The Triumph of Uncertainty

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Chapter 13
Requiem for the Ego

While several Romantic tenets held great appeal for me, in many respects the most compelling ideas were those that reconfigured personal identity. As previously discussed, the key innovation concerned the self’s relation to its addressed object. That object could be the outside world or some inner self-consciousness. Relation became the key precept, for when one is in dialogue, the experiencing self is absorbing and responding. In the process of experience, which now became the watchword of romanticism, the very idea of a set identity, one fixed and unchanging (and thus incapable of evolution), becomes anathema. The cardinal rule is self-reflection, and in an endlessly recursive process, the self experiences itself, more particularly its world, the other, and its own experience. Relation replaces entity.

How did this transfiguration of the self occur? Without digressing too deeply into the history of philosophy, it is fair to say that philosophers at the dawn of Romanticism—and by extension, or perhaps in concert, the poets—were attempting to break the confining impasse in which the self had been placed by John Locke’s construction of a detached, observing “eye” that would perceive the world, know it directly, and retain its objective autonomy (see Appendix). In many ways, “autonomy” was the key issue, serving both as the basis of an epistemological system and as the fundamental element of a moral and political philosophy. This idea of autonomy was recognized at the crest of Newton’s epochal discoveries in the philosophy of Locke, who effectively translated the objectifying scientific ideal into the political and moral domains (MacPherson 1962). Locke’s philosophy hinged upon arguing for the ability of
the individual to detach from the world, and from himself, and observe each objectively (Tauber 2001, 199). The romantics rebelled against this formulation of identity. Yes, they prized individuality, but they rejected the metaphysical rift that set them apart from nature and the ideal of the Whole.¹

I think the crucial characteristic of the romantic dislocation (becoming a malignant trope as “alienation”) resides squarely in Hegel’s insight. In confrontation with the Other, self-awareness arises. He is not me and with that recognition, I becomes self-conscious. That mindfulness of me as distinctive and different then reconfigures the subject’s relation to the world. Before the Other appears, the world and me are one, but in the self-consciousness of recognition, a division occurs. In the barest sense, the self-recognition of I sunders the self’s integration with both nature and more intimately, one’s subjectivity. Here the source of romantic sensibility arises. I am out-of-joint with the world because of the disjunction induced by becoming individualized. The subject is no longer embedded within an integrated whole in which s/he lives. The I’s lost integration then initiates efforts to repair that fragmentation, a catch-all for the romantic philosophies of redress. In sum, as a result of the I being atomized by self-conscious recognition, the ensuing rupture triggers the search for a “resting spot,” where s/he no longer feel self-conscious, separated (even estranged) and thus disaffected and disjointed.

Science plays a role in this metaphysical drama through the formal restrictions imposed by objective knowledge, which fundamentally challenges (and uproots) subjectivity—the me as arbitrated solely by the sense of self. So, when I earlier opined that “objectivity makes subjectivity a problem,” I am referring to the undercurrents of this metaphysical division of Self and World. On this reading, Thoreau’s celebration of nature became a vocation for mending his metaphysical divide that suffered a self-consciousness he could only suspend in the mystical states he sought. His journals recount moments of rapturous communion with nature, instances of mystical revelries. He referred to these experiences only metaphorically and made no attempt to capture these experiences in his writings (Tauber 2014b).² Indeed, he left them unsaid; they exemplify the

¹ Romantic holism, as a philosophical construct, grew out of the seventeenth century debate over the metaphysical structure of nature, where Spinozan pantheism became the direct antecedent of the romantic notion of nature’s unity (McFarland 1969; Israel 2001). Thoreau closely followed that understanding.

² Thoreau was well-aware of his idiosyncratic amalgamation of interests. When the secretary of the Association for the Advancement of Science questioned him about what branch of science interested him, Thoreau famously wrote in his journal, “I felt that it would be to make myself the laughing stock of the scientific community to describe or attempt to describe to them that
intransigence of the unsayable, and he thus left his pantheism in silence. To the extent that Thoreau’s informal theology had an ethical component, it resided squarely in his call for a deliberate life, one that would find its meaning in search for a utopian realm in which harmonious integration with nature occurs beyond self-consciousness (Tauber 2001, chapter 7). So, by fully engaging and appreciating the wonder and mystery of the world he inhabited, Thoreau stitched together the rift between himself and the sublime Other. Note, on this reading, Thoreau’s nature studies were subordinate to a spiritual quest in which his self-conscious intelligence dissolved in perfect harmony with Nature.

Although Thoreau’s detailed study of nature accentuated the subject-object divide, his pantheism offered a metaphysical solution to a threatening alienation. He admonished that we should recognize that we are nature, or, as he put it, that we should acknowledge our own “wildness.” In asserting that nature, the wild, is within us, our mission is to discover and become intimate with that primitive essence which connects us with the cosmos. The wild, because of its very character, cannot be “known,” that is, tamed or rationalized, made a species of consciousness. All those modes of knowing that we pursue are sorry residues of a primary knowing. In the wild, Reason does not rule; it can, at best, only mediate. So, in some sense, Thoreau “solved” the Kantian imbroglio by asserting that no essential divide separated man and nature, only one’s self-consciousness. We are at base wild and thus integral to nature. The “problem” of human agency arises only when we become self-conscious knowers, who must contemplate and objectify our experience so that the recognition of our primary experience may be reported—to others and, more fundamentally, to ourselves.

So, while Thoreau’s philosophical milieu was idealism, he reached beyond Reason to a realm of unprocessed experience that required translation, which in itself was only a derivative problem of self-consciousness (Tauber 2001, 202). In that formulation, he reframed the defining question of his age that had been presented by Emerson, but not “solved.” Self-consciousness remained, albeit both a problem in terms of disenchantment and alienation, as well as the means of negotiating that “space” between the knower and his object of attention.

branch of science which specially interests me, inasmuch as they do not believe in a science which deals with the higher law. So I was obliged to speak to their condition and describe to them that poor part of me which alone they can understand. The fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot.... How absurd that, though I probably stand as near to nature as any of them, and am by constitution as good an observer as most, yet a true account of my relation to nature should excite their ridicule only” (Thoreau 1997, 469-70, March 5, 1853; emphasis added).
A “solution” was tendered, but it awaited a radical reformulation, a philosophy explicitly directed at the romantic imbroglio.

