice, even if implicitly. To this extent they are critical. But they must leave open the place of the refuted interpretations, because they cannot generate a relation to practice. To this extent they are destructive. Scientific theories give rise to technically exploitable knowledge, but not to normative or action-oriented knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

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34 Habermas, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

And he follows with a quote from Nietzsche,

Science explains the course of nature, but can never give man commands. Inclination, love, pleasure, pain, exaltation, exhaustion - science knows nothing of this.

According to Habermas' portrayal, Nietzsche seems to be in a position of accepting the Comtean positivist assumption that only science yields knowledge, whilst at the same time he devalues scientific knowledge to the point where it becomes meaningless. Habermas explains,

For, through the same methodology that guarantees certainty to its cognitions, science is alienated from the interests that could be their only source of meaning.<sup>35</sup>

Nietzsche, then, is caught in a tension,

On the one hand modern science is conceded a monopoly of knowledge, which is confirmed by the devaluation of metaphysical knowledge. On the other hand the knowledge thus monopolised is itself devalued by necessarily dispensing with metaphysics' innate connection with practice and thus losing our interest.<sup>36</sup>

Habermas then levels his strongest criticism against Nietzsche,

His critique of Western philosophy, his critique of science, and his critique of prevailing morality constitute a single testimonial to knowledge striven after on the path of self-reflection and only on this path. Nietzsche knows this. "From

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35 *ibid.*, p. 293.

36 *ibid.*

the beginning we are unlogical and therefore unjust beings and can know this: this is one of the greatest and most insoluble disharmonies of existence". Yet Nietzsche is so rooted in positivist beliefs that he cannot systematically take cognisance of the cognitive function of self-reflection from which he lives as a philosophical writer. The ironic contradiction of a denial of reflection however, is so stubborn that it cannot be dissolved by arguments but only appeased by invocations. Reflection that annihilates itself cannot rely on the aid of beneficent regression. It requires auto-suggestion to conceal from itself what it unceasingly accomplishes, namely critique.<sup>37</sup>

In the effort of by-passing Nietzsche's real question Habermas arrives at this conclusion. From here it is a small step to see the self-refutation of reflection completed in words of Nietzsche's own, like, 'we know that the destruction of an illusion does not by itself yield truth, but only one more piece of ignorance'. These words, and similar ones, give Habermas sufficient reason to conclude that, for Nietzsche, knowledge must be hard facts, to be verified objectively as truth and then utilised. In this particular case, the denial of knowledge - in the sense of what was regarded as knowledge but later exposed as illusion, and the removal of that illusion leaving only empty space - so pre-occupies Nietzsche that he is unable to recognise that denial for what it is, a piece of knowledge in itself.

But is Nietzsche really caught in the position Habermas attributes to him? That is, does Nietzsche allow only scientific information the status

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37 ibid., p. 299.

of knowledge on the one hand, whilst denying its value on the other, and does this tension lead him to reject self-reflection as critique?

On the face of it, Habermas seems to be right in holding that Nietzsche appears to be caught up in positivism. There is enough in Nietzsche's thought lending itself to such a construal. He does ascribe to knowledge an instrumental character; it is motivated by the instinct for self-preservation, and Habermas can further derive Nietzsche's alleged positivist tendencies from his rejection of metaphysics. However, these facets of Nietzsche's thought do not lead him in the direction claimed by Habermas, for there is another side that Habermas is neglecting.

In Nietzsche's thought,<sup>38</sup> metaphysics, philosophical interpretations, religious outlooks and moral systems all share one characteristic:- they attempt to derive the conditioned from the unconditioned; they try to establish 'facts' - in the form of descriptions and definitions - when confronting what is open, strange and indeterminate. But then, it is in the nature of thought to do this. Thought supplies, by inventing, the adjunct of what it is concerned with. So, in treating with what is conditioned thought moves naturally to what is unconditioned, and when dealing with the unconditioned, moves towards the conditioned.

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38 Nietzsche's view, as it is presented in this and the next two paragraphs, is taken from The Will to Power. Many of the direct quotations that follow on subsequent pages are also taken from this collection of unpublished notes. Whilst I am aware that this material is controversial, and not always a reliable source of Nietzsche's 'final' views, I use those quotations which have, as I see it, a metaphysical edge not always present to the same degree in his published work.

For example, the ego was thought of and invented as an adjunct to the multiplicity of mental processes, and the world has been parcelled into ends and means, things, substances, logical laws, and numbers, by thought in its attempt to re-form the world into what is self-identical - in the sense of translating what is unfamiliar into conditions already familiar. Thought - with its inherent compulsion to measure - therefore strives to make similar. So, to understand means simply to be able to express something new in the language of something old. The new is constantly submerged into the familiar; it is measured, sorted, categorised according to what has already been conditioned in the same way previously.

If thought did not first re-form the world in this manner - into things, numbers, ends and means - there would be nothing that could be called knowledge. Knowledge, in essence, is a 'referring back', a 'regressus in infinitum', 'that which comes to a standstill' because 'Our knowing limits itself to establishing quantities'.<sup>39</sup> These established quantities are what we call ideas, concepts, facts, and laws. Originally there was a chaos of ideas; eventually the ideas that were consistent with one another remained, whilst the greater number were rejected. Such consistency was necessary in order that there might be what is called knowledge.

This view of how knowledge takes possession of what is undefined, should be kept in mind when examining a passage such as the following;

Knowledge works as a tool of power. Hence it is plain that it increases with every increase of power -

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<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, Notes 574, 575, p. 309.

The meaning of 'Knowledge'; here, as in the case of 'good' or 'beautiful', the concept is to be regarded in a strict and narrow anthropocentric and biological sense. In order for a particular species to maintain itself and increase its power, its conception of reality must comprehend enough of the calculable and constant for it to base a scheme of behaviour on it. The utility of preservation - not some abstract theoretical need not to be deceived - stands as the motive behind the development of the organs of knowledge - they develop in such a way that their observations suffice for our preservation. In other words, the measure of the desire for knowledge depends upon the measure to which the will to power grows in a species; a species grasps a certain amount of reality in order to become master of it, in order to press it into service.<sup>40</sup>

A passage such as this one seems to lend powerful support to Habermas' charge of positivism. The 'concept' of knowledge 'is to be regarded in a strict and narrow anthropocentric and biological sense', there must be enough that is 'calculable and constant', because this is the stuff that facts are made of. Knowledge emerges as instrumental; its facts ensure and enhance survival.

Yet there is nothing here which condemns Nietzsche to positivism, not even, or rather especially not, the peculiarly ambiguous positivism Habermas attributes to him. This is not an account of what knowledge is - a definition - rather it is a description of the function the concept of knowledge fulfils. That is, when the meaning of knowledge is under

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40 *ibid.*, Note 480, p. 266.

consideration - in the sense of why the concept of knowledge has arisen - then, Nietzsche argues, it must be regarded in a strictly anthropocentric and biological sense.

But to investigate the meaning of the concept of knowledge is to undertake a different task from examining that process which is given the name of knowledge, because a concept of knowledge is already the product of the process of knowledge. For Nietzsche, a concept is an established quantity of thought; it is the very invention of the process of knowledge, of which the further question regarding its meaning, in terms of its purpose and utility can be asked. In that case, to trace the utility and purpose of the concept of knowledge, as Nietzsche does here, is not to define knowledge as such; it is to define only the product of knowledge. These are two separate issues. Beyond the question of why certain concepts - including the concept of knowledge - have come into being, and what purpose they serve, there lies the further question concerning the pre-conditions determining the process of reason itself.

This, of course, applies to all areas of understanding. By utilising specific established quantities - that is, facts - a connection between theory and practice is forged, which makes the emergence of normative, action-oriented schemes of behaviour possible. Facts, in this sense, include the descriptions and definitions operative in metaphysics, religious outlooks and moral systems. As Nietzsche explains,

A morality, a mode of living tried and proved by long experience and testing, at length enters consciousness as a law, as dominating - And therewith the entire group of related values and states enters into it...Exactly the same thing could have

happened with the categories of reason; they could have prevailed, after much groping and fumbling, through their relative utility - There came a point when one collected them together, raised them to consciousness as a whole - and when one commanded them i.e. when they had the effect of a command - From then on they counted as a priori, as beyond experience, as irrefutable. And yet perhaps they represent nothing more than the expediency of a certain race and species - their utility alone is their 'truth' - 41

From Nietzsche's point of view, Habermas, with his concern for the certainty of the standards of self-reflection, provides an example of those who collected the 'categories of reason' and 'raised them to consciousness as a whole', and then counted them 'as a priori, as beyond experience, as irrefutable'. But this is to remain centred within a concern with the products of knowledge - its concepts, ideas, facts, and laws. That is why Habermas does not face the question Nietzsche faces. What, for Habermas, has an a priori character - the certainty of the standards of self-reflection - is precisely in question for Nietzsche. That it is in question for Nietzsche, indicates the kind of perspective on thought and knowledge outlined just now, but which Habermas fails to take into account.

Nietzsche, in dealing with knowledge, moves between two perspectives, each giving rise to very different questions. He takes the value of knowledge seriously; that is what he is doing in the above passage, where he examines the purpose and usefulness of the concepts produced by

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41 ibid., Note 514, p. 278.

knowledge, concepts like 'beauty' and 'goodness'. Amongst those concepts is the concept of knowledge itself. Habermas, not himself a perspectival thinker, sees this analysis as Nietzsche's instrumental view of knowledge, as a concern - on Nietzsche's part - with only facts and their usefulness. On this misunderstanding, he partly bases his objections to Nietzsche. But what Habermas ignores is that, taking up another perspective, Nietzsche also examines knowledge as that process which establishes quantities and thereby 'takes possession of things'.

But Habermas cannot appreciate Nietzsche's shifts in perspective, and as a result he believes that Nietzsche uses reason - although he translates that as self-reflection - in order to show the impossibility of knowledge, or, in Habermas' terminology, to show the self-denial of reflection. Habermas' perception, however, is not anchored in an awareness of the context in which Nietzsche is working, and against which it should be understood. For Nietzsche, when looking at knowledge as the kind of process described, it cannot be the case that there is such a thing as knowledge, because knowledge cannot be defined. To define knowledge - to call it a body of facts, for instance - is equivalent to seeing it as some sort of thing. But that cannot be sustained. Knowledge produces things, like concepts, and so knowledge cannot itself be such a thing. Even if the definition of knowledge as a body of facts is abandoned, it would still be the case that no other definition could be substituted. Even to say 'knowledge', is to refer to something that has already been delimited and bounded, something that is a finite quantity. But knowledge in this sense is impossible, and not only because the knowing faculty cannot evaluate and criticise itself, but also because knowledge, as that process which conditions the unconditioned, by making discrete what is otherwise fluid

and indefinable, cannot itself be discrete. On that basis, Nietzsche can argue that there is no knowledge as such.

Related to this is Nietzsche's ultimate rejection of 'facts'. Our thought produces what are called facts; but this does not mean that there are facts, as though facts had some sort of ontological status. Nietzsche's objection to this assumption is largely directed against the notion of truth in the Platonic sense of eternal and unchanging, a sense of truth surviving in the objective truths of science. He protests,

Against scientific prejudice - the biggest fable of all is the fable of knowledge.<sup>42</sup>

And,

Against positivism, which halts at phenomena - "There are only facts' - I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations.<sup>43</sup>

In the full light of Nietzsche's thought, Habermas' case begins to pale. Only when it is disregarded that Nietzsche confronts an issue from more than one angle, exploring different perspectives in equal depth, and only when one of those perspectives is singled out and considered at face value, does it become possible to raise objections of the sort made by Habermas. But when Nietzsche's position is wholly taken into account several points about Habermas' claims become clear.

Habermas has an inclination to connect the view that knowledge is instrumental with positivist tendencies. He sees such a connection at work

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42 *ibid.*, Note 555, p. 301.

43 *ibid.*, Note 481, p. 267.

in Nietzsche and it becomes an important factor in his conclusion that Nietzsche regards only scientifically verifiable information as knowledge. However, to see the process of knowledge as instrumental because it is the process of conditioning the unconditioned is not at all the same as seeing knowledge as instrumental on the grounds that its facts are utilised to condition the unconditioned. The distinction hinges on the role of facts. The latter type of instrumentality is connected with positivism in that the facts are an important means to an end, for they make possible ultimate control over what is not yet controlled. But in the former type of instrumentality, facts are not a means to an end, instead it is the process of knowledge which is the means by which the indeterminate is appropriated, and the so-called 'facts' of knowledge are only the end product of that process. It is this type of instrumentality that prevails in Nietzsche's thought, and it is removed from positivism because there is room here for him to deny that the established quantities of thought have the status of objective facts.

So the view of knowledge as instrumental is not in itself enough to lead Nietzsche into positivism, and more importantly, Habermas cannot use this as a springboard for the conclusion that as far as Nietzsche is concerned only scientifically verifiable information has the status of knowledge. This conclusion by Habermas, on Nietzsche's part, is deeply undermined anyway by Nietzsche's rejection of the possibility that knowledge as knowledge can be defined at all. This holds for all areas of knowledge, including the scientific. Nietzsche certainly considers the concepts and facts of knowledge from the point of view of the purpose and use they serve, and this is what Habermas picks up on, but the conclusion

Habermas draws cannot be supported; instead, it reveals his disregard for Nietzsche's sensitivity to perspective.

Further, that sensitivity prevents Nietzsche from being caught in the tension claimed by Habermas. But Habermas, unable to see that there is consistency of thought underlying Nietzsche's different perspectives on knowledge has to divine the existence of that tension. It accounts for what he senses as the definition of knowledge as instrumental facts on the one hand, and the devaluation of such knowledge to meaninglessness because it loses all relation to life - it breaks the connection between theory and practice. Habermas cannot see that Nietzsche is saying that if knowledge is increasingly understood in the positivist sense, then the connection between theory and practice is broken. Consequently, he sees Nietzsche's quite separate analysis of the positivist view of knowledge as an endorsement of positivism, and hence sees a tension where there is only a movement between two separate questions resulting in an overview that binds elements of the two.

From what has been said so far it becomes clear that Habermas' strongest criticism of Nietzsche fails for similar reasons. To claim that Nietzsche denies the critical power of reflection because for him any reflection, his own included, cannot be regarded as yielding knowledge, is not an objection to Nietzsche; it is to be in agreement with Nietzsche's own point of view.

But that an investigation of Habermas' case against Nietzsche reaches this conclusion, itself reveals a basic asymmetry in the dialectic, an asymmetry which cannot be penetrated by remaining at the level of providing

convincing arguments to refute or defend one against the other. The conflict between Habermas and Nietzsche is possible because at a much deeper level that which shapes the substance of their thought comes into opposition. Habermas' fundamental standpoint is shaped by the metaphysics of being, whilst Nietzsche's is dominated by the conviction that all is in a state of becoming.

