# INTERSUBJECTIVITY:
# EXPLORING CONSCIOUSNESS
# FROM THE SECOND-PERSON PERSPECTIVE

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*ABSTRACT:* Today, the study of consciousness within Western science and philosophy is polarized between investigations of third-person, objective, correlates (e.g., neuroscience and cognitive science) and investigations of first-person, subjective experience and phenomena (e.g., introspection and meditation). These two perspectives set the terms of debate in contemporary consciousness research: Is consciousness first-person subjective or third-person objective? How can we bridge the "explanatory gap" between objective brains and subjective minds? Although many participants in this debate recognize that a comprehensive study of consciousness must include both first- and third-person perspectives (some still hold dogmatically to one perspective or the other), few are exploring consciousness from the second-person perspective. Although the second-person perspective has been almost entirely overlooked in Western philosophy, the notion of intercsubjectivity has actually had significant proponents in other disciplines-such as linguistics, social psychology, psychotherapy, and anthropology. The author proposes that intersubjectivity is a foundation to both a philosophical understanding of and an experiential engagement with transpersonal phenomena. Having clarified what he means by the key terms "consciousness," "subjectivity," and "intersubjeetivity," the author gives a rationale for a second-person approach to consciousness studies, then surveys significant historical precursors to the notion of intersubjectivity in Western philosophy and proposes an evolutionary model of consciousness based on a distinction between intersubjective and interpersonal consciousness-a model that provides a philosophical foundation for the core insights of transpersonal psychology. In the conclusion, some possible objections to intersubjectivity are addressed and implications for a second-person methodology are considered.

INTRODUCTION

*The Vitality of Human Engagement*

Being intensely engaged in a relationship with another person is one of the greatest joys of being human. It is, perhaps, the most vital manifestation of consciousness. Yet it is an aspect of consciousness that, for the most part, has been overlooked in transpersonal psychology and the emerging field of consciousness studies. This approach to consciousness calls for a shift of perspective-from looking at the world as a collection of objects, or even as a collection of subjects, to a view that sees relationships as fundamental.

This perspective has not been completely ignored, however, in the Western intellectual tradition. For instance, most notably, Jewish philosopher-theologian Martin Buber (1970) recognized the importance of the "I-thou" relationship. and, 2500 years ago. it was the essence of the great dialogues of Socrates at the foundation of

Western philosophy.l Reading Plato's dialogues, it is clear that Socrates was engaging his students in an approach similar to what I address in this paper. However, whereas Socrates was passionately on the hunt for knowledge (an epistemological quest), I am advocating a study of intersubjective engagement as a methodology intended to elucidate the nature of consciousness itself (an ontological quest). Both quests, of course, arc intimately related. The point I want to emphasize, though, is that the second-person perspective has been sidelined to precisely the degree to which Western philosophy has moved away from the influence of Socratic dialogics-sidelined, but not entirely silenced, as we will see in some detail a little later.

In this article, I argue that in addition to methodologies of first-person subjectivity (exploring consciousness from "within" through meditation and introspection) and third-person objectivity (studying external correlates of consciousness, such as brains and neurons), a holistic science of consciousness would also expand to include second-person intersubjective methodology and epistemology-to account for the inter-reflexivity of consciousness (subjectivity-reflected-in-subjectivity) in "I-thou" relationships. Whereas first-person methodologies, such as meditative practices, lead to "monologic" consciousness (Whorf, 1956), second-person methodologies, such as Bohmian dialogue, lead to "dialogic" consciousness (Bohm, 1985, 1996).

Having situated this intersubjective approach in an historical philosophical context, I will conclude with a proposal for an evolutionary model of consciousness in which intersubjectivity is primary and suggest the direction in which a second-person methodology for exploration of consciousness might develop.

Before we look at the historical roots of dialogic philosophy and why they failed to blossom, it will help if we are clear about the key terms; *consciousness, subjectivity,* and *intersubjectivity.* Having clarified how I use these terms, I will then state what I believe to be the central philosophical problem regarding these three concepts.

*Clarifying Terms*

*Consciousness.* Consciousness is a notoriously difficult concept to define. It is, paradoxically, our deepest mystery and our most intimate reality. Debates in philosophy and psychology frequently run aground in confusion because participants use the word *consciousness* with different meanings. Perhaps we should not try to define consciousness. For one thing, definitions are limiting, and for another, there is no one right way to use the term. *Consciousness* means different things to different people; because of that, it is important to be clear on the meaning we are using, I prefer to talk about the meaning or meanings of consciousness rather than its definition.