HEIDEGGER AND THE RELINQUISHED SELF

The journey on the Philosophical Highway I had initiated with Thoreau took me far beyond Walden Pond in ways I could hardly imagine. It originated in my laboratory. During my pivotal year, 1987, Leon Chernyak (my Metchnikoff co-author) and I indulged in afternoon talks about the philosophical canon. I am forever grateful to the serendipity resulting from my efforts to “save” Leon from a life in a taxi. His commitments to Hegel and Heidegger directed his efforts to educate me in a tradition quite alien to my own scattered readings in Anglo-American philosophy. Several years later, Dreben captured an underlying tension (which at times became an impasse) when he made a keen observation about Leon. During a salon session I had organized, Leon had offered a monologue on the topic at hand, to which Bert cracked, “This is quite amazing: nineteenth century St. Petersburg revisited!” Only at that crystallized moment did I recognize the wide expanse separating Leon and me. In the several years of discussions, I never quite understood his Hegel and later, with even more encryption, his Heidegger. Indeed, from our engagement over Heidegger (Leon’s true philosophical pole star) I gleaned only a glimmer of comprehension, but that was enough to sustain my interest long after Leon and I parted ways.

Although I easily mark the beginning of my Heidegger encounters with Leon, the ripened phase of my own understanding is difficult to demarcate. I continued to study Heidegger and soon after my introduction to the Department of Philosophy, I attended a seminar devoted to Heidegger’s Being and Time (1962) offered by my colleague, Érazim Kohak. That exposure did not dispel Heidegger’s opacity. However, when I conducted my last seminar at Tel Aviv University in 2015, “Heidegger on Nietzsche” (or better labeled “Tauber on Heidegger on Nietzsche”), I felt comfortable in his world.

Having arrived at Heidegger’s doorstep by a most circuitous and unlikely route, what did I find there? What was it that had sustained my interest? The brilliance of his Being and Time consists in its rejection of modernity’s ego that instantiated the subject-object epistemology lying at the core of the scientific endeavor. The appeal, at least for me, was to follow the outcome of the romantic challenge and the consequences of Heidegger’s deconstruction. I had a brief infatuation that evolved into a rejection, but given the centrality of the identity question, I felt compelled to come to terms with his philosophy. And in the pro-
cess, I clarified my own understanding of romantic selfhood and the issues con-
gregating around that topic.

Heidegger shared the same quandary faced by Thoreau, namely, Cartesian self-consciousness. But unlike Thoreau, Heidegger drove to the philosophical foundations of Western philosophy to provide an alternate understanding. He displaced the Cartesian structure of the ego residing distinct from the world by attacking philosophical views of the mind that omitted its most crucial feature, namely, the mind’s receptivity to the world. For Heidegger, knowledge (and ultimately truth) is a product of an orientation to the world based on a set of intuitions and practices that would capture that “natural” alignment. He attempted this with an epistemological revolution, one that would dispense with the subject-object mode of knowing by replacing the knowing agent peering at the world with Dasein (a redesigned subject) firmly implanted within the world.

Heidegger’s Dasein became a newly minted subject of experience. Dasein literally means, “being there”—the there being the world-at-large, and more specifically, the “there” places Dasein in the world, not detached from it. Heidegger’s primary philosophical target was the seemingly irredeemable Cartesian chasm between Man and the World. That division would be corrected with Dasein firmly embedded in the immediacy of the present time and place (i.e., without predication). Dasein is “a way of thinking, which, instead of furnishing representations and concepts,” the result of an ego looking at the world and deriving knowledge of the world, she is placed in the world (Heidegger 1993a, 138). Accordingly, Dasein abdicates an Archimedean point of reference (me-
other) and thereby discards the predicate structure of knowing. In other words, by moving the subject into the world, the very notion of the ego—that which surveys the world as a separate eye—is dismissed. I dubbed that move, the ego’s requiem (Tauber 2013a).

By rejecting the autonomous notion of agency, Heidegger audaciously attacked the very foundations of modernity. With Dasein’s “receptivity” to the world a bold revision of Western metaphysics results, because the world is no longer seen as a collection of objects, a world-picture depicted by a representing subject (Heidegger 1977a; 1977b). This configuration also dispenses with the primary representation of the self, which in the Heideggerian schema is no longer an object, but rather conceived as a life unfolding in the world. Note, with that move, he putatively solved the “problem” of self-consciousness and thus

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3 With the I dissolved into the world, “the way in which man is man, that is himself ... by no means coincides with I-ness” (Heidegger 1977a, 145).
fulfilled Thoreau’s romantic aspirations. No longer a mind at the center of consciousness, Dasein finds itself in what it does, and affirms identity as a product that develops in the course of living (Heidegger 1962, 155).

Heidegger thus addresses the imbroglio of self-consciousness: Dasein displaces the ego’s attention to objects, of the world and of herself, with the subject’s epistemological placement within the world and her existential turn to face Being. Accordingly, Dasein is embedded in Being, not itself. Only a falsifying self-consciousness, a self-consciousness that objectifies subjectivity, separates Man from his authentic nature. Indeed, Being cannot be approached in the Cartesian schema, because the self-consciousness constitutive to the self-knowing ego entraps its own selfness. So, instead of an entity, “a thinking thing,” Dasein is conceived in a functional engagement with Being.

Because Dasein is no longer a “subject” posed in distinction to some “other,” the predicate division of an ego surveying the world of beings is no longer operative. Instead, Dasein turns to that which cannot be objectified, Being. Truth then becomes the authenticating truth of Dasein facing the Nothing and allowing its “unveiling.” In that presentation to the void of nothingness, its “receptivity” to Being, Dasein fulfills the human imperative. Accordingly, Dasein exists as a “potentiality-of-Being,” one that has abandoned itself to “possibilities because it is an entity which has been thrown” into the world and open to it (Heidegger 1962, 315). This constitutes a particular characteristic, for unlike other beings, “Being is an issue for it” (ibid., 32). In short, Dasein is determined not by reference to a “what” but rather as that being which “always understands itself in terms of its existence—in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself” (ibid., 32–33). And on this existential turn, much fell as the modernist edifice crumbled into postmodernity.

With Dasein, the metaphysics of individualized selfhood would be replaced with one of integration. Arguing that the entirety of Western metaphysics rests upon the displacement of philosophy’s escape from Being, Heidegger sought an understanding of subjectivity that would allow, indeed, accomplish, a radical shift in philosophy’s entire agenda. In that move, the atomized ego would be

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4 In an astonishing reversal of the usual meanings, Heidegger asserts that Dasein’s recognition of the ultimate mystery of Being (its essential hidden and unknowable character) represents the truth function. Dasein exercises its freedom in a perpetual “unveiling” of truth, i.e., the “true” is that which emerges in the light of the openness, a presentation or offering of Being. Yet the endeavor of “unveiling” perpetually faces a reciprocal “veiling,” for the what of the unveiled is nothing: “Being in its very disclosure, withdraws into veiling” (Borch-Jacobsen, M. 1991, 105–106). In other words, truth for Heidegger is the unveiling of Being, whose very essence is that which recedes from knowing, and retreats from us (Heidegger 1993a; Dahlstrom 2001).
replaced with Dasein’s receptivity to the Absolute. In short, Dasein represented Heidegger’s response to the romantic alienation and the nihilism afflicting Western civilization.