That is, Habermas gives the impression that self-reflection and self-formation are dynamic processes, but it soon becomes clear that he works with concepts which imply stability and fixity. At a basic level, there is always something certain and unquestionable for Habermas. For instance, there is certainty in the standards of self-reflection, beyond which Habermas never penetrates, and the possibility of there being knowledge is accepted without question - it simply becomes a matter of accounting for different types of knowledge in terms of different interests. In self-formation too, there is always something stable against which distortions can be recognised as distortions. By means of self-correcting reflection a final reconciliation is always possible, preventing a permanent antagonism between what is known and unknown. What is known might be modified, but such modifications always preserve, rather than destroy, an essential stability. The self is always there, as a nucleus, throughout even its most radical changes.

For Nietzsche, however, there is no underlying stability of any kind. All is in flux, caught in the flow of becoming. If this underlying state of flux were in any way capable of pausing, of arresting itself with the fixity that implies being, then all becoming would long ago have come to an end, for how could a world of being have reverted to a world of becoming?

All becoming would have ceased. As it is, the world is permeated through and through with becoming, from the all-consuming urge to life in its disparate forms, to as minimal a sense of becoming as manifested in thinking.

The world, as pure becoming, must generate its own momentum in order to maintain the perpetual flux of coming-to-be, so the world as driving force is also the Will to Power. This force, inherent in all there is, is pure becoming constantly striving towards being, for implicit in the notion of becoming, is the drive to be. Integral to becoming is the urge towards completion, that is what urges it onwards - so that it can find fulfilment in what has become. The goal, then, is the state of being; or at least, the durability that is being. Nietzsche writes,

To impose upon becoming the character of being - that is the supreme will to power.<sup>44</sup>

Yet, it is in the nature of becoming never to achieve true being; if its constant flow were to be interrupted by permanence in any sense, becoming would lose its character of becoming and give way to being. So, whilst the world as becoming is constantly impelled by the Will to Power to overcome and arrest becoming, to impress upon it the character of being, it is an attempt always doomed to failure. For this reason, being is a necessary fiction, an invention, a goal always striven after and forever unattainable, supporting the perpetuity of becoming, and the driving force, as Will to Power, of life itself. So being, in essence, is nothing but the false manifestation - although utterly necessary for life - that becoming has reached its goal and has been overcome, if only fleetingly. This

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44 *ibid.*, Note 617, p. 330.

fundamental strife is the contradiction at the heart of the world, a contradiction which cannot be resolved by a reconciliation comparable to a Hegelian synthesis. The effects of contradiction permeate and determine the nature of all there is. It is from such a point of view that Nietzsche's perspectivism emerges.

Against the background of this metaphysical position, it becomes clear why Nietzsche sees thinking as a compulsion to measure and to transform the indeterminate into what is self-identical, and why he sees the act of knowing as limiting itself to establishing quantities hardened into concepts, ideas and facts. It also explains why Nietzsche is at pains to point out how thinking and knowing resist being defined. Fundamentally, thinking and knowing are imbued with the characteristics of becoming, and therefore they strive also to overcome, by creating entities, by reforming an indeterminate world and parcelling it into definite sums of thought, which have all the characteristics of being. It also becomes clear why the products of thinking - in the form of objective facts and objective knowledge - are an invention, and therefore ultimately a fiction.

However, in Habermas the underlying orientation towards a metaphysics of being, predisposes him to implicitly grant the status of a form of being to thinking and knowledge, so that it becomes possible to judge what is and what is not. This in turn opens the way for speaking in terms of the 'self-denial of self-reflection', and stronger still, 'the self-refutation' of self-reflection. Nietzsche would see such expressions as indicative of only one level - the level of articulation - where notions of self-denial and self-refutation can properly exercise their hold, since

this is the level which aims at appropriating and rendering determinate what is unconditioned and indeterminate.

However, beyond that level, and in a world where all is in process of becoming, the notion of self-refutation has no place. In itself it is a fiction, one amongst others that are useful, perhaps, within the context of similarly fictitious 'things' like concepts. But in Nietzsche's view it would be a mistake to regard that context as other than a domain of pure invention. So, whereas in Habermas' discourse, the charge of self-refutation carries considerable force, it is not a charge at all in the world of Nietzsche.

Even so, this does not quite close the issue. When Habermas' objections are set aside, the issue of the relationship between self-reflection and self-constitution is free to emerge. It is worthwhile to pursue this issue for a moment, even though it involves repeating some points that were made about Nietzsche's view of knowledge and his basic metaphysical position. In the interests of clarity, this cannot be avoided.

Nietzsche, an advocate of 'tremendous self-examination',<sup>45</sup> exhorts us to reflect, to trace the subject under consideration back to its origins, and that bears on thinking in the following way: all that enters into consciousness as the unity of one thought is already highly complex, we always have only a semblance of unity. Thinking is not what it seems. Nietzsche says,

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45 *ibid.*, Note 585, p. 316.

Thinking, as epistemologists conceive it, simply does not occur; it is a quite arbitrary fiction, arrived at by selecting one element from the process and eliminating all the rest, an artificial arrangement for the purpose of intelligibility.<sup>46</sup>

That is, thinking is a process involving many possibilities, only some of which come to consciousness. No sooner do we grasp a few and make them intelligible, than others arise, and beyond that still others, a multitude of incoherent experiences. One thought, already immensely complex, is a contrived unity formed from certain elements, arbitrarily chosen whilst others are equally arbitrarily rejected. Another thought follows the first, only as the result of a similar, repeated process, but with the added feature of being made consistent with the pre-dominant elements of the first thought, so that the two seem to follow one another in a causally connected chain, and so the semblance of thinking develops. Yet, 'Between two thoughts all kinds of affects play their game: But their motions are too fast, therefore we fail to recognise them, we deny them -'<sup>47</sup>

Everything of which we become conscious is already ordered, arranged, schematised and interpreted into discrete sums of thought. In order to think and infer at all, therefore, it is necessary to 'assume beings'. That is, these parcels of thought assume validity as facts that are, and their status of being is secured by their objective accessibility. They can be verified by all of us, and in that sense they are not just the product of an individual's subjective experience. Thinking must 'assume

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46 ibid., Note 477, p. 264.

47 ibid.

beings' because 'logic handles only formulas for what remains the same.'<sup>48</sup> At the same time, this projection of 'being' onto our inner world of experience, has the further consequence that, because we assume that there is thinking, we conclude that there must be something that thinks, that there is an agent, acting upon inner experience and turning it into thoughts. But Nietzsche, in agreement with Hume on this point, argues, this conception is a second derivative of that false introspection which believes in 'thinking'; first an act is imagined which simply does not occur, 'thinking', and secondly, a subject-substratum in which every act of thinking, and nothing else has its origins: that is to say, both the deed and the doer are fictions.<sup>49</sup>

Since the deed and the doer are fictions, any claim that thinking and the self have some sort of objective being cannot be supported. But this means that self-reflection, as Habermas sees it, is also a fiction. Thinking, in thinking of itself as thinking, deals only with the fictitious unities - the thoughts - it has arbitrarily produced, whilst other perhaps equally significant possibilities perish and are never reflected. Or again, self-reflection, as we commonly understand it, is a one-sided enterprise, reflecting only those experiences which have already been ordered into thoughts, whilst other phenomena are too fast and too many to be captured by the slower processes of consciousness. So a significant aspect of thinking is never reflected; the movement of becoming is obscured by what has become, and yet what has become is pure invention. Further, in the absence of a self as Habermas understands it - that is, as

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48 *ibid.*, Note 517, p. 280.

49 *ibid.*, Note 477, p. 264.

a permanent nucleus which can be modified - the possibility of reflection, as it is understood by Habermas, is even more undermined.

However, this conclusion itself can only be discovered by using thinking to think about thinking. So in one sense, when Habermas accuses Nietzsche of using self-reflection to deny the critical power of reflection he is right. Nietzsche does constantly urge us to reflect, to trace any subject back to its origins, and to re-appropriate that which has been suppressed, ignored or forgotten. In this process it becomes clear that to think about thinking itself reveals the evaluative quality of thinking, otherwise Nietzsche could never interpret thinking as that which invents entities.

But Nietzsche himself never denies this, and that is where Habermas goes wrong. What Nietzsche does deny is that the evaluative quality of thinking can produce critique and knowledge in the sense that Habermas means. Thought invents itself, the agent we call the self, as well as self-reflection, and knowledge too; but underneath the process of thinking lies that which lacks coherence and unity of any kind. To understand knowledge as Habermas does, is based on far too absolute a conclusion, as far as Nietzsche is concerned. Rather, the evaluative quality of thinking, which Nietzsche himself uses and never denies, leads to interpretation, and interpretations of interpretation.

Nevertheless, whilst the nature of thinking is nothing but an 'artificial arrangement' of certain phenomena, our belief in the causal, logical connection between thoughts, which constitutes thinking as we understand it, may be utterly necessary. As Nietzsche never tires of

saying, a belief can be a condition of life and nevertheless be false. The urge and effort involved in inventing entities is grounded in the compulsion to introduce some fixity within flux, change and conflict. In fact, Nietzsche could not deny the evaluative power of thinking, because for him it is by means of evaluation that we can live at all. He reiterates this over and over again in his writing, for instance, in Thus Spake Zarathustra he says,

No people could live without evaluating...A table of values hangs over every people. Behold it is the table of its overcomings; behold, it is the voice of its will to power.<sup>50</sup>

The power to evaluate is embedded in thought, those fixed points that Nietzsche sees in terms of invented being. Through thought we spin the illusion that we inhabit a rational, intelligible world of being, for we doubt with well-founded suspicion that it is already thinkable...You still want to create the world before which you can kneel: that is your ultimate hope and intoxication.<sup>51</sup>

In making becoming thinkable in terms of being, we make the self thinkable. We therefore invent a self, become a self, to gather into one what is 'fragment, riddle and dreadful accident'. But to do this, the evaluative quality of thinking is required, and to this the mode of self-reflection belongs. In a crucial sense, then, Nietzsche must accept that

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50 Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale, in A Nietzsche Reader, (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex) p. 223.

51 Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, (Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex) p. 113.

in the movement of self-reflection, thinking and its invention, the self,  
become one.

## CHAPTER 8

### **THE SELF - THE EMERGENCE OF AN ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTION**

In looking back over the philosophical moves examined in this thesis, it becomes possible to discern three strands of thought, one of which eventually provides the means for a more adequate conception of the self. The first train of thought is expressed in the idea that the self is somehow given, to be discovered by thought; the second, that the self is constituted or created through human agency. These two conceptions of the self alternate in dominance over time, forming a dialectic that is still operative now, in the twentieth century. The third strand of thought emerges as a result of Descartes' action - what Taylor calls taking up the 'stance of radical reflexivity'<sup>1</sup> discussed in Chapter 2 - and becomes the source for shaping the idea that the self is brought into being by reflection.

The first of these ideas underpins the thought of Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Kant, Fichte and Kierkegaard in varying degrees. Descartes introduces perhaps the most straightforward version of the view that 'I' is a given object, the existence of which can be revealed in thought. In Locke and Leibniz, a certain amount of ambiguity becomes manifest, in that some aspects of the self are clearly given, such as Locke's substantial self, and Leibniz's idea that 'I' is a unified, indestructible 'thing', whilst others appear to be constituted, like Locke's personal identity and Leibniz's construction of the law of the individual. But in both these

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1 Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989) p. 130.

cases, the balance tips in favour of the idea that, at the most fundamental level, the self is given. For Kant, equally, there can be no doubt that the unity of apperception must be presupposed to be present, as a foundation establishing the coherence of the activity of consciousness. Similarly, in Fichte and Kierkegaard, an ambiguity that is of a kind with that found in Locke and Leibniz, though somewhat more conspicuous, combines uneasily with the idea that the very structure of the self is already given; for example, Fichte's notion of the self as an interplay of the finite and the infinite, and Kierkegaard's idea of the self as a relation, solidly prevail over any suggestion that the whole of the self is constituted.

Yet, it has emerged in the course of this thesis that if the self is regarded as a given object of some sort, then intractable problems follow. If Descartes' conclusion that the ego is a mental substance is examined seriously, as Locke tried to do, it soon becomes apparent that it is not possible to sustain such a view. This is confirmed by Hume, who, searching in vain for his self, concluded that there is no such thing. Even if the notion of substance in relation to the self is abandoned, the idea of the self as a given mental entity of some sort remains problematic, as Locke's position shows. In Kant too, despite his denial of the self as substance, and despite his conception of the self as one of the transcendental ideas, inescapable problems occur as a result of his presumption that the unity of apperception - the 'I think' - is given, that it is already present before introspection takes place, so that a permanent subject/object dichotomy becomes unavoidable.

The second of the three strands of thought in this thesis, that of self-constitution, has been explored in the thought of Pico, Greenblatt, Fichte and Habermas. In these four cases, constitution - or creation - of self occurs through the medium of thought, but whereas Pico, Fichte and Habermas<sup>2</sup> appear to want it both ways, in that all three seem to hold that the self is a combination of that which is given and that which is constituted, Greenblatt prefers to focus unambiguously on how the self is fashioned. Yet Greenblatt's position, as much as any modern version of the idea of self-constitution, rests not just on the thought of predecessors like Pico and Fichte, but also on elements in Locke and Leibniz, on Kierkegaard, for whom the self is constituted out of the struggle between the finite and the infinite, and on Nietzsche, who, regarding the self as an invention, exhorts us to 'will a self and thou shalt become a self'<sup>3</sup>. However, there are problems concerning the notion of self-constitution that have not yet been raised, problems that I will deal with in the next chapter.

For the moment, it needs to be noted that this thesis brings to light certain aspects of the dialectic between the idea that the self is given and the notion that the self is constituted. In looking back over the preceding chapters, it can be seen that this dialectic sometimes moves between the thought of different thinkers at different times, as in the case of Pico and Descartes, Kant and Fichte, Nietzsche and, at one level, Habermas. It can also move within the thought of one particular

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- 2 Whilst I discussed Habermas' position in the previous chapter, there are still some important points that need to be raised. I will do so in the next chapter.
- 3 Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986) 366, p. 364.

philosopher, as in the case of Pico, Locke, Leibniz, Fichte, Kierkegaard, and Habermas. When this happens, it is sometimes possible that these ideas do not conflict entirely, that some kind of compromise is effected between aspects of the self that are given and aspects that are constituted, as Fichte and Kierkegaard demonstrate perhaps with more success than any other philosophers examined here. Yet, in both these cases, each view has been shown to include the deep contradiction of a self at once whole and divided, a contradiction which relates to the nature of reflection.

The third strand of thought, which has also been surfacing in the previous chapters, is that of a self which emerges through reflection, in the sense that it comes into being in reflection. What that means exactly will be unfolded in the course of this chapter and the next; for now, it needs to be noted that this view can be grounded in what Descartes actually demonstrates, although he misunderstood his own discovery, as I have argued in chapter 2. Leibniz came close to undoing the mistake made by Descartes, for he explicitly works at how reflection has access to inner phenomena, something Descartes failed to do, but he, like Descartes, sees thought as revealing what is already there. It is not until Hegel that the idea of the self as a construct of thought develops sufficiently to emerge in the full light of day. Hegel shows the movement involved in the rise from consciousness to self-consciousness within the framework of the reflection of the Understanding, and in the end he establishes convincingly what others before him, notably Fichte, had only partly formulated - that the self is intrinsic to reflection.