In my experience, the most common misunderstanding arises from a basic confusion between the *philosophical* and *psychological* meanings of the term. I find it helpful, therefore, to distinguish between two basic meanings of consciousness.

*Philosophical consciousness* refers to a *state of reality* characterized by interiority, subjectivity, sentience, feeling, experience, self-agency, meaning, and purpose. Anything that has any of these has consciousness. Anything that does not would be

non-conscIous-blank, void, vacuous, wholly objective. This meaning refers to consciousness as context; it is about the *mode of being* that makes possible any and all contents and forms of consciousness. Philosophically, then, consciousness is a *state or quality of being-the fact* of consciousness. For example, a person (awake or asleep), a dog, or a worm exemplify consciousness in this sense; a rock, a cloud, or a computer do not. Looked at this way, it is *clear that* the philosophical meaning is fundamental-for without consciousness as a state of being (i.e., an ontological reality) there could be no psychological states or contents.

*Psychological consciousness.* on the other hand, refers to a *state of consciousness* (e.g., awake, dreaming, joyful, fearful, mystical) above threshold awareness. It presupposes the existence of philosophical consciousness. It is about the *contents* of consciousness (e.g., thoughts, beliefs, images), and about the *mode of access* (conscious or unconscious) to these contents. Psychological consciousness is typically contrasted with the unconscious, which is below threshold awareness (e.g., asleep, trance, coma, habit, instincts). Unconscious is not the same as *non-conscious*-the former still has some psychic or subjective activity present; thelatter is *wholly* objective. For example, a person engaged in conceptual cognition is conscious in this sense; a person in a coma, or a worm, are examples of what being unconscious means.

A third meaning of consciousness refers to higher mystical or spiritual states of consciousness typified by *experiences* of oneness, interrelatedness, compassion, and love. However, because *spiritual* consciousness is a *state* of consciousness (albeit higher or highest), it too qualifies as a form of psychological consciousness. It is typically contrasted with "unenlightened" or "unevolved" ordinary states of consciousness.

Whenever we speak about consciousness, it helps if we are clear about what we mean: Do we mean the *state* of awareness contrasted with being unconscious (psychological meaning), or do we mean the *fact* of awareness contrasted with the complete absence of any mental activity whatsoever (philosophical meaning)? Although there are many other meanings of consciousness-we will look at eight of them later when I discuss an evolutionary model of consciousness-I think this distinction between psyc1jological content and philosophical context is basic. It will surface again when we examine the key issue of the relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

*Subjectivity* also has at least two critical meanings:
Subjectivity 1: experienced interiority
SUbjectivity 2: private, independent, isolated experience.

*Subjectivity* 1. In the first case, subjectivity means, essentially, a capacity for feeling that is intrinsic, or interior, to the entity under consideration-a what-it-feels-like-from-within. The key notion here is "experienced interiority" as distinc.t from vacuous (I.e., without experience) external relations. A subject is constituted by internal relations, and these are *felt* or experienced. Without experience there could be no subjectivity (and vice versa; *in* fact, the two words are virtually synonymous), and experience is always internal or intrinsic to the subject-that is to say, experience does not "happen to" a subject, it is *constitutive* of the subject.

Subjectivity has a point of view. It "takes account of," or feels, its own being. Its being is validated, felt, or known from within itself-hence it is *first person-not* just from without. It cannot be fully accounted for by external, mechanical relations. A subject lives or endures through time, feeling its own continuity.

*Subjectivity* 2. In another related, though restricted, sense, subjectivity means an isolated, independent, self-sufficient locus of experience. Classically, this is the Cartesian ego, wholly private, and independent of all reality external to it. In the first case, subjectivity I, experienced interiority is not automatically self-contained within its own private domain-it is interior, but not necessarily independent or isolated. The question of whether it is self-contained or interdependent is left open: It is possible for subjectivity 1 to be either interior and *shared,* or interior and *private.* In this second, Cartesian case, the subject is not only interior, it is self-contained and private. Such independent egos, or subjects-Leibniz called them "monads"-can communicate only via mediating signals, whereas subjectivity 1 can communicate by participating in shared presence. With subjectivity 1, interiority or feeling can be "intersubjective" and precede individual subjects; in subjectivity 2, interiority is *always* private, and intersubjectivity, if it occurs, is always secondary. I will be using both forms of subjectivity in this paper, but will be careful to indicate, where it is not obvious from the context, which variety I am referring to.