Heidegger probed the limits of thought itself. His task was audacious and, in many respects, impossible. Indeed, he himself admitted that he could not concoct the language that would carry the ineffable. His failure hardly discredits the effort. After all, the God of Moses answered the inquisitive “Who are You?” query with the simple reply that has echoed through the ages, “I am that I am” (Exodus 3:14). What might Heidegger add? Indeed, can such a question be addressed by philosophy at all? Wittgenstein gave a resounding, “No!” Heidegger joined in the assault on metaphysics, but not with the burn and scourge strategy Wittgenstein employed (discussed below). Instead, Heidegger explained philosophy’s failure in terms of the misplaced attention to “things” (“beings”) as opposed to Being.

Heidegger wished to recapture a religious sensibility, one that would confront an exhausted spirituality. While his project twists and turns through a meandering maze, the underlying issue is quite simple: Can Being be thought? Can we perceive that which underlies the particularities of beings? Can we think in terms that radically dispense with our own subjectivity, namely a point of view? In this regard Being and Time failed to address these matters and thus remained unfinished. And the later writings, tinged with the mystical and sprinkled with poetic and numinous overtones, reflected how language failed Heidegger as well. I appreciated his attempt to address Nietzsche’s challenge of facing nihilism, but this seemed more of a theological problem than philosophical (at least as I understood the disciplinary demarcations). As Heidegger himself admitted in the famous Der Spiegel interview (1966), we need a new divinity:

*Heidegger:* Philosophy will be unable to effect any immediate change in the current state of the world. This is true not only of philosophy but of all purely human reflection and endeavor. Only a god can save us. The only possibility available to us is that by thinking and poetizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god, or for the absence of a god in [our] decline, insofar as in view of the absent god we are in a state of decline. [“god” as the concrete manifestation of Being as “the Holy.”]

*Spiegel:* Is there a correlation between your thinking and the emergence of this god? Is there here in your view a causal connection? Do you feel that we can bring a god forth by our thinking?

*Heidegger:* We cannot bring him forth by our thinking. At best we can awaken a readiness to wait [for him]. (Heidegger 1976)
He could not be clearer: thought would not deliver us from the grip of nihilism, while receptivity to Being would.

Heidegger claimed that because of the dominance of the techno-scientific depiction of the Real, we were incapable of hearing the call of Being. His entire philosophy may be regarded as a gallant attempt to revitalize subjectivity in a turn away from the material and, in parallel, legitimate the truths of the soul. This is what he meant by “unveiling” Being. That was not the work of philosophy, but rather the proclamation for a new spirituality.5

The 1929 Inflection

Heidegger substituted a metaphysics of Being for a metaphysics of beings. Since I had aligned myself with Wittgenstein, who had effectively argued the “nonsense” of any metaphysics as a motley group of “grammatical errors,” philosophy, then, with relentless scrutiny, must “show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle” (Wittgenstein 1968, 103e.) Accordingly, Heidegger was either the biggest bug in the jar or, as he himself attested in his last testament (Der Spiegel interview), philosophy’s role in loosening nihilism’s grip on the soul was strictly supportive. This latter view of philosophy is less a dismissal than an acknowledgement of the limits of analytical thought. Here, I decided the Heidegger and Wittgenstein lines converge: each recognized the legitimate call of the existential, but philosophy could not carry us forward (Braver 2012).

Heidegger would repeatedly ascend his secular pulpit in his attempt to overcome the old metaphysics intertwined in a language that remained unyielding to his strenuous efforts. He failed. Articulating how the “nothing” outstripped thought, at least for me, is a story better approached through art and music. I did not follow him any further in the direction he probed. In this regard, his most satisfying contribution to my own project was in illustrating, in a way so different yet complementary to Wittgenstein, the outer borders of philosophy. In that enterprise, he came to the limits of thought, and more specifically, the limits of language. Once that corner was turned, the personal identity issue came into a new focus: personal identity means exactly that—personal and thus radically subjective. What I think and feel is me, and the me has no analytic definition. And it is here that the philosopher must cross over to another kind of expression. I would turn elsewhere to go forward. As dis-

cussed below, I returned to an earlier intuition, one first sensed well before any philosophical awareness pushed it aside.

Some observed that Heidegger inaugurated the “end of philosophy,” certainly as conceived before the publication of Being and Time in 1927. In the celebrated 1929 Davos debate between Heidegger and Cassirer, Dasein dramatically confronted the anthropo-centric modernist orthodoxy of the time. Their confrontation has been regarded as the dramatic turn of twentieth century philosophy, a tipping point when the Cartesian ego was toppled and a reconceived notion of subjectivity introduced. Heidegger radically restated the thematic question “What is Man?” to “Where is Man?” His answer, Dasein resides in the world and leaves the self-reflexive ego unreconciled to its isolation. Thus for Heidegger, Dasein must eclipse Man. And with the demise of the ego, basic notions of subjectivity, personhood, and agency would be fundamentally reorganized.

Heidegger’s agenda distinguishes the world of beings and that of Being. The former constitutes the subject of philosophy’s history, namely, the world depicted by the ontic sciences (physics, psychology, physiology, etc.) that are devoted to the elucidation and control of nature. The ontic orientation underwrites humankind’s modernist selection of scientific scrutiny that offers, at best, a narrow depiction and, at worst, a dehumanizing distortion. And note, with Heidegger’s effort to revamp Western metaphysics, science is no longer his concern, other than to subordinate it to a new conception of humanism (Heidegger 1993b). He argued that to even have a “world view” offered by science (the product of the representing ego) confounds Dasein’s fundamental character, namely the cardinal characteristic of the human ability—if not fundamental and essential characteristic—to face Being. In other words, to accept the objectification of scientific inquiry and to “see” reality is to remain locked into a survey of the furniture of the world while Being beckons.