In Hegel, however, the movement of the dialectic inevitably foreshadows the end of reflection and of the individual self. Even if that

is accepted as a plausible future state of affairs, it remains that - a solution for the future. In the meantime, there is something inherently unsatisfactory about accepting a solution on promise; it may very well be inevitable and necessary within the Hegelian system, yet if we reject that system, and place ourselves outside it, we cannot do other than face the contingency of variable future outcomes. Kierkegaard realised this only too well, but what he proposed had the side-effect of resurrecting many of the old problems, and so in this respect Kierkegaard does not present an advance on Hegel. By means of the thought of Nietzsche, however, the idea that the self is brought into being in reflection becomes possible as an adequate solution for the first time - as I hope to show shortly - and that is because in his thought both thinking and the self are conceived of in a radically different way - as invention, as fiction.

Closely related to all three ways of regarding the self is another aspect: the role of reflection is crucial, for the self and reflection remain indissolubly linked throughout various changes. This, at least, is clear from the work of Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Habermas. The presence of that link can even be demonstrated in a negative way. For instance, Hume dismissed the possibility that there is such a thing as the self, whilst at the same time he strictly limited the understanding of reflection. Lacking a fuller notion of reflection - like that held by Leibniz, for example - Hume eliminated the possibility of conceiving an alternative view of the self. So Hume, in taking the position he does on what he would consider to be two unrelated issues, nevertheless demonstrates a connection between reflection and the self, if only negatively. Even when the point is reached - with Nietzsche - where the nature of thinking is seen as grounded in invention,

and reflection is divorced from self-consciousness, the link is not broken. The concept of the self is now made to conform with this altered view of thinking. Within a new framework, in which invention becomes the focal point, the self is accordingly conceived of as a fiction.

So, on the basis of what has been unfolded so far, the conclusion can be drawn that the way reflection is understood influences the concept of the self; alternatively, whatever concept of the self is adopted influences how the structure of reflection is perceived. Further, it is the contention of this thesis that this link remains; it is operative, for example, even behind contemporary notions of self-constitution, but that issue will be taken up in the next chapter.

The question of how exactly reflection and the self are linked has received its most explicit treatment in the various proposals of Fichte, Kierkegaard and Hegel, some details of which have been presented in this thesis. As we have seen, these accounts all generate problems, yet the source of these problems is not to be found directly in the link between reflection and the self, even though they influence how that link is regarded. Rather, the problems occur as a result of certain metaphysical assumptions about the wholeness of being, which come to be translated into the notion of one simple, already given, self - a fundamentally united entity.

### **The Self as Given - within the Context of the Metaphysics of Being.**

At the beginning of the first chapter, I proposed to examine the dialectic between the notion that the self is given and the idea of self-constitution within a context shaped by two factors - perceptions of the

being of the self, and the belief in a special relation between thought and the self. I argued also that this context emerged out of certain trends in thinking in Italian Humanism, and that for centuries to come it would be impossible to disengage any conception of the self from its relation to the structure of thought and to the nature of the self's being. The former issue has been discussed throughout the chapters that followed in terms of the connection between the self and reflection, but the latter has remained somewhat overshadowed by a presupposition inherent in the view of the self that dominated during the period covered so far in this study. That is, since the notion that the self is given prevailed - even as hints to the contrary emerged in the work of Locke, Leibniz, Fichte, and Hegel - an embedded presupposition in that notion also prevailed, namely:- the being of the self is characterised by wholeness; it is a primordial unity.

This presupposition was not in question as long as the givenness of the self remained fundamentally unchallenged. The self was simply regarded as an entity of some sort, perhaps with special characteristics, alongside all the other entities that are in the universe. This state of affairs continued despite various intimations - for example, in the thought of Fichte - that the self is created, or constituted, and therefore the structure of its being is likely to be different from that of the given self. The fact that considerations of this kind never really developed once they surfaced, must be attributed to the underlying framework of what, in the previous chapter, I have called the metaphysics of being

The metaphysics of being, enshrining the belief that the world and all there is has the fundamental character of stability, endurance and unity - qualities that are normally attributed to being - influenced the thought of

almost everyone examined in this thesis, with the exception of Nietzsche. Against that background, the presumption that the underlying ground of the self is unified could not but flourish. Nevertheless, as the result of constant analyses of the self's relation to reflection, that assumption became more and more difficult to sustain, for the unity of the given self is inevitably shattered when reflection brings about the separation of the self into subject and object, a separation which becomes problematic because it cannot be overcome. As a result of such developments, the being of the self became an issue in its own right.

It needs to be added here that as a result of what the previous chapters show, the problems caused by the subject/object dichotomy remain insoluble as long as the conviction that the being of the self is that of a primordial unity continues to be allowed to stand, because that unity, understood as already present before reflection takes place, will always be split into subject/object once reflection occurs. Only in Hegel can a solution be found, but to accept it would involve the acceptance of his whole system, including that feature which endorses the destruction of the individual self. If Hegel's way is rejected, but without substituting an alternative view of the underlying metaphysical position concerned, then, as Kierkegaard exemplifies through his understanding of an essentially static reflection, there is no way out of the difficulties that have come to light here.

This leads to the conclusion that if the idea of the self as somehow given is grounded in underlying assumptions spun from the metaphysics of being, then that idea is likely to be untenable, because the inbuilt inclination to presume that the self is a united entity before reflection

takes place, runs into unsolvable problems. At least, that is so in all the cases that have been studied here. It is not only the difficulties in Descartes, Locke and Kant that show this; they could perhaps be explained away in terms of other problems within their respective systems. But the unresolved struggles in Fichte and Kierkegaard corroborate just how hard it is to sustain the view of the self as given.

But perhaps, in spite of what has been shown in the previous chapters, it is still possible to argue against that conclusion after all. It might be argued, for example, that almost everyone considered in this thesis runs into problems because they link self with reflection, that this very linking is the real problem. Once this link is disregarded, or not made at all, and the self is seen as an autonomous given entity, disconnected from reflection, the problems resulting from this connection will disappear, including the problems with the underlying metaphysics.

This argument, however, runs into all sorts of difficulties. Apart from other objections that could be raised against it, the one I want to take up here is that such a way of looking at the issue would involve a return to Descartes' stated position - that the ego is already given as a thinking thing, and, whilst it can be discovered by acts of thought, it is nevertheless not the same as those acts. But to defend some kind of updated version of that position would never do. That is because Descartes' original position was the consequence of a mistake; it emerged as a result of his own misunderstanding of what he did.

As I have tried to show in chapter 2, there is a mismatch between the philosophical position Descartes articulated and what he actually

demonstrated. What he showed was just the opposite - that it is not possible to disengage the self from reflection. There are two aspects to this. One is that, through his own example, he established incontrovertibly that the option to take up the first person standpoint is always present; it can be taken up at any time, by anyone; there is no getting rid of it; even if it is never taken up by any specific individual, the possibility for someone or other to do so is always there. So what Descartes' action - in taking up the first-person standpoint - brings home to us, is just how pervasive this option is; so pervasive, in fact, that it occupies a prominent place in the range of perspectives we can devise in order to interpret our experience of the world. This was always so, in that it was always a perspective available to us, as Augustine had already demonstrated long before Descartes.

However - and this is the second aspect worth noting - it was not until Descartes that this essentially familiar avenue for interpreting our relation to the world, became established as a philosophically acceptable way of proceeding in an inquiry. So what had always been a more or less utilised human perspective, was suddenly favoured, and singled out as a philosophical method. Consequently, the experience of self inherent in that standpoint became conspicuous; not only could it be replicated, and therefore verified, again and again, but that experience itself became the object of philosophical attention.

But even outside specific philosophical debates, once the experience of subjectivity expressed in the first-person standpoint had been fully brought to light, the prominence of the self was guaranteed, and to such an extent that now, even if we want to distinguish that experience from

epistemological considerations, the dominance of the self cannot be dismissed, for we have, since Descartes, fully accepted that the self is revealed the moment the first-person perspective is adopted.

Moreover, if that standpoint has the structure of reflection - and I have tried to show in chapter 2 that it has - then the connection between reflection and the self receives powerful confirmation. Since this is such a crucial point, it might be useful to repeat here, though briefly, why the first-person standpoint is reflexive. It is clear, as Taylor writes, that as soon as that standpoint is adopted, I am focussing on myself as the agent of experience and making this my object. This kind of standpoint has the structure of 'radical reflexivity' because it cannot do other than bring

to the fore a kind of presence to oneself which is inseparable from one's being the agent of experience, something to which access by its very nature is asymmetrical; there is a crucial difference between the way I experience my activity, thought and feeling, and the way that you or anyone else does. This is what makes me a being that can speak of itself in the first person.<sup>4</sup>

The consequence that a 'kind of presence to oneself' is brought 'to the fore' when our thinking shifts away from experience itself to that which experiences, occurs as the result of the movement of turning back characteristic of reflection. That movement, discussed often in previous chapters, finds expression in the first person standpoint, for that standpoint leaves no doubt that there is an 'I' who is the agent of

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4 *ibid.*, p. 130-131.

experience. Even though Descartes himself never fully discussed the nature of reflection, the move he made was nevertheless essentially reflexive; in structure, it is similar to what has just been described. That being so, what he demonstrated above all by taking up the first-person standpoint was that the self cannot be separated from reflection; as Hegel has shown in a very different way, as soon as reflection takes place, a self inevitably emerges.

As a result, the suggestion made before - that it is the connection between reflection and the self, instead of the notion that the self is given, which causes problems - cannot be upheld. Rather, since a common human perspective is encapsulated in the first-person standpoint, which can be taken up again and again, revealing each time the presence of self, that standpoint is an important aspect of human experience. Regarded in this light, such experience cannot be judged as though it were in the same category as a philosophical theory. Since it is a question of human experience, and not of the adequacy of a given theory, the connection between reflection and the self, integral to that experience, cannot be treated like a philosophical assumption open to rejection. Rather, as an aspect of experience, that connection needs to be accounted for in any adequate conception of the self.

Consequently, in the search for a solution to the problems besetting the notion of the self as somehow given, the connection between reflection and the self cannot be set aside or ignored on the basis that it is the source of those problems. If anything, what I concluded above - that the way reflection is perceived influences the concept of the self - can now be strengthened by suggesting that reflection is integral to the very being of

the self. But what this suggestion involves cannot be dealt with just now; at present I am clearing the ground for a full explication to follow in the next chapter.

**The Self as Given - within a Context Other than the Metaphysics of Being.**

In the meantime, it might be objected that even to make this suggestion at all is too swift. Whilst it might be accepted that the link between the self and reflection has been shown to be undeniable, the emergence of a 'kind of presence to oneself' does not necessarily suggest that the self is brought into being by reflection, no matter what that might mean; rather, it might be equally plausible that reflection discovers the presence of a self that is already given before reflection takes place. In recent times, for instance, the early Heidegger held that the self of Dasein is there before self-reflection. 'Reflection, in the sense of a turning back, is only a mode of self-apprehension, but not the mode of primary self-disclosure'.<sup>5</sup> It is clear that for Heidegger reflection can apprehend the self of Dasein - which is a way of being, not an entity of any kind - but it cannot bring that self into being. <sup>5a</sup>

Yet, some questions need to be asked about this self which is there before reflection, a self which comes to light in a pre-reflexive mode of self-disclosure, all the more so because Heidegger does not subscribe to the metaphysics of being; for him, the self is not grounded in a primordial unity. So here is a case where the self is seen as given, but now that idea is located within an alternative conceptual framework, a

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5 Martin Heidegger, The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, trans. by A. Hofstadter, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982) p. 159, quoted in Rodolphe Gasché, The Tain of the Mirror, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986) p. 83.

5a In this sense, then, the self is already given for Heidegger. At least, that is a consequence of the position he articulates in the work presently being considered.

framework in which older metaphysical assumptions concerning being are explicitly shunned. In this respect, Heidegger, after Nietzsche, achieves what Kierkegaard could not - he substitutes a new grounding for the old, a new source for the disclosure of a self which is nevertheless still seen as given.

So the question now becomes:- if it was the case before that the idea of the self as given foundered because it was pinned down within a problematic set of metaphysical assumptions, and not because it was linked with reflection, then maybe now, supported by a different set of underlying assumptions, the notion of the self as given can be upheld. If it can be upheld, then the suggestion that reflection brings the self into being will have to be discarded, for if the self is given, then, as Heidegger holds - and I think correctly - the role of reflection can only be that of self-apprehension.

In what sense, then, does Heidegger mean that the self is given? One short answer is that it cannot be the case that this self is an already united entity, waiting to be discovered. He says specifically that the disclosure of the self must not be thought of in a Kantian sense, that is, in such a way that an 'I think' accompanies all representations and goes along with the acts directed at extant beings, which thus would be a reflective act directed at the first act.<sup>6</sup>

To prevent the slide back into any previously prevailing views of self-reflection - not just the Kantian one - Heidegger insists that,

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6 ibid.

Self-understanding should not be equated formally with a reflected ego-experience.<sup>7</sup>

Rather, as Gasché points out, for Heidegger the self of Dasein finds itself not within itself, but in the world which surrounds it. What Heidegger means by the self-understanding of Dasein, emerges through each encounter with the things that are ready-to-hand, and each different encounter shapes Dasein's self-understanding in conformity with the thing encountered.

Such multiple means of self-understanding must not be conceived of in a Cartesian sense, as elements that make up 'the ontological constitution of the person, the ego, the subject'.<sup>8</sup> If anything, they are primary forms of pre-reflexive self-disclosure, which form a fundamental ground, an obscured and lost foundation. It is in this sense that the self is there 'without reflection and without inner perception, before all reflection'; that is, it is in this sense that the self is given, and it is this self which is grasped when the self is apprehended in reflection. In short, self-consciousness and its constituting self-reflection relate to these more primary forms of pre-reflexive self-disclosure, but in a condition of unawareness, for these forms constitute the lost foundation of self-consciousness and reflection. Heidegger writes,

We cannot define the Dasein's ontological constitution with the aid of self-consciousness, but, on the contrary, we have to clarify the diverse possibilities of self-understanding by way of an adequately clarified structure of existence.<sup>9</sup>

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7 ibid.

8 ibid.

9 ibid.

Reflection, in this scheme, apprehends self-understandings; or, as Gasché puts it, in Heidegger 'Self-consciousness is a mode of self-apprehension in terms of a reflexive subject-object relation.'<sup>10</sup>

But precisely this point is so troublesome; Gasché's remark, in fact, captures all that is problematic about Heidegger's position. In considering that more carefully, it becomes clear that through his notion of pre-reflexive self-understandings, Heidegger, instead of succeeding in freeing the self from reflection, has actually produced a more primordial view of reflection in relation to the self. In spite of what he would like to believe, Heidegger's notion of self-understanding is not pre-reflexive at all; rather, that notion has all the characteristics of reflection.