Which brings us to the core question raised by this paper: Which comes first, subjectivity or intersubjectivity? I will return to this in a moment, but first I should clarify what I mean by "intersubjective."

*Intersubjectivity.* Again, we should make an important distinction between two basic meanings-standard and experiential-with a further subdistinction of the experiential meaning:

- Intersubjectivity 1 (standard meaning): consensual validation between independent subjects via exchange of signals, Standard intersubjectivity relies on exchange of physical signals.

- Intersubjectivity 2a (weak-experiential meaning): mutual engagement and participation between independent subjects, which conditions their respective experience. It is psychological. Weak or psychological intersubjectivity relies on nonphysical presence and affects the contents of pre-existing subjects.

- Intersubjectivity 2b (strong-experiential meaning): mutual co-arising and engagement of interdependent subjects, or intersubjects, which creates their respective experience. It is ontological. Strong or ontological intersubjectivity relies on cocreative nonphysical presence and brings distinct subjects into being out of a prior matrix of relationships.

The basic difference to note here is between *intersubjective agreement* (1), where my language about the world conforms to yours, through exchange of conceptual and linguistic tokens, and *intersubjective participation* (2a), or *intersubjective cocreativity* (2b), where my experience of myself shows up qualitatively differently when I engage with you as a reciprocating center of experience. The first kind, the standard meaning of intersubjectivity, is used to describe what otherwise goes

by the name of "objectivity" in science (Velmans, 1992, 1993), and is not what I am concerned with in this paper. I am trying to get at something deeper, something with potentially profound implications for philosophy of mind and consciousness studies in general.

In the second (and third) sense, intersubjectivity happens through participation and mutuality, and we do not even have to agree. In fact, the vitality of this form of intersubjectivity is that it is often heightened by authentic disagreement and exploration of differences. Let us look more closely at these distinctions.

*Intersubjectivity* 1. This standard meaning derives from Cartesian subjectivity (isolated, independent subjects). Here, individual subjectivity ontologically precedes intersubjectivity. Individual, isolated subjects come first, and then through communication of signals arrive at consensual agreement. Here, the "inter" in intersubjectivity refers to agreement "between" subjects about so-called objective facts-and the subjects do not even have to interact (their agreement could be validated by a third party, as indeed is often the case in science).

*Intersubjectivity 2a.* Here, the sense of individual subjects remains, but now intersubjectivity refers to how the experience or consciousness of participating subjects is influenced and conditioned by their mutual interaction and engagement. The emphasis here is on the experienced interiority of the subjects as they interact, not on their objective agreement about some item of knowledge. Although this is a significant shift of emphasis from the standard meaning of intersubjectivity, nevertheless it is "weak" compared with the "strong" shift we will look at below. It is weak not because the participation and engagement involved is weak-indeed it could be intense--but because it refers to changes that happen to the *form* of consciousness of the participating subjects, not to the *fact* of such consciousness. It is weak insofar as it refers to the contents, not the context, of consciousness. It is a weak meaning of intersubjectivity because it addresses psychological rather than philosophical issues; it is weak because it still posits subjectivity as ontologically prior to intersubjectivity. Here, the "inter" in intersubjectivity refers to the mutual structural coupling of *already existing* experiencing subjects, where the interiorities of the participating subjects are interdependently shaped by their interaction.

*Intersubjectivity 2b.* This is the most radical meaning, and one that offers the most promise to transpersonal psychology. According to this "stronger" meaning, intersubjectivity is truly a process of cocreativity, where *relationship* is ontologieally primary. All individuated subjects co-emerge, or co-arise, as a result of a holistic "field" of relationships. The being of anyone subject is thoroughly dependent on the being of all other subjects, with which it is in relationship. Here, intersubjectivity precedes subjectivity (in the second, Cartesian, sense, but subjectivity in the first sense, of experienced interiority, is implicit throughout). The *fact,* not just the form, of subjectivity (in the second, Cartesian sense) is a consequence of intersubjectivity. Here, the "inter" *in* intersubjectivity refers to an interpenetrating cocreation of loci of subjectivity-a thoroughly holistic and organismic mutuality.