With that conclusion, Heidegger turned philosophy from metaphysics that dealt with beings, to Being—the ineffable Beyond, that which human could not comprehend but might intuit. Although he discarded much of what had passed for legitimate philosophy since Plato, he had not escaped metaphysics, he only

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6 If there was a victor, Gordon (2010) awards Heidegger, inasmuch as the younger generation gravitated towards him with enthusiasm. Certainly, in terms of the next century, Heidegger’s influence far outweighs any of the neo-Kantians, the group with which Cassirer affiliated. See also Friedman 2000.

7 “Western history has now begun to enter into the completion of that period we call modern, and which is defined by the fact that man becomes the measure and the center of beings. Man is what lies of at the bottom of all beings; that is, in modern terms, at the bottom of all objectification and representability” (Heidegger 1982, 28).
substituted his own version. To contemplate Being and deny such considerations as non-metaphysical begs a smile or a snort! Indeed, in 1929 Heidegger had not fully established his rhetorical position and was satisfied to plainly assert that “the truth of metaphysics dwells in [a] groundless ground” of Being where philosophy has no hold (Heidegger 1993c). Later he would struggle to find his voice to address the unsayable and abandoned analytics, altogether (Heidegger 2012; 2013). By then, he was no longer doing philosophy. Indeed, he had moved well past philosophy; he had become a theologian, or what he preferred to call himself, a “thinker.” In abandoning traditional metaphysics, he had discarded philosophy-speak, for the language-at-hand was incapable of addressing the Great Mystery.

With the headline story of Dasein’s introduction, the modernist edifice crumbled into postmodernity (a story I detailed in my Requiem for the Ego [2013]). This chapter of intellectual, indeed, cultural history finally came into focus for me. I understood the contours of my earliest collegiate attempts at defining the relationship of scientific thinking and other kinds of subjective experience as an expression of situating myself in a world that afforded no singular point of view. Different perspectives offered distinctive pictures of reality. The self-consciousness that the subject-object structure of thinking proffered effectively provided degrees of objectivity, but objectivity was only one way of being in the world. My own recalibration resonated with Heidegger’s redefinition of humanism, wherein humankind moves from “man is the measure of all things” to a new form of harmonization with all that which seems to alienate. As opposed to the prison of self-consciousness grounded in the Cartesian ego, 1) humans would be part of the world, not separate looking at it, and 2) philosophy would be directed not to the world of things, beings, but rather Being. In the simplest summary, Heidegger would replace the self-consciousness of peering at the world with Dasein living in it. He thus combined a phenomenological revamping of identity with an existential reconfiguration. And that revised posture included a profound metaphysical move as well.

My own recalibration resonated with Heidegger’s redefinition of humanism and pricked my slumbering consideration of the All and the End. But his venture, as philosophy, seemed doomed to me. I had searched for an elusive synthesis exemplified by Thoreau’s venture, but eventually, I saw the terminus of Dasein’s logical progression—the end of an objectifying epistemology: science could not be included in Heidegger’s vision. He followed Nietzsche, who had shrilly “slammed the door on the house of scholars” (Zarathustra) and attacked
the pillars of Western civilization—Reason, Science, Socrates, Christianity—with a slash and burn strategy. While Nietzsche’s Dionysian and tragic dimension of human life held my attention during my youth, I eventually recognized that he and Heidegger led a tribe of their own. Perhaps because Nietzsche was my First Love, I suffered an idiosyncratic introduction to philosophy and naively thought that he would provide a philosophical foundation for my own venture. He did not, nor did Heidegger.

I held Reason in too high esteem to forego its promise. I distrusted Heidegger’s invocation of “poetry.” Approaching Being was not philosophy, it was a mysticism newly garbed. At that point, he hoped to shift philosophy to a nebulous form of “thinking” that too easily was subverted for nefarious ends. Moreover, the alternative to positivism’s hegemonic hold on human knowledge is not a Heideggerian “unveiling” of truth or a rejection of science, but rather finding new ways to rejuvenate a tired epistemology. And that project is tied to the larger requirement of refashioning our governing metaphysics, which I dare predict must arise from the smoking ashes of the twentieth century phoenix. The battle between a newly revised Enlightenment and a dangerous, exclusionary a-rationality (the same vacillation of enlightenment and myth described by Horkheimer and Adorno [1993]) represents the most troubling unpredictable struggle of our uncertain era.

My search to find coherence with two ways of knowing, knitting the world together, so to speak, ended with my Heideggerian gambit and a bald recognition: the logic of deconstructing the subject-object understanding of agency leads to a religious station, one that I associated with allures long ago rejected (e.g., mysticism, Buddhism, mind-expanding drugs, religious fervor). I had never ventured into those territories and so my imagination could not accommodate Dasein’s mode of experience. More, I found no philosophical traction in Heidegger’s writings. Once I penetrated the obfuscations of his language and exposition, I found his ideas lodged in a different enterprise from my own. I had more ground to plow.

Moreover, I am suspicious of Heidegger’s moral baggage and its influence on his philosophy. Lurking in Dasein’s shadow is a Nazi espousing the volk,
Natur, the collective fate of the People. Facing Being implicitly draws from the same wellspring of a grand collective that too often subordinates the individual to the group defined in ideological or religious terms. Indeed, where does Being end and beings begin? And more generally, a fundamental weakness looms: I did not find an ethics embedded in Heidegger’s vision. A philosophy of Dasein may be adequate for living in a hut, but not for life among others (Sharr 2006). The similarities with Thoreau are self-apparent and for my part, their self-imposed isolation, rejected. In the end, my sense of responsibility carried by a moral self-consciousness fails affiliation with Dasein.

So, although Heidegger set a new agenda for many, I rejected Dasein. On balance, I think he should be credited with reminding us of the ineffable regions that philosophy cannot reach, but he did so by abdicating the self-awareness that undergirds moral agency. And if this self-conscious modernist position is rejected, an inescapable question arises: what is philosophy in light of the turn toward Being and away from Man? Dasein might capture a romantic ideal, but at an unaccountably excessive cost. The extracted price I counted too dear for one committed to the sanctity of one’s sense of autonomy and self-responsibility. And while I am intrigued by Heidegger’s provocation, in the end I could not follow him. The philosophy failed, as he himself admitted when he decided to shed “philosopher” and become a “thinker.” With that conclusion, I moved my Heidegger library to the basement for storage and there it rests. However, the unresolved issue of identity, the problem at the base of my immunological studies and the issue underlying all that followed, remained for decipherment. I went back to Wittgenstein and as I first sensed many years before as a young adult, his approach would yield a more satisfying response to the question at hand about me (Tauber 2013a, chapter 7).