This can be shown by imagining the most primitive level of the encounter of Dasein with the thing that is ready-to-hand. When Dasein, in its pure simplicity of just being there, happens upon a thing ready-to-hand, the meeting with that thing must force Dasein to turn back upon itself, to grasp itself, before it can understand how different, or the same, the thing encountered is to itself. This movement back to itself must precede any formation of a self-understanding. That is because the understanding in question here is not just an understanding, or even a primitive grasp, of the thing itself - like a pure awareness of something, which involves a complete absorption in the thing to the exclusion of all else. In such an understanding, only the outward reach to the thing is important; any concern with that which reaches outward is irrelevant, and it can rightly be said of such an understanding that it does not involve any reflection, in that there is no turning back to that which performs the

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10 Gasché, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

movement outwards. But this is not the kind of understanding that Heidegger has in mind; what he envisages is that the understanding of the thing must lead to an understanding of Dasein itself, it must lead to a self-understanding formed by the relation to the thing.

But it is hard to see how the emergence of this kind of understanding - if it is to be a genuine self-understanding - is possible without involving a turning back on the part of Dasein to apprehend itself, once it has reached outward to grasp the thing, in order to make possible an understanding of itself in relation to the thing. As Hegel has worked out convincingly, any self-understanding, no matter how primitive in its structure and content, presupposes the occurrence of a reflexive, turning back movement. A so-called pre-reflexive self-disclosure is, in the light of these considerations, not pre-reflexive at all; instead, it is essentially reflexive; such an understanding, in order to be of self, must involve a reflexive turning back.

So if the primary mode of self-disclosure - that of self-understanding - is already reflexive, then the self-apprehension that occurs in reflection as Heidegger understands it, is actually a higher order of reflection, and the distinction he wants to maintain between pre-reflexive self-understanding and self-reflection simply crumbles. More significantly, despite his efforts to show the contrary, the self does not come to light primarily in a pre-reflexive mode of self-disclosure, it emerges in a thoroughly reflexive context. What we have here, then, is an updated version of Descartes' position. Descartes also tried to separate the being of the self from reflection, just as Heidegger attempts to do,

but in both cases each thinker succeeds in demonstrating how intrinsic reflection is to the self.

Even so, what Heidegger means is that such a self-disclosure is not to be seen in terms of the unconcealing of an ontologically given entity. These self-understandings are a very primordial grasping of dim self-awareness, and, whilst it might be conceded that this awareness has a reflexive structure, it is not at all the same as the reflection which is supposed to engage an ontologically constituted ego, a kind of ego which Descartes, for instance, had in mind after he had assumed the first-person perspective. Heidegger's objections to this are quite clear, as the discussion above shows; for him, self-understandings are not to be seen as contributing to the ontological constitution of the self of Dasein.

Yet, in spite of Heidegger's break with ontological assumptions, he nevertheless wants to insist that the self is given, and, when we turn to focus on this issue, we soon find that his acceptance of the self as given in the sense outlined above, turns out to be as problematic as any similar views previously. In part, this is because Heidegger's view of how the self is given collapses, for he succeeds in showing what he did not want to show:- that this self is not given at all, since it cannot be given before reflection in the way he proposes. Rather, what he proposes opens up the possibility that the self might actually come into being in reflection. But this would be an unwelcome consequence for Heidegger - at least for the early Heidegger we are dealing with here - for it would imply that the self is no longer given before reflection takes place.

In any case, even if an attempt was made to rescue Heidegger's notion of givenness away from its genesis in reflection, other, older problems would only re-emerge. If we take up the notion of givenness as Heidegger sees it, that notion - just as its previous versions held by those philosophers who subscribed to the metaphysics of being - cannot escape the problems concerning reflection already encountered. This is because, at a fundamental level, Heidegger allows that the dim graspings of self-awareness are nevertheless that which is apprehended as self in reflection, even though it is hard to talk of a self here, since what will be self is only formless and nascent. The trouble is, once reflection makes this inchoate, but given, self its object, then, in accordance with its very structure, reflection immediately brings about the disintegration of that self in the subject/object dichotomy, with all its attendant problems. Even at this very primordial level, there is nevertheless something already there for reflection to apprehend as self, yet, in turning upon that self, reflection immediately splits what there is into subject/object.

Heidegger, in this respect, faces the same problems as the philosophers of reflection before him; problems that were dealt with in the last three chapters. To be fair, his orientation to the self is different; he is not concerned with the problems caused by reflection, which had occupied Hegel and others. What he objected to is that self-reflection had been consistently regarded as the only means for apprehending the self, rather than one means among many, as Gasché makes clear.<sup>11</sup> So the problems concerning the reflexive subject/object relation, which have occupied us here, were not a primary concern for Heidegger. Yet, once this is said, it also needs to be pointed out that if

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11 ibid.

he had considered the older issues, he might not have entangled himself in precisely those same problems.

So even in a case like this, where the old metaphysics of being is explicitly rejected, and the notion of the self as given is considered in the light of a different underlying conceptual framework, it is obvious that the problems we have met before in the course of this thesis return like a plague. Regarded in the light of all that has emerged so far, it becomes clear that it is not just Heidegger's understanding of how the self is given that proves to be problematic. Now, having explored the issue from different angles, it must be concluded that the very idea of the self as given, in any version, will always run into problems of the kind encountered here. It seems that as long as the conviction of the self as given is upheld, then, as has been shown, as soon as reflection focuses on the self the split between subject and object occurs, and the problems relating to how the two halves are to be put back together again prove to be insuperable. Since reflection is such a fundamental activity, presupposed the moment anyone takes up the first-person standpoint, this objection cannot be dismissed.

At this point, then, we have come full circle. Instead of finding in Heidegger's position a means for supporting the notion of the self as given, and therefore a means for rejecting the suggestion that reflection brings the self into being, the conclusion to be drawn from what we have found leads in the opposite direction - that the notion that the self is given cannot be upheld in any of the circumstances considered here, and therefore the suggestion that reflection brings the self into being need

not be discarded. If anything, as a result of examining Heidegger's position, that suggestion becomes stronger.

### **Nietzsche - and the Emergence of the Self in Reflection.**

Perhaps the best way of understanding that suggestion is to begin by turning again to the larger conceptual framework in which any notion of the self is embedded. We have seen that if the metaphysics of being dominates, the problems are such that they prohibit any satisfying account of the self. This is true also of the early Heidegger's outlook, since, although he attempts to think of being in a radically different way, he is close to becoming bogged in the notion of the givennes of the self; a notion which is inclined to be uncomfortably associated with a certain a priori stability, so often thought of as one of the defining features of being.

Having said that, I now want to consider how the whole character of conceptualising the self changes once a different kind of philosophical framework is adopted, based on the notion of plurality rather than on unity, on becoming rather than on being - as in Nietzsche's thought. In a universe of becoming, such features as the stability and the unity implied in the concept of being are regarded differently, for those features are not seen as the fundamental state of affairs; rather, they are seen as an imposition on all there is as the result of the illusion of being. That is, when the universe is seen in terms of the concept of becoming, and the notion of being is believed to be an illusory construct, the stability and unity attributed to what there is, do not have the same degree of inevitability that is found in a universe understood in terms of the metaphysics of being. That stability and unity of being, transposed almost automatically to the idea of the self as given, and so close to the hearts

of all those thinkers before Nietzsche who subscribed to a world in which things are, can be viewed differently when the idea of a universe caught in the flow of becoming is taken seriously.

If all is in process of becoming, the notion that the self is not given becomes perfectly consistent. The idea that thinking brings the self into being becomes equally acceptable, provided it is understood that the being of such a self is a fiction in the sense discussed in the previous chapter, created - as Nietzsche establishes convincingly - as the result of a common assumption that if there is thinking, then there must be something that thinks. If the concept of becoming informs our understanding of the nature of all there is, then there can be no such something that thinks, as though that were a stable agent of some sort; rather, the concept of an agent can be transformed into the notion of a medium through which thinking finds its expression, a medium which, like thinking, is equally a process in the flux of becoming. This is not to say that taking up the first-person standpoint, and all it implies, becomes irrelevant. That move can still be made, only now what it implies can be interpreted differently. Within this alternative conceptual framework, there is no longer any need to remain fixated on the idea of the self as a permanent entity, something that is already, and therefore has the characteristics of givenness, stability and unity before thinking discovers it.

By following the track of Nietzsche's thought, the link between reflection and the self can be understood in such a way as to bring about a different outcome from that of any previous position. Before Hegel, that outcome had been hinted at in Fichte, and to some extent in Kant as well, but it was thwarted by the metaphysical assumption of an original unity as

the source of the self. In Hegel's work, the connection between the self and reflection was thoroughly worked out, but because of the nature of his system the result negated the individual self. By considering the issue in a different light, however, a way opens up to overcome the old problems.

Adopting a Nietzschean scheme, the very being of the self is now a fiction generated by thinking which itself has the hallmark of invention. The groundwork for this position was laid out in the previous chapter, and need not be recounted here, but one point must be brought out. Nietzsche himself never linked reflection with the self in a manner similar to that of his predecessors. If anything, as the previous chapter shows, his understanding of what knowledge is leads to the conviction that there is a necessary gap between self-cognition and the so-called knowledge of self derived from self-reflection. We cannot ever know ourselves because we cannot ever find ourselves; we have to misunderstand ourselves. This, at least, is what he writes at the beginning of On the Genealogy of Morals, and this view is supported by his belief that lived experience - not self-reflection - is the source of self-consciousness, even as self-consciousness itself can never hope to entirely comprehend this source. As Gasché has pointed out, the introduction of this gap between the self and what the self knows breaks radically with the

philosophically consecrated mode of accounting for the knowledge that one claims to possess by grounding it in the self-conscious and publicly accountable subject. Here, self-reflection loses all foundational capacity with respect to knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

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12 ibid., p. 81.

Nietzsche's position is therefore thoroughly anti-Cartesian, and this colours his attack on the status of knowledge, and the concepts of the self and reflection. When these issues are of concern to him, Nietzsche's target is almost always Descartes; out of this context his view of the self as fiction emerges. But whilst his objective is different from the one pursued here at the moment, and whilst it cannot be claimed that Nietzsche conspicuously links the emergence of the self with reflection, two aspects of his thought are important for that alternative conception of the self.

The first is that, as a result of his belief that all there is has the character of becoming, the notion that the self is brought into being by reflection is no longer suffocated by difficult metaphysical considerations. Secondly, in his attack on the Cartesian position, Nietzsche himself assumes that thinking invents the self. As a result, the self cannot be regarded as other than bound to thinking; it must be intrinsic to thought.

That this is so follows from what Nietzsche does. To begin with, he transposes the Cartesian cogito into the following form - there is thinking, therefore there must be something that thinks<sup>13</sup> - and then, by means of this transposition, he attempts to discredit the cogito on the grounds that it is an invalid piece of deductive thinking, for, he says,

when I analyse the event expressed in the sentence 'I think', I acquire a series of rash assertions which are difficult, perhaps impossible, to prove - for example, that it is I who think, that

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13 Nietzsche, The Will to Power, trans. by Walter Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale (Vintage Books, New York, 1967) Note 484, p. 268.

it has to be something at all which thinks, that thinking is an activity and operation on the part of an entity thought of as a cause, that an 'I' exists, finally that what has been designated by 'thinking' has already been determined - that I know what thinking is.<sup>14</sup>

On the basis of these considerations, Nietzsche concludes that the self is a fiction, brought into being by a piece of deductive thinking gone wrong. That is, he criticises the Cartesian assumptions, exposing the invalidity of the deductive slide that is going on, because he disagrees with the conclusion that the self is a thinking thing, since that conclusion simply raises too many ontological problems. Heidegger later took up this same point in his denial that self-understandings are to be seen as elements in the ontological constitution of the ego. But getting back to Nietzsche, his point is that, far from leading to this conclusion, an altogether different one should be reached:- that the self is a fiction. According to Nietzsche, we have misunderstood the nature of thinking, and therefore also the nature of the self.

But in attempting to show this, he does not deny the phenomenon of thinking, only our understanding of what goes on; similarly, he does not deny the phenomenon of the self, only that we have misunderstood its nature, we have taken it to be an already existing thing. In fact, to make his point, and in order to marshal support for his conclusion that the self is a fiction, he plays up the idea that thinking invents the self; a notion with altogether different connotations from the idea that thinking

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14 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale, (Penguin Books Ltd. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1978) p. 28.

discovers or apprehends the self.<sup>15</sup> In putting forward this perspective, he is attacking the metaphysical framework concealed behind the Cartesian assumptions - and that is why those assumptions are so wrong, according to him.

But to us, it becomes only too clear that in his endeavours to discredit Descartes, Nietzsche is advocating the notion that the self is an invention of thought. This is the point at issue for us here, and it is the only point. It might be possible to argue about Nietzsche's intention in adopting this notion, for example, whether he used it as a ploy to be discarded once it had served its purpose, or whether he seriously assumed that there is a self, which is invented in thought. Further, it might equally be suggested that it is important to consider how he regarded the self, in that it is arguable that his exhortation to become a self eventually ceases, to be submerged in the larger sketch of the Superman. But these issues, important though they may be for a full understanding of how Nietzsche understood the self, are not relevant here, and must be set aside, for what concerns us at the moment can be confined to this one point:- that Nietzsche floated the idea that thought invents the self.

Even so, despite the fact that this is the case, there is on the face of it no reason to attribute to Nietzsche the idea that reflection brings the self into being. Particularly since he scorns the whole philosophy of reflection as it had been worked out by Fichte, Hegel, Schelling and others. Besides, since many forms of thought are generally recognised, of which reflection is only one, and since Nietzsche is intent on separating

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15 Nietzsche does this in, for instance, the notes of the Will to Power, and in the early sections of Beyond Good and Evil, and The Twilight of the Idols.

self-consciousness from reflection, there is reason to believe that his promotion of the idea that thought invents the self must not be taken as an espousal that the self comes into being in reflection. Whilst this is so, however, I nevertheless believe that it can be shown that Nietzsche's position does imply that the self comes into being in reflection, and not in any other kind of thought.

Nietzsche criticised Descartes for what he said, for the conclusion he drew. But what Descartes did - in taking up the first-person standpoint with its inherent reflexivity - conforms quite well with Nietzsche's suggestion that it is thinking which invents the self. To clarify what I mean:- Nietzsche's criticisms of the cogito work because he transposes what Descartes actually said into a piece of deductive thinking. In that way he can expose the invalid assumptions concerned. But in doing so, he changes the meaning of the cogito, for to say 'there is thinking, therefore there must be something which thinks', is different from saying 'I think, therefore I am'. The latter statement is perfectly compatible with the idea that the self -'I' - comes into being in thought; at the same time, there is in this statement no further claim concerning what that 'I' is, only that it is. To say 'I think, therefore I am' simply means that self is because someone expresses his/her thought, and Nietzsche can have no quarrel with this.