**On Perspicuity**

Heidegger presented romanticism’s terminus for me (at least in terms of defining the knowing subject, the self-conscious me), and as I put his ‘solution’ aside, I turned to Wittgenstein, who offered a radically different way of doing philos-
ophy. I had been drawn to him for many reasons. Obviously, his influence in Anglo-American philosophy was self-evident and I wanted to understand him for that reason alone. But I was attracted to him for the substance of his thought, far more than, for instance, the pull of James, Dewey, Quine, or Rorty. While I closely studied each of them, Wittgenstein, at least for me, towered over all the rest. I had intuited from my first encounters that he had developed an appealingly skeptical approach to philosophy, and in the process altered the course of thought. This was the message hammered home by Dreben, and the better I understood his interpretation, the better it addressed my own doubts about the limits of analyticity.

Wittgenstein became my antidote for Heidegger, and metaphysics more broadly. For Wittgenstein, philosophy’s role was to reveal the faulty “grammar” of persistent philosophical problems. Accordingly, philosophy becomes an analysis of language. And what posed as grand metaphysical questions then must be seen to have no answers simply because they are not true questions; they are mistakes of grammar (what Bertrand Russell called “bad grammar” [Russell 2012, 183]) and thus “nonsense.”9 Thus all matters pertaining to ethics, aesthetics, and the spiritual fell beyond philosophical scrutiny. In short, Wittgenstein did not deal with such matters, albeit they are central to human life, because analysis has no jurisdiction in the domain of the subjective or the ineffable. And more to the point, offering analytical rationales and explanations misappropriates philosophy’s legitimate agenda. He therefore admon-

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9 Following Wittgenstein, Dreben quipped, “the history of philosophy is the history of ‘nonsense,’” a slogan that became the nom de guerre for the general deconstruction of classical philosophical problems to “problems of language.” Science had sense; logic had sense; ethics and aesthetics had no (analytical) sense, i.e., they were non-sense, because they lacked truth criteria of the sort governing science. What I heard Dreben repeat on several occasions has been documented somewhat differently: “Philosophy is rubbish, but the history of rubbish is scholarship” and “Philosophy is garbage, but the history of philosophy is scholarship” (Leiter 2005). He may have said “garbage” or “rubbish” on other occasions, but those nouns misrepresent his invocation of Wittgenstein’s notion of nonsense that has specific meaning and represents a serious philosophical position about the bulk of philosophical discourse, i.e., “nonsense” consists of matters beyond analytic discussion (e.g., ethics, aesthetics). The epigram of an anthology edited by Dreben’s second wife, Juliet Floyd, has as its epigram, “Nonsense is nonsense, but the history of nonsense is scholarship” (Floyd and Shieh, 2001). “A bit of background on the ‘history of nonsense’ quote: ‘Nonsense is nonsense—but the history of nonsense is scholarship’ is actually a quote from Saul Lieberman, who uttered it when introducing Gershom Scholem at a famous lecture in the 1940s at the Jewish Theological Seminary in NYC. Lieberman was a great Talmudic scholar; Scholem was, of course, one of the greatest scholars of Jewish mysticism. … Dreben’s first wife’s father was Shalom Spiegel, who was a distinguished scholar of medieval Hebrew…. so the quotation had great resonance for Dreben, in multiple ways” (Leiter 2005).
ished, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” (Wittgenstein 1981, 189).10

While the primary lesson I gleaned from studying Wittgenstein’s philosophy concerned the limits of analytical thought, the more immediate impact focused on ways of thinking about mental states and introspection, more generally (Tauber 2013a, chapter 7). And those positions then led to a reevaluation of the entire personal identity imbroglio. In short, Wittgenstein’s philosophical orientation offered me a way of thinking about the enigmatic I that made “sense.”

The self, became, under Wittgenstein’s analysis, a metaphysical problem and therefore a result of faulty grammar. He begins his critique by scrutinizing the use of “I” as subject and the use of “I” as object (Wittgenstein 1960, 66; Shoemaker 2003).

Wittgenstein insists that in its use “as subject,” “I” is not used to refer to myself as a particular person. Rather in its use “as subject” “I” has no other function than to express the self-ascription of a subjective state (for instance tooth-ache, in: “I have a tooth-ache”), without any reference at all being made to a particular entity, distinguished from other entities in the world. In this respect, Wittgenstein provocatively maintained, saying “I have a tooth-ache” is no different than moaning. (Longuenesse 2017, 2)

For Wittgenstein, the ego’s “private” language is a contrivance of a scrutinizing faculty that is the public expression of an artifact. The mind turned in upon itself seemingly employs the same perceptual functions used to engage the external universe. So, when the moods, sentiments, emotions—the affects—obtain attention, consciousness does what it always does to fulfill its evolutionary function: Facing a ‘problem,’ it scrutinizes, analyzes, judges. Usually the target is the world, but in our culture, the mind itself, through self-consciousness, “materializes” inner states to become objects of inspection. In other words, in that inner-directed configuration, the mental is composed of representational objects observed by an ‘objective,’ detached ego. That “eye” peers within to discover me.

10 The meaning of this proclamation has been subject to seemingly endless comment, for interpretation orients critiques of the Tractatus itself, and more broadly, the relationship of Wittgenstein’s early (Notebooks and Tractatus) and late Philosophical Investigations and On Certainty. I align myself with those who see continuity, i.e., the later pragmatic view of language is a further development of earlier views. For discussion of this orientation see Diamond 1996; Crary and Read, 2000; Janik 2004; for a dissenting view, see Hacker 1972; 2000.
There is a picture of the mind which has become so ingrained in our philosophical tradition that it is almost impossible to escape its influence even when its worst faults are recognized and repudiated. In one crude, but familiar version, it goes like this: the mind is a theatre in which the conscious self watches a passing show (the shadows on the wall). The show consists of ‘appearances’, sense data, qualia, what is given in experience. What appear on the stage are not the ordinary objects of the world that the outer eye registers and that the heart loves, but their purported representatives. Whatever we know about the world outside depends on what we can glean from the inner clues. (Davidson 1994, 61)

On this view, making pictures of any mental state, perhaps most vividly illustrated by memory images, is to utilize (extrapolate) modes of perception from the objective world to representing states of the mind.

Of course people have beliefs, wishes, doubts, and so forth, but to allow this is not to suggest that beliefs, wishes, and doubts are entities in or before the mind, or that being in such states requires there to be corresponding mental objects. (ibid., 62)

However, such objectification of mental “pictures” cannot be achieved and remain only “metaphors of objects before the mind” (ibid.).

Wittgenstein (as Kant before him) uses “I” narrowly as a semantic expression of inner mental feelings or thoughts, and thereby avoids the self construed as an object, altogether. However, unlike Kant’s transcendental construction (i.e., defining the necessary conditions for the mental), Wittgenstein came to this important distinction by essentially following Hume’s almost cursory, off-hand remark about grammar: “all the nice and subtile questions concerning personal identity can never possibly be decided, and are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties” (Hume 1978, 262). That mind-bending comment was extended by Wittgenstein to the reduction of all philosophical problems to those of language misuse. So, for him, the role of philosophy is to clarify problems bestowed by metaphysical confusions through an examination of language itself.

Wittgenstein described the language of inner states as an exemplar of profound philosophical mistake reaching to the very core of Western metaphysics. James Edwards calls this extrapolation from outer, public language to inner, private states, “rationality-as-representation,” the Cartesian commitment to
see all our thoughts as representations. And with representation comes the requirement of justification: What is the correspondence between the language and its object (Rorty 1979)? Locked into a mind-body dualism, rationality-as-representation is the true root of ‘private language’ that “forces us to construe all such complaints [pain] as reports, descriptions, representations; thus, it is that conception which fertilizes the ground for the seed of the object/name picture” (Edwards 1982, 188). And the same objectifying ‘logic’ is applied to feelings and memories. In sum, the metaphysics of early modernity, with its conception of rationality reaching into the mind and treating it as an it, as an object, is the target of Wittgenstein’s attack.  

The metaphysics that Wittgenstein sought to overturn follows many routes towards diverse targets, but in the context of addressing ‘the self,’ the key issue is the abandonment of explanation and the substitution of description. He proposed a different way of looking at the world, at ourselves within that world, and the inner life in which we recurrently take notice:

> A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of words. – Our grammar is lacking in this sort of perspicuity. A perspicuous presentation produces just this understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections.’ (Wittgenstein 1968, 49e)

And those ‘connections’ comprise a different way of discernment that begins with a startling surmise, namely our world is not hidden (as Western metaphysics assumes), but rather reality is presented directly. We must not allow a false application of grammar interfere with that appreciation. “A philosophical problem has the form: ‘I don’t know my way about’” (Wittgenstein 1968, 49e), and for Wittgenstein the correct method of finding one’s path is not by “penetrating the phenomena” of language and meaning, but to better arrange “what we have always known” (ibid., 42e, 47e). So instead of seeking some hidden homuncu-

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11 He made “a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts – which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please” (Wittgenstein 1968, 102e). An “in-use” alternative is offered instead, a form of pragmatism that spawned the “ordinary language” school of philosophy (Soames 2003; Misak 2016). See Baz (2012) for review of this position and a trenchant defense of its continued relevance.

12 “Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything. — Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us” (Wittgenstein 1968, 50e). As discussed in chapter 9, this is the basic position Rorty assumed in his critique of positivist philosophy of science.
Thus, as already discussed regarding Rorty’s critique of positivist philosophies of science (chapter 9), instead of seeking a Hidden Reality (referring to subjective states, metaphysics tout court), philosophy should discern how language functions to present the world (Wittgenstein 1968, 128e; Rorty 1989a; 1991c; 1991d). In the case of objectification, science employs representations to achieve its ordering functions, but subjectivity possesses no representational language. Yet mental states do exist, and our ability to communicate them occurs within “forms of life” that operate by communal agreement and practice (Wittgenstein 1968, 88e–89e). So, while language that eschews representation (in a first-order way) suffers from a lack of reference, but experience and accepted custom achieves understanding, more or less.

Although philosophy is etymologically defined as the “love of wisdom,” I think Wittgenstein hit closer to the mark when he characterized philosophy as a “therapy,” by which he meant that in removing philosophical perplexity, a resumption of a “normal way of life, no longer tormented by earlier confusions and scruples” could be attained (Edwards 1982, 133). Accordingly, the solution of a philosophical problem is to make it vanish, note, not by an answer, but by dismissing the question altogether:

For the clarity we are aiming at is indeed complete clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear.

The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping to do philosophy when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring itself in question. (Wittgenstein 1968, 52e)

Whereas Heidegger effaced the I, Wittgenstein went further by discarding any metaphysics in which to situate me. Instead, he regarded the identity issue as

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13 “The philosophers’ treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness” (Wittgenstein 1968, 91e). For a critical view of how ‘therapy’ is construed in Wittgenstein’s philosophy, see Hutto 2006. Selecting references on this topic is daunting inasmuch as a catalogue of published works on “philosophy as therapy, the method and nature of philosophy” lists 115 items as of 1990! (Frongia and McGuiness 1990, 399). Considering the intense interest Wittgenstein has enjoyed over the past 25 years, I cannot estimate what a comprehensive review of the topic would entail.
misconstruing subjectivity and thus the question of the I lay outside analytical discourse. This solution, applied to the problem of personal identity, sliced through the philosophical Gordian Knot of confusion surrounding this topic. With this perspicacious insight, I could again approach the identity question on its own terms.

Subjectivity Rescued

Let us briefly retrace our steps and reset our bearings. The worldview bestowed by science, and more, the dominance of its criteria of truth and determination of reality requires a translation into humane significance and meaning. Simply, our metaphysics poses the challenge of how to mend the world, to make the world—humans and nature—whole again. One approach was to seek a more encompassing Weltanschauung, a “return to reason,” a broad reason that allows for different kinds of discourse with different standards of knowledge to capture a spectrum of experience directed at different ends (Toulmin 2001). Sensitive to this romantic quandary of alienated nature, stitching together the subject and her object became my prominent theme of study. Twentieth-century continental philosophers, most notably Weber, Husserl, and Gadamer, taking their lead from Goethe and Schiller, repeatedly addressed this latter metaphysical challenge (Weber 1946; Husserl 1970; Gadamer 1981; Bortoft 1996; Beiser 2005). They provided commentaries about a reality depicted objectively, that is, a world in which humans self-consciously reside separated from that world. From their descriptions, the challenges of defining meaning and significance of human existence took diverse courses, of which, as explained, the Thoreau-Dewey line of thinking seemed most promising to me.

The second general approach I followed requires reconfiguring the knowing agent from an outside observer to an integrated participant. So, the question looms: might a revised epistemology overcome the Cartesian subject-object divide? Always aware of separation, and appropriately so, since science would purge itself of subjective contamination, this “subject-less subject” faces the metaphysical challenge of finding herself in the world described without her (Fox Keller 1994). What are the philosophical possibilities and

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14 One expression of this sentiment may be found in environmentalism, which draws from both the earth and biological sciences, as well as from religious and moral sentiments (Albanese 2002; Dunlap 2004).
consequences of shifting the human “stare” at the world to human placement within it? Heidegger directly confronted this challenge, whose attempted resolution I rejected.