But he does not see this; he is too caught up in demonstrating that the cogito is a faulty piece of deductive thinking. Even when he discusses the cogito in terms of the 'I think' in the quote above, he is so intent on objecting to the implication that we can have knowledge of the existential status of this 'I', and so intent on denying that we can have knowledge of

what thinking is, that he overlooks the fact that the structure of the cogito is actually compatible with his own assertions that it is thinking which invents the self. In that respect, Nietzsche and Descartes have no disagreement; if Nietzsche is prepared to assume that thinking invents the self, then the cogito in its original form confirms, rather than denies, that assumption. If this is accepted, then the first-person standpoint - as it is expressed in the cogito - is not an incompatible stance for Nietzsche to take, and from that it follows that it would not be inconsistent for him to acknowledge that to bring the self into being is an act of reflexive thought, and not of any other kind of thinking, like deduction.

It is for this reason that Nietzsche's thought makes possible the development of the idea that reflection and the self are indissolubly linked, and that reflection brings the self into being. Yet, whilst this merging is coloured by the characteristics of one particular direction of thought - that of Nietzsche's - it has not been contrived out of thin air. If anything, in the light of this thesis it is only too clear that where Nietzsche's thought leads had already been foreshadowed by others. Leaving Nietzsche out of it for the moment, the most important of those who signal a different conception of the self are Descartes himself, Fichte, Hegel, and - after Nietzsche - Heidegger. Each of these four, in a very different way, points towards the notion that the self comes into being in reflection. In this chapter I have discussed how Descartes demonstrates this, and how Heidegger's position naturally leads him in the same direction. In the previous chapter, I dealt with how, in Fichte, reflection creates the self, and, in pursuing Hegel's own thought, the

result can only be that the self is a construct of thought, emerging through reflection.

But in none of these four cases could that notion develop fully. In Descartes, for instance, it was hampered by his metaphysical convictions. In Fichte, the contradictions generated could not be reconciled. In Hegel, the problem became that he went too far, for in his system the individual self would eventually cease to be at all; and in Heidegger, his acceptance of self-apprehension as a reflexive subject/object relation, and his acceptance of the self as given, prevented the flowering of the notion that the self comes into being in reflection. Through developing strands of Nietzsche's thought, however, it becomes possible to fully articulate what was in the tradition all along. By regarding being as a fiction, and the self as invention, Nietzsche points the way to how the notion that the self is brought into being by reflection can be envisioned. In that respect, his thought opens up a context in which this notion can flourish free from the trap of former problems.

## CHAPTER 9

### **THE FORMING OF SELF**

The thought that reflection brings self into being suggests that the connection between reflection and the self is now beginning to crystallise as a formative link. Reflection forms self; that is what is meant by saying that reflection brings self into being. This has been indicated more than once before, but so far the fullness of this perception has been clouded by serious obfuscations. Now that some of the major obstacles have been removed, the cogency of this view can emerge unobstructed, and the moment has come to explain what it involves.

I take as fundamental two points which have emerged in this thesis:- firstly, if Hegel's insight into the character of reflection is developed fully, then it has to be the case that self is brought into being by reflection; secondly, the movement which brings this about is expressed in the essentially reflexive first-person standpoint. The first point underlies my discussions in the previous chapter, concerning the ultimately reflexive character of the self in Descartes, Heidegger and Nietzsche. That is, I regard it as incontrovertible that reflection performs a mirroring function, perhaps best understood in terms of a movement which always throws that which is reflected back onto itself; it is precisely this return from the reflected image to that which makes the image possible which brings self into being.

Broken down to its most basic level, this means that in the mirroring of reflection, some aspect or the whole of what is originally

indeterminate, is isolated and captured by means of its own image, an image leading straight back to the original indeterminateness. But now something determinate has come into being; it can be seen in the reflected image, which has set boundaries to exactly that part, or even the whole, of the original indeterminateness corresponding to the image. That part, or that whole - now the newly determinate being - must be self, since reflection can only re-present that which is the same. Once it is acknowledged that what is reflected is the same as the reflected image, the self comes into being; by means of the reflected image, that which is reflected becomes self.

This kind of analysis remains entirely within the spirit of Hegelian thought, but without taking on board the fullness of the concept of absolute reflection developed by Hegel, for that is not relevant. What is of concern to us here is only that self is brought into being by reflection, and in the unfolding of what that means only the early stages of Hegel's notion of reflection are required.

At the level of consciousness, the movement of reflection is one in which consciousness becomes conscious of that same consciousness. When this occurs, it is because the intentionality inherent in consciousness turns from an outward direction, in the sense of being absorbed in the immediacy of what is before it, to an inward contemplation of consciousness itself. At that point a reflexive shift occurs; a shift which is the source of the emergence of the self, and this is expressed in the term 'I', enshrined in the first-person standpoint.

But how is the self which comes into being through reflection in this way to be understood? The first point that must be made is that this self is actual; it is not merely an idea of the self that comes into consciousness once reflection takes place. Rather, in the movement of reflection described above, consciousness brings self into being in that it forms self. This forming, however, must be understood as a making of self in the very process of manifesting self by means of its own image. I make this qualification because the notion of forming a self - of self-formation - is closely associated with that of self-constitution, and later on I want to reject what that notion involves. So for my purposes, the notion of forming self, in the sense of making self in the process of manifestation, is more appropriate; but what this notion means will be clarified as this chapter progresses.

For the moment, all that is necessary is that it should be clear that in the movement of reflection, consciousness brings self actually into being, and not just the idea of self. An idea of the self is the notion that the self is given, for example, or the idea that the self is an autonomous unity, or the concept that the self is brought into being by reflection. Such ideas are ways of forming an understanding about the nature of the self; they are ideas, notions, or concepts of the self without actually being the self; their purpose is to make some sense of what might otherwise remain naggingly inexplicable. In contrast, the movement of reflection which brings self into being is a process with an actual product - self: a process to be distinguished from the idea or concept of that process and its product.

Still, an adequate conception of this actual self has yet to be formulated; all that can be said about it at the moment is that, apart from its actuality - about which more will be said later - its very being is dependent on reflection. In its pure being, this self brings to mind Kant's transcendental ego, the bare 'I think', an empty thing-in-itself. So perhaps the first elements for articulating the self brought into being by reflection can be drawn from Kant.

Kant's transcendental ego - singled out and accorded an enduring autonomy which survives the fleeting array of thoughts, feelings, moods, and so on which comprise the contents of consciousness - is similar in one significant respect to the self brought into being by reflection. That is, the context of both this self and the transcendental ego is shaped by a distinction between consciousness of self and consciousness of everything else that is not self. Kant's transcendental ego is always inexorably separated from the contents of consciousness. Similarly, the process in which the self is brought into being by reflection can be distinguished from the immersion by consciousness in its experience of thoughts, feelings, and so on. So there is at least one feature at play which would make the use of Kantian elements plausible. On the face of it, the conception of a self thought to lie beyond the immediate contents of consciousness - a self which, it can be argued, Descartes had in mind, and Kant articulated - seems to be an appropriate start for conceptualising the self which is brought into being by reflection.

Further, the attraction of developing a concept along these lines is enhanced by another consideration. The influence of the Cartesian/Kantian conception of self has fanned out in various directions, affecting several

popular ideas of the self. For example, Kant's transcendental ego lends itself to being linked in one important respect with a point of consciousness familiar in meditation. In turning inward in meditation, consciousness penetrates beyond thought, feelings, and so on, to a level where there seems to be nothing. At this point, consciousness is beyond all those concerns, and, in the spirit of Kant, that point of emptiness is often taken to be the 'real self'. This self, like the transcendental ego, is equally free from the sway of whatever thought, feeling, or mood dominates consciousness at any moment; it is a self which endures remote from, and unchanged by, the activity of consciousness.

The same isolation of the self is even more profound in those views which posit the greater worth of the self against the shortcomings of the ego. For example, a Kantian detachment of the self arguably underlies Jung's distinction between the self and ego. Such a distinction, crucial to his analysis of dreams for instance<sup>1</sup>, has often found its way into other popular notions which spin off from Jung, and continue to assume a structural difference between the self and the activity of consciousness.

These three influences shaping popular conceptions of the self - the Cartesian/Kantian, the meditative and the Jungian - differ widely in many respects. However, despite their divergences they share one relevant feature. All three incorporate the view of a contentless self, remote from the activity of consciousness. At first sight, this view appears to be compatible with the little we know so far of the nature of the self brought into being by reflection, since its structure seems determined by a process

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1 See, for example, the selection from Jung's writings edited by R. F. C. Hull: *C.G. Jung: Dreams*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1982).

of coming to be distinct from other kinds of conscious activity. Therefore, a modified view of this kind might open up a direction for articulating the self we are dealing with. To take such a direction would have the benefit of including certain insights of a stream of thinking which, though not the dominant orthodoxy at the present day, nevertheless supplies a well-supported popular alternative.

But if the self brought into being by reflection - a self I will call the reflexive self from now on - were to be articulated along Kantian/meditative lines, old problems surrounding the thing-in-itself and the subject/object dichotomy would re-emerge at once. This is obvious in the case of a Kantian type of self. However, it also applies to the general notion of the meditative self, because even in this case, there is something already there, a given self, a 'real' self which can be reached through certain practices. Such a given self falls prey to the difficulties mentioned in the last chapter, which plague any notion of the given self. So whilst these problems would no doubt have a different character this time round, they would still require a solution, and, at even a superficial glance, there are already hints of other problems that would unfold once a Kantian/meditative schema were taken seriously. Therefore, despite a certain similarity at this early point between the reflexive self and the Kantian/meditative self, elements of the stream of thought just discussed cannot provide a suitable beginning.

Even so, this discussion itself provides a foil for the emergence of a different conceptual framework. Against a Kantian/Jungian/meditative background it becomes possible to determine what the reflexive self is and what it is not. For example, the idea embedded in that background - of a

self serenely and wisely removed from the turmoil of conscious activity, a self which forms a permanent, though characterless backdrop, imaginable as a neutral point of consciousness in meditation - raises some serious questions apart from those already mentioned. In this respect, one difficulty concerning the self as a point of consciousness immediately occurs.

That is, to conceive a point of consciousness to be the real self seems highly arbitrary. Such a point is frequently regarded as a sort of single apex lying beyond the contents of consciousness. But this prospect is not the only one possible, for it is equally plausible to imagine that there are many such points, limited only by the range of the movement of consciousness. In such a context, any point beyond the habitual contents of consciousness might be only one of a potentially limitless, moving number. If that is the case, then to randomly select one point, arresting it by fastening that point with the designation of self, appears not only unjustifiable, but improbable. A multitude of puzzles occur at once, not the least of which concerns the dubious possibility of always reaching the same point, and therefore the same self, whenever consciousness moves in what may be a vast expanse beyond the immediate contents of consciousness. On such grounds, there is reason to reject the Kantian/meditative conception.

At the same time, however, a diverging frame of reference has just now emerged. In the face of this problematic notion attached to the transcendent self, a more appropriate context has become possible, one which holds the potential for a different way of seeing the reflexive self. That is, the points of consciousness - essentially pauses or rests during

its continual movement - which lie outside the commonly experienced patterns of conscious activity may be numberless. We may be able to project our consciousness in an ever-widening range that has no limits in principle. (In imagining this, Fichte's infinitely outreaching movement of consciousness comes to mind.) These points of consciousness, these rests, seem empty just because what consciousness becomes conscious of when it is stilled at a point beyond the well-known is inchoate, in that what consciousness grasps cannot be articulated according to familiar patterns.

Yet, whilst that is so of the content of consciousness at such times, the pattern of the movement of consciousness is quite familiar in the Fichtean sense described in chapter 6. Following Fichte, the movement of consciousness, after it has been stilled at a point, either flows onward or turns back. So in the midst of the widely ranging movement of consciousness, some points provide an impetus to reflection because they precipitate a turning back. Once consciousness turns back upon itself in the movement of reflection described at the beginning of this chapter, the reflexive self is brought into being.

But this notion of the self is beginning to differ significantly from the Kantian/meditative idea. For a start, the transcendental point of consciousness, beyond the familiar activity of consciousness, is not regarded as the self - as it often is in meditation. Instead, some points at which the flow of consciousness is arrested, become moments for a reflective movement by consciousness, and from that movement the self emerges. So rather than being a transcendental point of consciousness, the reflexive self comes into being as the result of a movement provoked by such a point. This self, then, cannot be thought of as an empty 'I think',

or as a bare point of consciousness not unlike the transcendental ego in its structure. Instead, far from being an empty thing-in-itself, about which nothing further can be said, the reflexive self, emerging as it does, is full of content, full of that which consciousness is conscious of.

That is, when consciousness turns back in reflection, and produces self, that self is determined by a certain context; it is a self formed when the activity of consciousness appropriates the contents of consciousness as its own contents, and so what self is, is determined by the content of consciousness. Whilst self is brought into being by the movement of reflection, self is all that consciousness is conscious of at the moment of turning back.

To clarify this it is useful to recall how, at the beginning of this chapter, it was pointed out that in reflection, that which is indeterminate is grasped by means of its own image and then recognised as self. But this account involved what is essentially indeterminate. At the level of consciousness, the process is far more complex, for a consciousness characterised by intentionality is now involved.

In short, since consciousness is always a consciousness of something or other, it means that the reflexive self comes to be with the aid of that same intentionality which consciousness projects towards what it is conscious of. That is, in the case of the reflexive self, intentionality operates in the mode of reflection, and this brings the reflexive self into being. Since it is formed from, and by, this intentional activity, self - in order to be self at all - is the intentional activity of consciousness;

it is consciousness grasping itself by means of its own intentional reflection.

However, the intentional activity of consciousness does not involve a bare consciousness, since consciousness is always consciousness of something. Therefore, when consciousness turns back in reflection and brings self into being, that self has a concrete identity by virtue of all that consciousness was conscious of at the moment of turning back. It is this content of consciousness which determines self once reflection brings self into being. Self, in that it is the intentional activity of consciousness, is at the same time rendered determinate by the content of consciousness. Further, in so far as self is determined by the content of consciousness, self is that content, and this works in two ways. First, self is full of what consciousness was conscious of at the moment of turning back in reflection; in that sense self is the content of consciousness. Secondly, once it has come into being as the content of consciousness, self can in turn become part of the content of consciousness; it can subsequently be grasped in consciousness in the same way that anything else is. In that respect, self is no different from thoughts, feelings, moods, and whatever else consciousness is conscious of.

The picture of the reflexive self that now emerges is of a self that is always, and necessarily, formed from the reflexive/intentional activity of consciousness, whilst what that self is, is determined by the content of consciousness at the time of reflection. Regarded in this light, any attempt such as Kant makes to separate the self from the representations of consciousness must fail. In Kant's case, that attempt flounders on the

grounds that the 'I think' is not - as Kant believes - distinct from consciousness; rather, far from being distinct from the contents of consciousness, the 'I think' is already filled with those contents. To separate the self of consciousness from the contents of consciousness, and then to say that this self is distinct in that it endures throughout the flux of the contents of consciousness is therefore a mistake. Self is always already mediated; even in its pure being, the reflexive self is not empty; it is full of the content of what consciousness is conscious of.