The issue hinged on the problem of self-consciousness from which romantic alienation originated. Just as the world is objectified, so too am I as a subject made into an object by introspective reflection. Self-consciousness carries the same gaze that had been directed towards the external world inwards to look at oneself, as if me is something to be observed—seen or heard. Such objectification instantiates the self as another entity in the world, namely, the I becomes a thing to myself. Wittgenstein showed that such a formulation utterly distorts the subjective, which must be understood on its own terms. He may well have been influence by Kierkegaard, to whom we now turn (Creegan 1989).

Kierkegaard observed how the objective and subjective aspects of experience can easily be conflated. In his section, “The Task of Becoming Subjective” of the Postscript, he wrote,

[...]he subjective problem is not something about an objective issue, but is the subjectivity itself. For since the problem in question poses a decision, and since all decisiveness ... inheres in subjectivity, it is essential that every trace of an objective issue should be eliminated. If any such trace remains, it is at once a sign that the subject seeks to shirk something of the pain and crisis of the decision; that is, he seeks to make the problem to some degree objective. (Kierkegaard 1941, 115)

In other words, subjectivity does not adhere to the demands of objectivity. And more to Kierkegaard’s point, assuming an objective view of one’s own life and determining its ‘intent’ based on such criteria both distorts and misdirects the subjectivity that constitutes one’s core being.

Objectivity is an orientation towards reality based on abstracting away, in various degrees, from subjective experience, and from individual points of view. A subjective orientation, on the other hand, is based on an attunement to the inner experience of feeling, sensing, thinking and valuing that unfolds in our day-to-day living. (Balog 2016)

But what does “attunement to the inner experience” mean? In philosophical terms, or analysis in general, subjectivity doesn’t mean anything, at least analytically. There is no referent other than me. The wording approximates an as-
sertion that subjectivity has its own truth and standing. And more to the point, there is no basis for analysis, philosophic or otherwise. As Wittgenstein said of the *Tractatus*, the whole point of the book is to show what is important cannot be expressed.\(^\text{15}\) This observation is generally thought to pertain to ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics, but more generally he was referring to subjectivity writ large, namely all that which cannot be objectified or treated with the logic applied in scientific investigations. Attempting to capture subjectivity in objective terms, namely, in universal public talk, is a misplaced endeavor, radically mis-aligned with *who* one is.

Subjectivity objectified presents the self as an object, where the *I* becomes an entity, a something that is separated from the world and navigates it as such. Moreover, when the subject as object is regarded in abstract, universal terms, private experience is silenced. When I am reduced to a thing, *me* is transformed into something else, an inauthentic self. “Inauthenticity” (what Sartre calls, *mauvaise foi* or “bad faith”) in the Kierkegaardian tradition refers to the assumption of a false identity that subverts one’s freedom. By identifying and resisting external identifications (incumbent expectations), the existentialist recognizes counterfeit identity and countermands it by asserting independence of choice and action. The more skeptical view (e.g., Freud and Foucault) contends that the “liturgy of inwardness” is founded on the flawed idea of a self-transparent individual who is capable of choosing herself” (Adorno 1973, 70; quoted by Varga and Guignon 2017). And the most basic inauthenticity is when *me* becomes an *it*. In this pose, the subject assumes objectification as reflected in a make-shift mirror that splits *me* into a subject observing another (*me*). From that externalized vantage point, self-consciousness may then peer inside’ to look for “me,” or even style “me” as some-thing—an image or an ideal of some sort. In that exercise, “me-ness” then becomes a translation of a mirrored it. And a translation, a representation, by definition cannot be the thing-in-itself.

Kierkegaard conceived self-consciousness in a way quite different from Hegel by placing reflexivity squarely at the nexus of his own selfhood, but again, not as an entity. The self for Kierkegaard shifts from an analytical focus to a subjective one. On Kierkegaard’s view, the self becomes a recursive reflection upon itself that has no end (as culmination). Self-consciousness is “decisive... The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the

\(^{15}\) This comment is based on various letters Wittgenstein wrote to Ludwig von Ficker. Discussed by Janik and Toulmin 1973, 190–201 and McGuinness 1988, 287–89.
more will; the more will, the more self” (Kierkegaard 1980, 29). Indeed, reflexivity, the process of relating, is the self. In other words, reflexivity has displaced circumscribed entity with infinite process. And when me moves to the inner domain of self-consciousness, it loses identification. Because self-reflexivity has no object, it cannot be identified in relation to another. Simply, there is no Other, no object that might be object-ified. Subjectivity resides in its own domain, sui generis, independent of predication.

This much seems clear. However, Kierkegaard goes further by turning the endless self-reflexivity outward (Kierkegaard 1980, 13–14; Taylor 1980). The move is profound. Either the self-directed regression continues with no end, or it turns away from further introspection and answers its own inquiry with the only alternative, the Other. This other may be any species of alterity, but for Kierkegaard, man attains his highest state when the other is God. This formulation is the beginning of religious existentialism, and from my perspective, the origins of conceiving the self as a moral category.

I took Kierkegaard’s formulation of identity to heart. With the success of the scientific characterization of nature, the knowing agent was caught in the same objectifying application. To objectify this self as an it commits an error, a mistake that constitutes much of modern philosophy and whose correction encompasses a vast array of contemporary thought. This orientation does not gainsay the critique of individuality as a product of manipulative social power (Foucault), unconscious opportunism (Freud), or distorted subject-object relations (Heidegger). It makes only a modest claim: The me (or I) serves as the linguistic label operating in the public domain referencing possessive identity and obligation. And in the private realm that which is called me is but a placeholder in the subject-object language of life in the world. Even there the self does not exist in any straightforward sense, but it persists as a useful linguistic

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16 From the twentieth century vantage of a phenomenologist, this process-oriented construction is reaffirmed: “The self is literally no-thing ... self is precisely the peculiarly complex reflexivity itself.... In that sense, self turns out to be the eidos of human life” (Zaner 1975, 168).