Therefore, what was earlier regarded as a significant resemblance between the transcendental ego and the reflexive self - a resemblance of context, marking the pure being of self off from the activity of consciousness - has now been found to be acceptable at only the most superficial level. Only the possibility of distinguishing the process in which self comes into being from the immersion by consciousness in what it is conscious of, now becomes a point of resemblance identifying the reflexive self with the transcendental ego/meditative self, a resemblance so slight as to be useless in any articulation of the reflexive self. Nevertheless, in the course of this discussion, the nature of the reflexive self is becoming more distinct. Now it can be said that the very being of this self depends on reflection, that it is actual, and that it is not only characterised by the activity of consciousness, it is that activity, made determinate by the content of consciousness.

### **The Reflexive Self and the First-Person Standpoint.**

Nevertheless, there is still a point of vagueness that needs to be cleared up. It concerns the distinction between the self and the content of consciousness. If the self is rendered determinate by the contents of

consciousness - if, in the sense explained above, self is the content of consciousness - then, at first sight, its privileged position as the agent of conscious activity is threatened, and that immediately appears as counter-intuitive in the light of all that has been said in this thesis about the first-person standpoint. After all, it is possible to distinguish between the self, the agent of experience, and that experience. That, at least, is what the first-person standpoint conveys. So to say that self is the content of consciousness seems to dismiss the distinction invoked by that standpoint.

But this is not so. Consciousness of self, in one sense no different from consciousness of a thought or a feeling - since both must be the focus of consciousness and in that sense both must form part of the contents of consciousness - is altogether different in another sense. Taking up a Fichtean context might help to develop this point. Consciousness reaches limitlessly outwards until at some point it is stilled and then turns back. But in its outward reach consciousness is nevertheless still a consciousness of something or other; consciousness always becomes immersed in what is before it, what it grasps in the form of an object, a thought, a feeling, or whatever.

However, when consciousness turns back in reflection, and brings self into being, the object, thought, or feeling is still nevertheless present. Only, now that self has also emerged, it becomes possible to say 'my thought', 'my feeling' and so on. So whilst both self and the thought or whatever, are contents of consciousness - that is, in recounting my thought, both I and that thought are part of conscious operation - self is nevertheless of a different order, in that it has come into being by means

of a process unlike the process of thinking or feeling. That is, self comes into being in a process which gathers up the experience of consciousness, setting bounds around it so that it can be acknowledged as self, whereas in the process of thinking, or feeling, there is only an outward movement by consciousness, without a reflexive appropriation of the content of that movement. It is this difference in the movement of consciousness which is captured and expressed in the first-person standpoint. Self will always be unique amongst the contents of consciousness in that the mode and nature of its very conception is unlike the conception of anything else in consciousness. The first-person standpoint is a manifestation that this is so.

#### **The Being of the Reflexive Self.**

All the while, however, in the whole course of this discussion of the reflexive self, a point of contention has been nagging in the background. It involves the 'being' of the reflexive self. If reflection brings self into being, would it not be the case that further acts of reflection must inevitably split this self into subject/object? How are the previous problems associated with reflection to be overcome? A quick answer lies in the way 'being' is understood. The reflexive self is not an entity of any kind; following Nietzsche, its very being is a necessary fiction. That is, I want to suggest that a feature of Nietzsche's idea that the self is a fiction is relevant to the conception of the reflexive self, in that whilst it cannot be denied that the being of the reflexive self is actual, it is nevertheless the case that 'being' is imposed by the act of reflection.

A reminder of what this involves recalls Nietzsche's position in chapter 7. For Nietzsche, reason, in order to function at all, must assume

'beings', because it can only deal with formulas for what remains the same, and therefore for what is. That is, when we become conscious of a thought, countless phenomena escaping conscious awareness have already been ordered, arranged, schematised and interpreted. Thinking is above all a process which involves conditioning the unconditioned by making discrete what is otherwise fluid and undefinable; the new is constantly submerged into the familiar, in that it is measured, sorted, categorised according to what has already been conditioned in the same way previously.

Through this process, thoughts and concepts, and facts, come into being - they are discrete bundles of thinking, as it were; they are Nietzsche's established quantities; they have contents that are because those contents are thought to be just like thought itself. So the self is because it is thought to be. In that sense the self is actual, and this assumption is quite acceptable provided it is also accepted that the very 'being' of these thoughts, concepts and facts, and of their contents, can, after Nietzsche, be regarded plausibly as inventions of the process of thinking. In its drive to re-form a fundamentally unconditioned world, and render determinate what is essentially indeterminate, thinking invents the fiction of 'being'; without this fiction, thinking itself could not progress. In this light, it becomes clear that it is because we think thoughts, concepts, facts, etc., and therefore make them be, that we then slide into attributing 'being' to what those thoughts, facts, and concepts are about.

At the same time, whilst there has always been some distinction between kinds, or degrees of being, it is also the case that the being of objects has been regarded predominantly in terms of the being of real

entities, or substantial things, unless those objects were already defined as fictional or supernatural. That is why self - thought to be real - has been regarded as an autonomous, given, substantial thing; it was thought to be, and its actuality was then immediately interpreted in terms of the old metaphysical categories. But against a Nietzschean background it becomes possible to see the 'being' of the reflexive self differently. Instead of confirming the reality of the self as a substantial thing, the 'being' of the reflexive self is the 'being' of actuality, in that what was indeterminate has actually been rendered determinate. This kind of being, emerging in this kind of context, can best be understood in terms of the invention of thought, striving to domesticate what is otherwise undefinable.

But that brings to mind again the question raised above:- if the reflexive self is actual, if it has 'being' in the sense of the actuality described just now, then is it the case that this self also has the characteristic features normally associated with being, such as unity and stability.? That is, a question can still be raised about the nature of this self that has emerged in this way. For example, does it have the wholeness and unity we usually associate with the notion of being, and which we also tend to attribute to something that is actual - a wholeness we even impute to that which we distinguish as fiction and invention? If the answer is yes, then it might be argued that to say that the reflexive self is actual, is not really an advance from any previous position; rather, we are back with the same problems encountered before. The problem of the unity of the self wrestled with by Kant, Fichte and Kierkegaard, seems now only to be deferred rather than solved by the conception of the reflexive self. That is because if, as is likely, the self becomes the

object of further reflection once it is brought into being, then that reflection, by its very nature, will again split the unity of the self into subject and object.

This argument can be countered by first conceding the point that the actual self does have the characteristics of wholeness and unity. To deny this would simply be inconsistent with the way we normally understand that which actually is - that is, as an entire something, the coming to be of which has resulted in what is whole. For example, if the actual self were to be regarded in terms of many diverse features, those features would nevertheless be grouped together by the designation of 'self', and this very grouping, this very designation, imparts wholeness. Similarly, were the reflexive, actual self to be seen in terms of multiple selves, each one amongst that multiple must nevertheless have wholeness, in that it must be defined, and thereby made whole, so that it can be distinguishable from other selves. In short, once being is imposed on otherwise inchoate indeterminateness, wholeness is also imparted. Even each part of a whole has its own essential wholeness as a part.

Therefore, when reflection makes its inward move, what is brought into being is a whole self. But this wholeness is not that of an already given original source of the self, as it was in Kant, Fichte, and even Kierkegaard. In this respect, the fact that these thinkers held such a conviction shows how much they were still caught in the Cartesian framework: one which presupposes the self to be grounded in an already present unity. If that is what is meant by the wholeness of the reflexive self, then a return to previous problems really does become inevitable. But the conception of the wholeness of the self within a framework of

becoming is very different; that wholeness is inherent in that which is expressed.

My point can be clarified by means of what Charles Taylor has to say about what he calls the expressivist view. He writes,

To express something is to make it manifest in a given medium. I express my feelings in my face; I express my thoughts in the words I speak or write. I express my vision of things in some work of art, perhaps a novel or a play. In all these cases we have the notion of making something manifest, and in each case in a medium with certain specific properties.

But to talk of 'making manifest' does not imply that what is so revealed was already fully formulated beforehand. Sometimes that can be the case, as when I finally reveal my feelings that I had already put in words for myself long ago. But in the case of the novel or play, the expression will also involve a formulation of what I have to say. I am taking something, a vision, a sense of things, which was inchoate and only partly formed, and giving it a specific shape. In this kind of case, we have difficulty in distinguishing sharply between medium and 'message'. For works of art, we readily sense that being in the medium they are is integral to them. Even when it is clear that they are saying something else, we sense that we cannot fully render this in any other form...

And so for this kind of expressive object, we think of its 'creation' as not only a making manifest but also a making, a bringing of something to be.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self, (Harvard University Press, continued on next page

This kind of 'expressive object', 'a making manifest' which is 'also a making, a bringing of something to be', can be likened to the self brought into being through reflection. Until it was expressed, the object Taylor is talking about could not be said to be; it was not already fully formulated beforehand. Implicit in what Taylor is saying, however, is that once it is expressed this object has wholeness. At least, this is so in the case of 'the sense of things', which is only 'partly formed' until expression gives it 'a specific shape'. The emergence of shape indicates that what is within that shape has unity and coherence by virtue of that shape, and so what is expressed - the content of expression - is therefore given wholeness. Later in the process, features might be added or subtracted, yet even then a new wholeness will be brought into being. But what is most important for present purposes is that this wholeness could not have been formulated before objects of the kind referred to are expressed; rather, the wholeness comes about during, or in, expression.

It is this kind of wholeness that can be attributed to the reflexive self; a wholeness which depends on an aspect of reflection that has not been discussed so far. Up to now, the mirroring function of reflection has been explored, as well as the movement of reflection that brings self into being. However, there is another factor. Closely related to mirroring, is the expressive force of reflection - expressive in the sense of a making manifest, a sense that Taylor uses, which was discussed in chapter 5.

In the light of this added dimension, the actual wholeness of self is confirmed the moment self is expressed when brought into being in the manner described in this chapter. That is, in the case of the reflexive self, the actual wholeness of self is circumscribed and determined by those contents of consciousness captured as self, whilst other contents - perhaps past or future, to give them some context - are demarcated off from the contents that are appropriated as self at the moment of turning back. By that very demarcation of boundaries, self is shaped - as it were - and therefore manifested as whole. That is, wholeness is implicitly given to the contents of consciousness recognised as self, because self gives shape to those contents by enclosing them, just as wholeness is given to my face in reflection because the features of my face are enclosed by its shape, which forms a boundary around those features, distinguishing them from all that is outside that boundary.

But this wholeness emerges in expression. So when reflection brings self into being, when reflection expresses self - and thereby makes self, by making self manifest - the wholeness of self is forged in expression and manifestation. Therefore, that wholeness could not have been formed beforehand. For this reason, the wholeness and unity of the reflexive self are unlike the unity of the given self of Descartes and others examined in this thesis. The wholeness of the reflexive self is a unity that comes into being the moment self comes into being in reflection.

With this disclosure, the study of the structure of reflection, begun in earlier chapters, reaches completion. The mirroring characteristic of reflection, originally troublesome in Kant, but then recognised as indispensable through certain omissions made by Hegel, has already been

consolidated with the backward movement of reflection that Fichte and Hegel uncovered. But the resultant view of reflection - in which both mirroring and movement are acknowledged qualities of reflection - nevertheless left one important feature in relation to the self out of account. That is, reflection creates and makes self - in the sense that Fichte understood create and make - by expressing, and manifesting what had been inchoate beforehand. Therefore, the view of reflection I have been working with up to now must be extended to encompass the third quality of reflection - that of manifestation. As a result, it can be said that reflection at once captures what is selfsame - through introspective mirroring: makes self-recognition possible - through the movement back to that which is captured in mirroring: and creates self - through manifesting that self-recognition.

### **The Intermittent Actuality of Self.**

Given that the reflexive self has the kind of wholeness described above, further acts of reflection cannot split the unity of the self into subject/object. If self comes into being each time it is expressed in reflection, then it cannot ever be the subject of further acts of reflection in the manner that has proved so problematic in preceding chapters. That is, the reflexive self does not come into being once and for all; that would be to mistake the nature of its 'being' - the 'being' of actuality - for the being of substantial things which endure. Rather, each act of reflection brings self into being anew. This must not be understood in the sense that each time reflection takes place a new, and different self comes into being, so that a number of whole, autonomous selves eventually emerge. Nor must it be thought that in bringing self into being anew, reflection brings out and reveals a self which at other

times lurks in the shadows, as it were. Instead, what is meant here is that each distinct act of reflection results in a self the very being of which is discrete, in that it is confined to that act.

That this is so is grounded in the manner of being of the reflexive self. Whilst that being is actual, it nevertheless has its source in the movement of turning back in reflection, a movement which must be seen in terms of a particular kind of activity. In this movement a whole, autonomous self is brought into being, by becoming manifest through the expressive power of reflection. That self is actual. Before the reflexive movement by consciousness occurs, there is no self, and that self remains actual only for so long as it is being expressed in the first-person standpoint. So any further act of reflection cannot have as its object an actual self brought into being by a previous act of reflection, for that self is no longer actual at the moment of such a subsequent reflective move.

This point is not as problematic as it may seem at first sight, for it can be explained as follows. The full flow of the expressive force of reflection is poured out in the first-person standpoint. In saying 'I', the apex of the movement that brings self into being is disclosed and manifested; at that moment self is actual. But that actuality fades away when consciousness expresses what consciousness is conscious of in ways other than through the first-person standpoint. For instance, I 'forget' my self when I am wholly absorbed in some activity - like photography for instance. In the course of that activity I am 'lost' in the effort of working out a correct exposure, in the effort of making full use of the functions of my camera, or in contemplating the composition of some scene

before me. At such times, much of what consciousness is conscious of is expressed in thoughts, or words, or on film. At any rate, what consciousness is conscious of fills all of consciousness as it reaches outwards to what is before it. In the absence of a reflective movement, only what consciousness is conscious of in this outward movement takes on actuality. In that sense, self is not actual at such times, rather self is actual whenever, but only when, the first person standpoint is adopted.

This intermittent actuality of self, this notion of the discontinuous 'being' of self, seems highly suspect because it appears so counter-intuitive. It is almost inconceivable that I am no longer actual once I am absorbed in some engrossing activity, or when I am lost in contemplating the splendours of a landscape, or in listening to a great piece of music, or even when I am asleep. Such a loss of myself seems almost inconceivable because - put in terms like these - it is an impossible state of affairs. That is, what has just been articulated has been expressed from the first-person standpoint, and, as I have just argued, self is actual the moment that standpoint is taken up.

Yet, familiar words of this kind, used to describe an equally familiar state, must be taken seriously as an exact expression of the fact that self was no longer present. To say 'I was absorbed in taking photographs', or 'I was so lost in gazing at that sunset, that I forgot myself', mean precisely what they say. To be 'absorbed in' or 'lost' to the point of 'forgetting myself' express a prior loss of the actuality of self - a loss that only becomes noticeable once self is actual again.

At this point it might be objected that, since I can know that I lost myself in some activity, there must be some kind of underlying continuity of self; the actuality of self must somehow endure below the threshold of self-awareness, even during those times when I seem lost to myself. But to argue for such a view is to misunderstand what is happening. There is no underlying actual self, persisting through those moments of self-forgetfulness because the fact that I can say that I lost myself in some way, is nothing other than an indication that a reflexive movement has just taken place. A concrete example of this can be found in the very structure of those statements mentioned before. In statements like 'I lost myself', or 'I thought long and hard about myself, and then decided to change myself', a strange kind of dualism is present; there is an 'I' and a 'self' here. Both are supposed to be an expression of the same entity - self - yet, in statements of this kind, there is also a gulf - an evident distance between 'I' and 'myself'. That distance can be understood as the distance of reflexivity.

To say 'I thought long and hard about myself', or, 'I lost myself', presupposes that 'I' has a currency not shared by 'myself'; 'myself' in these statements conveys the sense of a less recent self, and quite rightly so, because 'I' can make judgements about 'myself' only as the result of reflection. That is, 'I' - the present self - is an enhanced self, compared to the self of 'myself', because 'I' has absorbed what 'myself' had no access to - that is, to the consciousness that 'myself' was lost, or that 'myself' needs to be changed. In that sense, 'I' is a different self, because it is shaped by the distance between the two selves, a distance filled with what consciousness became conscious of, which now also forms 'I'.

What this discussion shows, is that the intermittent actuality of self is borne out by the very language we use. I am only able to make the kind of statement presently being discussed because self has again been actualised as 'I' - expressed through the first-person standpoint - following a reflexive movement which, whenever it occurs, brings self into being. Therefore, in cases such as these, it is not necessary to postulate a continuity of the actuality of self; it is far more accurate to recognise that, since what such statements mean depends entirely on the movement of reflection, self has again been brought into being in this way.

One consequence of this idea of the intermittent actuality of the self is that the concern with the separation of self into subject and object, thought to be brought about by reflection - a theme so prominent in this thesis - can be set aside. In part, this is because the wholeness of self only comes to be in expression, and therefore there is no previous whole self that reflection can split into subject/object. But further, if the actuality of self is intermittent, the two opposing poles generated by reflection cannot be upheld. Such poles can only emerge if self is a permanent substratum of some sort, because they arise as a result of further acts of reflection involving the same, enduring self. But if self - in its whole entirety - is made actual by reflection, and that whole, entire actuality no longer remains after reflection, then self can never be split into the polarity of subject/object.

If this is so with respect to the subject/object dichotomy, then those problems which are generated on the assumption that self and reflection are

different in structure, can equally be set aside as irrelevant in the present context. This applies to a contemporary debate with a long history which can be traced back to the ancients. Since the time of Plato's Charmides and the writings of Sextus Empiricus, the debate has raged whether self-reflection is possible at all. Nietzsche, a more recent sceptic, raises essentially the same question when he asks how it is that reason can criticise itself if it can only use itself for this critique. To criticise itself, reason would have to judge its own performance in the very act of performing. But how can it do that? How can a tool criticise itself? For a critique of reason, a higher order of reason is therefore required, but this higher order is as unable to judge itself as the lower order, and so an even higher order is required, and so on, leading to a regressus ad infinitum. As Gasché puts it,

The aporia is obvious: either reason knows itself as Other, and this means that it does not know itself, or it becomes caught in a never-ending process of self approximation.<sup>3</sup>

A number of contemporary German critics have pointed to a string of similar problems. There is the circularity of self-reflection, for instance, which Henrich discovers and then objects to. His argument is that the theory of self-reflection contends that a subject-self comes to know itself when it turns its reflection upon itself. But it is only possible to speak of a subject-self where there is already a consciousness of self. The act of reflecting must be an act of a self already in possession of itself; yet self-reflection is supposed to bring about this consciousness of self. In short, such a theory of reflection must

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3 Rodolphe Gasché, The Tain of the Mirror, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986) p. 67.

presuppose what it is supposed to explain. Further, for self-knowledge to be possible, the subject must know in advance that the object reflected is its own self, yet the knowledge that the object turned upon in reflection is oneself, is supposed to be what the theory of reflection accounts for.<sup>4</sup>

Problems like these, concerning the very possibility of self-reflection, form part of a current debate which, for all its significance in certain respects, has no relevance in the present context. That is because several of the positions taken are related in one crucial way even as they differ from one another. That is, they are either generated by, or they attack theories of the self and self-reflection which assume that self is, perhaps as a kind of permanent backdrop, for whilst there is not always a presumption that the self is given, there is nevertheless a conviction that the self has a continuity which endures. But for that reason, objections raised in this type of debate can have no relevance here. In the light of the concept of the reflexive self - a concept that has itself emerged in order to provide an argument against the idea of a given, enduring self - it is not only the case that reflection brings self into being, but that very being has an intermittent character. So issues of the kind raised above, as well as any problems which emerge from the assumption that the self and reflection are structurally different, evaporate in relation to the concept that is at present unfolding here.

### **The Imprinting of Self.**

But whilst the reflexive self is in no sense given, there is an underlying continuity of becoming. The reflexive movement that brings self

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4 ibid., p. 68-69.

into being gathers up the trace of a former actualised self, still stamped on those contents of consciousness that previously became actual as self, plus all that consciousness became conscious of in the time between that previous act of reflection and the reflection at the present time. That is, to repeat a point made previously, reflection can never have as its object an actual self brought into being by a previous act of reflection, for that self is no longer actual at the moment of such a subsequent reflective move. If the notion that self is brought into being by reflection is taken seriously, then there cannot be an actual self before the act of reflection, nor can that actuality endure after the reflexive act.

What does happen, however, is that self gives a certain character to contents of consciousness acknowledged as self. To explain this, it is necessary to recall an argument made earlier in this chapter - that self is the activity of consciousness, made determinate by the contents of consciousness. At that point in the chapter, there is an implicit element in the argument which needs to be made explicit here. That is, once self is brought into being, it must itself be a process, a movement, if it is the case that self is an activity rendered determinate by the contents of consciousness.

Therefore, since it is essentially a movement, and not some thing that comes into being and then passes away without a trace, the actualised self must have some effect on the further flow of consciousness once its actuality fades away. That effect can best be seen as an imprint of self, marking those contents of consciousness that were previously actualised as self; that is, the previously actualised self has left the trace of an

imprint on the activity and contents of consciousness which affects the further flow of consciousness once its actuality fades away. In that manner, self remains part of the contents of consciousness - just like any thought, feeling, or mood - which forms part of the actual self brought into being by the present act of reflection.

That this is so, is not only evident from the kind of statements discussed above regarding the intermittent actuality of the self, but also from the fact that there is a distinct difference in character between the thoughts I have of some object, and the recognition that my thoughts of that object are my thoughts. That recognition can shape subsequent contents of consciousness, so that the imprint of self remains even as the actuality of self fades away. Therefore, in any act of reflection, a previous self-actualised content of consciousness, plus those contents of consciousness that have since followed, are formed into the actual self brought into being by the present act of reflection.

At one level, then, there is a continuity of self, but it is not the continuity of actuality. Rather, it is the continuity of becoming, expressed in the form of successive manifestations of self, which, through the activity of consciousness, become only a trace on contents of consciousness now left behind. In this activity, consciousness becomes conscious of and actualises whatever it confronts in its forward movement, only to be caught in a reflexive movement again, in which the imprint of a formerly actualised self and the new contents are actualised as self again. In this respect, the movement of consciousness is like a wave, moving back upon itself as it is spent on the beach, in order to move forward again. It is a process of becoming, an ever-flowing movement forward, punctuated

by points of reflexive return which bring self into being, to be understood in the Fichtean sense of the movement of a force which could not be without self-expression.

What this discussion really amounts to is an illustration of Nietzsche's point concerning the invention of 'being' by the process of thinking. The actuality of self is intermittent because it is the reflexive movement of consciousness which gives self actuality, an actuality expressed in thought or words through the medium of the first-person standpoint. Since it is expressed in thought, self could not be without thought, if 'expressed' is used in the sense Taylor means it. But just because self comes to be in thought, the actuality of self - dependent on being maintained by thought - is as intermittent as the movement of thoughts dictates.

But that this is so, is only one instance of what it means to be in a universe where all is in process of becoming. The sporadic actuality of self belongs within this context; or rather, this is the context against which the conception of the reflexive self emerges. If all is in flux, then the actuality of self cannot be other than intermittent, because, as argued in chapter 7, whilst becoming is for ever striving for being, being must, necessarily always elude becoming. Becoming could no longer be, if all that is becoming could find fulfilment in being.

### **The Reflexive Self versus the Constituted Self.**

The concept of the reflexive self that has now emerged is clearly very different from a Cartesian notion of the self, and from the notion of the self as somehow given. What is not so obvious is that this concept must

also be distinguished from notions of self-constitution, and that brings Habermas to mind again. For Habermas - as discussed in chapter 7 - self-reflection can lead to self-knowledge, since it is that type of thinking in which thought mirrors itself, and reviews itself. The fact that thought can review itself - by evaluating, assessing, comparing, and so on - indicates that self-reflection is capable of critical evaluation, and that produces a type of knowledge. Such knowledge makes possible a process in which the self is re-formed, because knowledge reveals aspects of that self that were previously ignored, repressed, forgotten or unknown. To clarify what he means, Habermas draws an analogy with the psycho-analytic process in which lost, or repressed psychic contents are re-appropriated. The acknowledgement of these aspects involves a retrieval of lost possibilities, which, if they are taken up, produce a re-construction or re-formation which is at the same time a self-formation, or a self-constitution, since it is a process going on within the self whilst also involving the self as agent.

The process that Habermas explains in a searching account has its counter-part in a much more familiar, ordinary experience. Sitting on the back step, I might be reflecting on certain events which have affected me, when suddenly these events take on an added significance, for I discover that, through the way I reacted to them, some aspect of myself hitherto unacknowledged is revealed. As a result, I am now in possession of a piece of knowledge about myself I did not have previously. This knowledge generates the potential for a change of attitude, so that possibilities for developing myself in a certain way, never considered before, open up. As a result, the impression grows that I can shape myself; I can constitute myself along certain lines; I can set goals for myself, and attempt to

live up to them, thereby making myself into a particular kind of person, a particular kind of self.

Impressions of this type support one of the assumptions underlying theories of self-constitution that are currently so fashionable. It is not only Habermas who builds on such an assumption; all those who take the notion of self-constitution seriously in one way or another - thinkers as diverse in their views on this issue as Habermas, Foucault and Greenblatt - base their theories on the impression that we can make, or shape, ourselves. Since the notion of self-constitution has several variations, which cannot all be dealt with here, I will contrast the main elements of only two theories of this type with the understanding of the reflexive self, in order to show why these theories are different and distinct from the concept of the reflexive self, and should therefore not be confused with it. For this purpose I will deal briefly with Habermas, because for him self-reflection and self-constitution are linked, and with Foucault, who has a view of self-constitution which does not solely rely on reflection.

Habermas, as already pointed out, believes that self-reflection yields knowledge, and it is this knowledge which makes self-constitution possible. In his scheme of things, the role of self-reflection is given prominent recognition; it is a vital element in the continuing process of forming self anew in the light of ever more and deeper critical evaluations. This is one point of contrast between the concept of the reflexive self developed here, and Habermas' theory of self-constitution. Whilst in Habermas' schema, knowledge is essential for constituting the self, knowledge is not needed at all in order to bring the reflexive self into

being. In recalling the account of the emergence of the reflexive self, it becomes clear that knowledge plays no constitutive part, and for that reason, knowledge can serve no essential function, as it does for Habermas.

This has a significant advantage for the concept of the reflexive self. The danger with the kind of theory Habermas proposes is that it is all too easy to assume that self is constituted in the sense that more and more features are added in the construction of a self that then comes to be seen as some thing. That is, there is a danger that despite the recognition that self-constitution is an activity, a process, it can easily be seen as the continuous building, and rebuilding, of one entity, even if this process takes a lifetime, a process of building made possible by using bits of knowledge - disclosed by self-reflection - as the building blocks. This brings to mind the notion of the self as an artefact, carefully constituted through knowledge - much like the construction of any artefact, which similarly requires a deal of specialised knowledge.

This danger is accentuated by Habermas' belief that self-reflection sets the subject free from being submerged in what is loosely recognised as 'objective' knowledge. That is, when knowledge is purely objective, the knowing subject - an undeniable factor in that knowledge - may no longer recognise itself in it. But, according to Habermas, through self-reflection the subject can know this. Self-reflection therefore emancipates; it sets the subject free in order to recognise itself. Emancipation, fostering heightened self-awareness, also encourages self-determination, so an interest in autonomy and responsibility drives the process of self-reflection. All this adds up to a picture of an entity - constructed by the use of knowledge - which holds out the promise of one

day reaching such a stage in its constitution that it can be recognised as wholly autonomous and self-determined. Even if that promise is never fulfilled, the suggestion of a finished artefact is now strengthened to the point where the self is in danger of being regarded as a thing, although admittedly a thing of a special kind.

This impression is all the more inescapable because Habermas never explains the nature of the self of self-reflection. Presumably it is not a Cartesian entity, nor a self that is somehow given before the act of reflection; otherwise its constitution through reflection - regarded by Habermas as an ongoing process - would be problematic. However, in the absence of an account of how he envisages the origin and nature of the self, Habermas becomes exposed to various objections raised in this thesis, because the very fact that a process of self-constitution - on his terms - also requires a self-integration to the point of attaining the self's autonomous wholeness, leads to the notion of an enduring self. Habermas portrays the self as simply undergoing certain changes in its structure, which have the character of a re-building as the process continues; but it is a re-building of something that is in essence stable throughout all the changes. If this impression is correct - and it is fuelled by the fact that for Habermas lost contents of consciousness can be retrieved to reform self - then the separation of the self into subject/object by the movement of reflection emerges as a problem.

That is, in the kind of self-constitution Habermas envisages, self makes itself its own object in reflection, and there are no safeguards built into this view by Habermas that prevent the kind of difficulties faced by previous philosophers of reflection. Once self examines itself in

self-reflection, once self becomes an object for itself, the problems of how the two parts of self can be merged again immediately occur - even if that self is only the kind of indefinite presence sketched by Habermas. Whilst the newly gained knowledge yielded by self-reflection is supposed in theory to bring about a newly integrated, whole self, that wholeness is mysterious, the only indication of it is supposed to become manifest through changed attitudes, beliefs, or behaviour.

But exactly how this integration is brought about before it is clearly manifested in behaviour is not accounted for. If Habermas held a view of expression comparable to Taylor's, he could at least argue that the new integration of self comes to be in its very expression, channelled through altered attitudes and behaviour. He clearly does believe something like this, but because he never explicitly argues for such a view - and one way of doing so might have involved some discussion along Taylor's lines - the wholeness supposedly achieved by the self has no philosophical grounding.