17 Seeking the divine offers the infinite framework for being, the second part of the synthesis (finite being the first). It is a choice governed by the absurd, but to make that choice is, for Kierkegaard, the final expression of freedom that completes the turn of the reflexive spiral. There, authentication is achieved. Ernst Tugendhat regards Kierkegaard as moving towards a Heideggerian solution by having “the self” relate itself not to itself but to its existence. Through a critique of reflexivity, he thus paves the road towards a phenomenological account of selfhood (Tugendhat 1986, 139–43). On this reading, Heidegger discovers the foreground of his own existentialist and phenomenological account of selfhood in Kierkegaard.
artifice that helps organize experience when one thinks about oneself as an agent. It is what Daniel Dennett calls a “center of narrative gravity” or an “artifact of the social processes that create us.”

Our fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition is... telling stories, and more particularly concocting and controlling the story we tell others—and ourselves—about who we are . . . Our tales are spun, but for the most part we don’t spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source.... Like the biological self, this psychological or narrative self is yet another abstraction, not a thing in the brain, but . . . an attractor of properties, the “owner of record” of whatever items and features lying about. (Dennett 1991, 418)

On this view, to navigate the world, a model of agency, a self-told, self-interpreted story, is required (ibid., 427). And within that narrative, subjectivity has its own inviolable legitimacy.

The Kierkegaardian perspective corrects what Lacan tracked to the successive manufacture of distorted, if not false self-representations. Representation is only that, a schema or picture or description of something that defies such an application. I look at my dog and see her as an animate object. She responds to me, we engage, we communicate, and we reciprocate feelings. But she is always a something. A self is a something, as well—something described

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18 Dennett is referring to the Johnson-Laird model theory of cognition, where the world is understood and negotiated by building inner mental replicas of the relations among objects and events that concern us (Johnson-Laird 1983).

19 Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) tracked misidentification to its putative roots in infancy. He took a rather ordinary finding about childhood development and turned it into a school of psychoanalytic thought that dominated France for a generation. He began with Henri Wallon’s report that by six months the human child recognizes herself in a mirror (unlike monkeys of the same age). More than just seeing a self-reflection, Lacan asserted that the infant identifies with the mirrored image itself. In other words, the child sees herself as that image. So instead of seeing the body in the mirror as a reflection, a representation, the infant thinks that the image is herself. From that seemingly unremarkable observation, Lacan built a scheme that presumed this early event is the beginning of life-long mistaken identity, i.e., the origins of neuroses. Accordingly, this infantile construction of an image of its body serves as a persistent template of what will become the structure of later personhood. Or as he put it, “the I is precipitated in a primordial form” at this early stage (Lacan 2006, 76; reviewed in Tauber 2013a, chapter 5). For a contemporary cognitive interpretation see Savanah 2013.
from an external point of view. However, I am not a self. I am (as Wittgenstein commented in the Tractatus) my world, the world of my experience. So, if I am my world then I am not in it as something separate. I am of my world in a way an object is not.

There is no I, no ego or subject, that stands alone in the world and sees and thinks and confers sense on what it sees and thinks. But there is a language of thought, and the I is the formal point of reference for it (Heaton and Groves 1994, 49). On this view, while the public who I am, a subject in the world, is identified in relation to others, me, in the subjective self-reflexive relation to myself (an identification within the private realm), cannot similarly be identified in relation to another. In the interior confrontation, there is no other, no object that might be objectified. When the I becomes a you, an object, the I has been split into an artifice of predicate language and an epistemology that follows that grammar by instantiating the utter separation of the ego from the world. And when the outward gaze is directed inwards, the romantic indictment of the Enlightenment follows: “Modernity’s Mistake” seeks objectification and order in subjective domains in which it has no jurisdiction.

On this view, the objectification of me is the imposition of an imperialistic positivism that has seeped into the deepest crevices of one’s own sense of self. And well beyond the Cartesian ego, Wittgenstein drew the most general conclusion:

Philosophers constantly see the methods of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to answer questions in the way science does. This

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20 For the parallels between Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on this matter see (Creegan 1989, 116–18).

21 5.63 I am my world.

5.631 The thinking, presenting subject; there is no such thing....

5.632 The subject does not belong to the world but it is the limit of the world.

5.633 Where in the world is a metaphysical subject to be noted?

You can say that this case is altogether like that of an eye and the field of sight. But you do not really see the eye. And from nothing in the field of sight can it be concluded that it is seen from an eye. (Wittgenstein 1981, 151)

To illustrate, imagine Ernst Mach’s drawing of himself in his Analysis of Sensations ([1886] 1914). We share, from his vantage, the view of a room, bracketed by the contours of his nose, mustache, and brow. The proportions of his lounging body, the room’s chair, window, bookcase are singularly perspectival: “[T]he self includes—or, more precisely is what it sees” (Ryan 1991, 9).

22 One of Wittgenstein’s most forceful arguments concerns the problematic status of “private language” of mental states (i.e., self-consciousness) that cannot be shared and thus cannot be objectified, i.e., defined (Edwards 1982; summarized in Tauber 2013a, 179–85).
tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads philosophers into complete darkness. (Wittgenstein 1960, 18)

In sum, I rest with Kierkegaard’s characterization of the sense of self as the reflexivity itself; coupled to Schopenhauer’s “extensionless point” that becomes “a viewpoint to know the world, yet distinct from the content of what is known” (Janeway 1989, 296), and Wittgenstein’s extrapolation: “I am my world ... The subject does not belong to the world, but it is the limit of the world” (Wittgenstein 1981, 151). In other words, if I am my world, I am not in it as a separate thing, a construction echoing Heidegger’s Dasein (Tauber 2013a, chapter 4). With these companions, I hold a basic conclusion: subjectivity resides in its own domain, independent of predication and thus objectification. To objectify my subjectivity is to mis-apply the rationality used to describe the natural world, whereby me becomes a what.

To conclude, the question of the self first explored in my examination of immunology eventually emerged as the lynchpin of my general philosophical education. With my reading of Kierkegaard juxtaposed to Wittgenstein, a plateau of sorts had been reached, in which the limits of analyticity had come into far better focus.

How then would the calculus about identity be further developed? How to construe subjectivity and all that resides in its domain? Although Wittgenstein’s deflationary views offered me repose from seeking an analytical answer, my inquiry remained unfinished. After all, his conclusion of silence hardly abdicates the inescapable claims of self-knowledge and the assessment of one’s exercise of choice, where the emotional components reside in the white spaces between the lines of the discussion. How might those silences be understood? Where does emotion reside in a Wittgensteinian universe? As explained in the following chapter, I continued to explore the substratum from which the perplexity arises, not for epistemological answers, but rather for ethical guidance. In other words, the what-am-I? morphed into the who-am-I? question, the core issue of grappling with personal identity.