Habermas, then, runs into problems because he attempts to juggle two basically incompatible elements in one theory. The self as Habermas sees it has one crucial feature in common with the given self discussed in previous chapters. At any particular stage, it is possible for the Habermasian self to reflect upon itself, but this must mean that there is always something already there - however lacking it is in those features which would enhance its wholeness and complete it - and so self-reflection always operates on that which is, and in that sense, the self Habermas is dealing with is already given. Like others before him, he tries to blend this conception of the self with a constitutive role played by reflection, and again, as on so many previous occasions, Habermas, like others, is led

into problems that are similar in nature to the subject/object dichotomy. The idea of self-constitution as Habermas sees it must therefore be distinguished sharply from the emergence of the reflexive self.

Yet, Habermas does give expression to a genuine insight. The view he holds connects with the story of what can happen on the back step, which is all too familiar. However, that occurrence, and others of a similar kind, can be interpreted differently, in such a way as to by-pass the problems Habermas inevitably faces. The self that is brought into being in any act of reflection is either enhanced or diminished in subsequent acts, but this has nothing to do with knowledge. To explain this, however, involves recalling the story told before.

Sitting on the back step yesterday, I - the self that comes into being the moment the first-person standpoint is adopted - considered certain events that had created quite an impact, and as a result I came to conclusions concerning the self I am. What that amounts to within the conception of the reflexive self, is that consciousness, full of the particular thoughts consciousness is conscious of, turns back in a reflexive movement, in which self comes into being. At that moment self-consciousness emerges, so that I and my thoughts form part of the same contents of consciousness, and this makes it possible for me to say 'I am thinking or remembering the pain of saying goodbye to my friend'. Since self-consciousness is determined by what consciousness was conscious of at the time of turning back, I and the pain are one.

But because self is the activity of consciousness - made determinate by the content of consciousness - self continues to reach out and to

encompass further thoughts and feelings. In that way, self - still actualised in the first person standpoint, expressed in saying 'I' - can consider further thoughts about the events in question. These thoughts, however, are about the impact those events had on me. So, in the one reflective act, self is not only brought into being, but, since self is the activity of consciousness, self can reach out and become conscious of those thoughts whose contents are of self as long as self is actualised in the first-person standpoint. Whilst this entails a reflective act within a reflective act, the danger of splitting self into subject/object is avoided because there is in this case no further act of reflection upon self. What is described here is a simultaneous reflection within reflection, which must be distinguished from those acts of reflection which follow in succession. It is these latter acts of reflection concerning the same entity that bring about the separation of self into subject/object.

Today, however, I may think differently about myself. That is, in re-examining myself I may decide that what I concluded about myself yesterday was not quite right; there was something missing. Again, this process need not be interpreted in a Habermasian way, as though new knowledge has been found which leads to a re-forming of myself. Rather, what has happened is that since self was actualised in yesterday's considerations, consciousness has moved on. After the moment of reflection passed, yesterday's actualised self has left only its trace in how the contents of consciousness that were actualised as self are now characterised. But because consciousness has moved on, other thoughts - in this case supplementary thoughts in terms of their contents - become the contents of consciousness. Therefore, the moment self becomes actualised once again, that self is constituted not only from the trace of yesterday's self still

imprinted on the contents of consciousness that were actualised as self then, but also from the supplementary thoughts in consciousness since that actualisation, which now make up the actual self.

In this case there is an enhancement of self, but it is an enhancement that is not dependent on further knowledge in the way Habermas envisages. Rather, since the actuality of self is intermittent, there is no self already present to be re-formed; it is simply that an increasing content of thoughts, channeled by means of intentionality towards the same consideration of the events that affected me, has resulted in an enlarged self, as it were, at the moment of turning back in reflection. This is the nature of the process of reflection, in which the self that is actualised has the character of the contents of consciousness at the point of turning back.

However, it is not the case that self is always enhanced. There are times when the contents of consciousness are simple and uncomplicated at the moment of turning back, and then a less complex self, in relation to the self actualised the day after the ruminations on the back step, comes into being. In Habermas' terms, the emergence of this somewhat diminished self is represented by the notion that certain aspects of self might have been lost or repressed. But in the case of the reflexive self, such diminishing comes about simply because the content of consciousness at the time of the retrospective movement of reflection is different. That is, since the contents of consciousness might be trivial or complex, it follows that a trivial or complex self, an enhanced or diminished self, comes into being in the moment of actualisation.

In the case of the reflexive self, then, there is nothing that undergoes a process of forming and re-forming; rather, in the continuity of intermittent actualisations, each self fluctuates between expansion and contraction, according to the simplicity or complexity of the contents of consciousness. Each time I come into being in the course of one day, I am determined by a certain content of consciousness, from the trivial to the profound. For example, I am feeling like having a cup of coffee at the moment; self is actualised as feeling like having a cup of coffee. But, because each actualisation of self leaves its imprint on the contents of consciousness, I can, with the aid of memory, which is a species of self-reflection, enhance the self I am at present. I can, at this moment of actualisation, remember, through reflection, a previously actualised self, and so I am enhanced as long as self remains actualised.

Such fluctuation between contraction and expansion has nothing to do with knowledge. Whatever the true milieu of knowledge might be, there are reasons for not mistaking it as a source for the constitution of self, as I hope to show shortly. Whilst the reflexive self is undoubtedly formed in reflection, that formation cannot be seen as a self-constitution through a reflection which yields knowledge; that kind of constitution is vulnerable to being interpreted as the continual building and re-building of one and the same self, with all its attendant problems.

This qualification, however, also applies to an aspect of Foucault's idea of self-constitution. Taking Nietzsche's genealogical method seriously, Foucault himself recognises three domains of genealogy, which he defines as,

First, an historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, an historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; third, an historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst Foucault, broadly speaking, explores the constitution of the self in terms of social, political, and moral practices, I want to focus briefly on what he calls techniques of the self, particularly in relation to his development of the Nietzschean idea of an aesthetics of existence; self can be understood as a work of art, just like a beautiful life can be a work of art. Here again, however, as in the case of Habermas, the danger presents itself that this constructed self, this artefact, comes to be envisaged as a kind of object. Even though the fashioning of a self is a process that can take a lifetime, the possibility is there in principle that self can be constituted in accordance with the aims professed at the outset; if this possibility is realised, then self becomes a product, with a certain wholeness and unity, just as wholeness can be attributed to any product, however imperfectly fashioned that product may be. In that sense, self can come to be regarded in terms of an object.

It might be pointed out that in the context of Foucault's thought, the problems generated by Habermas' view of one and the same self, constructed over time through self-reflection, do not apply, because he does not always link the emergence of the self with reflection. For example, he points out that in European culture up to the sixteenth century

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5 Foucault, in an interview in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Chicago, 2nd. ed. p. 237.

it was a question of the kind of work which an individual must effect upon him/herself so as to be capable and worthy of acceding to the truth.<sup>6</sup>

Generally, it was thought that ascetic practices constituted the best work that could provide the means to such an end. As a consequence, the adoption of ascetic practices led to the formation of a certain kind of self.

In this context, in which a practice becomes a technique constituting the self - whether or not that is consciously recognised on the part of the practitioners - the traditional Cartesian view of the self is disavowed. The difference is explained by Foucault himself as the difference between a subject regarded as the founder of practices of knowledge - as in the Cartesian view - and a 'subject constituted through practices of the self'.<sup>7</sup> It is the difference between a given self, and a self that is constituted over time.

In this respect, Foucault's view of the self would not pose a problem. The emergence of the self through practices that, whilst shaping self, are not always self-consciously aimed at doing so, is in one way not unlike the emergence of the self through reflection, in that in both cases the self is not given, but expressed through the medium in which it comes to be. The trouble is, in following a certain set of practices to achieve a goal, even without much thought for the kind of self that will be shaped as a result, moments of inwardness cannot help but occur. In most cases, there is not only the possibility of self-examination, but self-examination is essential

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6 *ibid.*, p. 251.

7 *ibid.*

in order to judge what kind of progress is being made in the attainment of the goal.

Foucault allows for this, to the point of recommending inward questioning about, for example, what 'aspect or part of myself or my behaviour is concerned with moral conduct'.<sup>8</sup> However, as soon as any form of self-examination occurs, reflection comes into play. Further, whilst Foucault does not always link self-reflection with care of the self, with practices which lead to the making of the self, it is nevertheless the case that there are occasions when Foucault's position depends on the exercise of reflection. For instance, he says in the Conclusion of the The Use of Pleasure, the second volume of The History of Sexuality, that

the Greeks questioned themselves about sexual behaviour... that they had access to prescriptive discourses by which they attempted to reflect on and regulate their sexual conduct...<sup>9</sup>

that Greek philosophy belongs to

a history of 'ethics', understood as the elaboration of a form of relation to self that enables an individual to fashion himself into a subject of ethical conduct.<sup>10</sup>

The first point to be made is that, as mentioned in chapter 8, even in this contemporary view of self-constitution the self and reflection remain linked. Secondly, in Foucault, as in Greenblatt - who is himself

8 ibid., p. 238.

9 Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, Vol. 2. of The History of Sexuality, trans. by Robert Hurley, (Pantheon Books, New York, 1985) p. 249.

10 ibid., p. 251.

influenced by Foucault - the connection between self-making and the word, discussed in chapter 1 again appears, recognised as one mode of self-fashioning. But whilst self-fashioning is overtly connected with reflection in cases such as these, there is also an element of self-reflection in those instances that are seemingly non-reflexive, such as the medieval example mentioned above. Perhaps this can best be shown by using the idea of self-creating in an aesthetic sense as an example.

Foucault says that,

From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art.<sup>11</sup>

This work of creation should not be understood in terms of a certain relation to oneself; rather, what is necessary is that such work 'should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity',<sup>12</sup> in the sense that 'one should create one's life by giving style to it through long practice and daily work'.<sup>13</sup> In that way, art comes to be related not merely to objects, but to individuals, and to life.

In this kind of creation - of a life, rather than of an object called the self - there must be an element of self-examination, for without any self-examination it would not be possible to style, to shape, or create, a life, a self. I can decide to create myself in a certain way, I can want to become a certain kind of self, I can want to live a life in accordance with certain values I treasure, without much thought for the self I am

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11 Foucault, in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *op.cit.*, p. 237.

12 *ibid.*

13 *ibid.*

becoming, or I can express the relation I have to myself in terms of the creative activity of styling my life. However, whatever the case, I can only engage in such creativity by periodically examining my life, to see if I am still relating the relation I have to myself to a creative activity, or to see if I am becoming as I want to be; I can only live up to my values by examining my conduct in relation to my values, to see whether I am living in accordance with them. Self-examination is, then, not only a significant technique for creating a life, as Foucault himself realises, but it is arguable that it is the most fundamentally necessary technique.

Yet, self-examination involves self-reflection; therefore, Foucault's notion of creating the self as a work of art, cannot escape its foundation in reflection. Further, because self-examination implies self-reflection, the self cannot help but make itself its own object, in a reflection which again cannot help but split that self into subject/object - into an 'I' that is the agent creating the artefact, the self, or a life, no matter how incomplete that self as artefact, that life as creation, may be. The moment there is a turning back in order to examine the life, or self, that has preceded the moment of turning back, the problem of something given, which reflection reflects upon, again presents itself. So the same problems centred around the subject/object dichotomy occur all over again. For this reason, Foucault's concept of self-constitution - at heart not so different from that of Habermas after all - must also be distinguished from the concept of the reflexive self.

But perhaps the most significant difference is that in theories of self-constitution, the activity of an agent is a fundamental assumption. In both Habermas and Foucault, and even more strikingly in Greenblatt

discussed in chapter 1, the belief that we constitute ourselves suggests that there is something, an agent, that does the making, an agent distinct from the product to be made. At an individual level, the idea that there is an 'I' creating 'myself' is present in Habermas' conviction that by means of self-reflection each one of us can retrieve aspects of ourselves so that the self we become is re-constituted through our own efforts. A similar need for the role of an agent is present in Foucault's idea that we create our life as a work of art. That agent can be the self, or, as also in the case of Foucault, the role of the agent can be taken over by certain practices of a social, political, environmental kind. But even when the presence of an agent is not explicitly acknowledged, it is our being in the world that shapes, or constitutes the self we are.

Yet, in rendering the self as a specific kind of human artefact, brought into being by certain means, through the agency of social, political, and other features of a humanly manipulated world, theories of self-constitution mis-place the genesis of the self. That is, the origin of the self lies not in its constitution by such human constructs; rather, as the activity of consciousness, grasping itself by means of its own intentionality in the movement of reflection, the self cannot be constituted. Instead, it springs from an activity that turns back upon itself through a stimulus that comes from nowhere other than within itself, an activity uncontrived by human intention or intervention. In this respect, there is nothing but a pure movement of reflection, an internal movement of consciousness, that becomes the condition that brings self into being.

But whilst self is not constituted in the sense that Habermas, Foucault, Greenblatt and others understand such constitution, self is rendered determinate by means of what consciousness is conscious of, in that self is the contents of consciousness at the moment of the movement back in reflection. Therefore, if consciousness is directed predominantly to certain issues - of a social, political, moral, aesthetic or other kind - then self will be rendered determinate in terms of those issues. However, since self is not constituted, but only rendered determinate in this way, self can be determined according to the range of the intentionality inherent in consciousness, a range that is in principle limitless in scope.

The difference between the constituted and the reflexive self is therefore ultimately the difference between a self that is fashioned out of various human influences, and a self which emerges in conditions beyond the reach of human manipulation. In contrast to the constituted self, the genesis of the reflexive self transcends human creation. Whilst the length, and perhaps even the occurrence, of acts of reflection can be affected and controlled - in that once self is actualised in the first-person standpoint, it becomes possible to choose however long reflection continues, provided self remains actualised - there is no means for self or any other kind of human agency to shape or fashion the structure of reflection which brings self into being. That structure, just because it brings self into being, cannot be formed or regulated by self. The reflexive self is, then, an actual phenomenon that has its genesis in certain conditions that facilitate its spontaneous emergence.

For this reason, the reflexive self is not created, in the sense that creation has been understood in this thesis, not even in the way that can be drawn from Fichte's thought as it is presented in chapter 5. The very notion of creation ex nihilo that both Pico and Fichte toyed with is not applicable here, for such a notion presumes the intentional activity of an agent, in that what is created has already been conceived beforehand by its creator. But the intentionality of consciousness that is captured in reflection is different, in that it is not directed towards the realisation of a previously conceived end, or purpose. The self that springs into being as a result of intentional reflection is purely and totally fortuitous and contingent, emerging as the accidental result of a reflexive structure in consciousness that is itself mysteriously purposeless, in that it cannot be rationally justified, only explained. Yet, in the course of its momentary and intermittent actualisations, that self instantiates the human way of being, in the effort to arrest and acknowledge as its own what consciousness grasps. From this foundation emanates our distinctive way of becoming, in all the spheres that our consciousness can encompass.

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