*The Big Question: Which Came First, Subjectivity or Intersubjectivity?*

Given these distinct meanings of intersubjectivity, we are faced with five questions:

1. Is the basic distinction between the standard meaning of intersubjectivity as "consensual agreement" and the other two experiential forms identified here legitimate?
2. If the distinction is valid, do interacting subjects actively shape the form and content of each other's experience?
3. If so, can one subject have direct access (not mediated by signals) to knowledge of how the other experiences this change?
4. Through this knowledge of how "I" show up in "your" experience, can I come to know something about my own consciousness?
5. Does intersubjectivity actually create individual subjectivities, is it ontologically primary, or does intersubjectivity presuppose already existing centers of subjectivity?

In answer to question 1, if we accept the first meaning of subjectivity (experienced interiority)-and what else could subjectivity mean if we excluded this?-I believe that we need a way to account for phenomenological data, such as experiences of rapport, empathy, and love between interacting subjects, which prima facie cannot be wholly explained in terms of exchange of linguistic or other signals. Phenomenologically and logically, therefore, the distinction is valid: Intersubjectivity cannot be restricted to the standard meaning of "consensual validation" of observations via exchange of physical signals.

In answer to question 2, volumes of data from social psychology, communications theory, psychoanalysis, and anthropology, not to mention much commonsense folk psychology-plus the answer to I above-hardly leave us any doubt: Interacting people do influence and condition each other's experience and contents of consciousness (how else could communication occur?). If this were the full extent of the expanded meaning of intersubjectivity, the point would be trivial. However, questions 3,4, and 5 raise controversial epistemological and ontological issues.

For if we can answer yes to question 3, then the epistemological tradition we have inherited from Kant and the Enlightenment would be radically undermined. The hoary problem of other minds would finally have a solution. If both this and question 4 are true, the implications for a second-person methodology in transpersonal psychology and consciousness studies would be far-reaching.

But if question 5 should turn out to be true, then pretty much the entire edifice of conventional philosophy and science based on an ontology of substance (both of matter and mind) would be seriously challenged. For how could there be intersubjectivity without there being always-already existing subjects? How could there be relations without pre-existing relata? Common sense, and even logic, seem to demand that for relationship to exist there must be things to relate in the first place. Given an ontology of substance (whether of physical energy or of Cartesian minds), the primacy of relata seems compelling. However, we have examples of alternative ontologies from, for instance, Whitehead (1979) and Buddhism (Macy, 1991),

where process is ontologically fundamental. These ontologies present coherent accounts where relationships are primary, where relata are constituted by their relationships. In such ontologies, intersubjectivity precedes subjectivity (Cartesian sense). Of course, even in these alternative ontologies, intersubjectivity presupposes subjectivity in the sense of "experienced interiority."

Whereas the *fact* of experienced interiority is a precondition for intersubjectivity, the *forms* of individual subjectivities (how that interiority is shaped and experienced in individual subjects) need not-and in the cases of Whitehead and Buddhism do not-require pre-existent Cartesian subjects. Such forms, cocreated as perishable centers of experience in the interplay and flux of intersubjective fact, *are* the individual subjects.

Whether we go all out and try to make a case for this strong version of intersubjectivity-with its profound philosophical implications-or keep our sights on a closer horizon by focusing on the "weaker" sense of intersubjectivity- with its implications for psychology and studies of the contents of consciousness-we still need to make a break from the conventional dichotomy of studying the mind from either a third- or first-person perspective. We need to introduce a *second-person perspective* into our studies of consciousness.

I now turn to the ideas of some major thinkers in recent Western philosophy and psychology. Building on these precursors, I will present my own rationale for taking the second-person perspective seriously.

STEPS TOWARD INTERSUBJECTIVITY

*Precursors*

Despite philosophy's distance from Socrates, engaged interpersonal relationship continues to run through European philosophy as a backdrop, or hidden tributary, to the individualism that has dominated Western thought since Descartes, Kant, and the Enlightenment. Perhaps understandably, the importance of this relationship has received more attention among psychotherapists and psychoanalysts than among philosophers. For example, Rogers (1951) developed "person-centered" psychotherapy, where the relationship between client and therapist was central; in radical psychiatry, Laing (1981) addressed the topic of the "self and other." More recently, psychoanalysts Stolorow and Atwood have reinterpreted the transference-countertransference phenomenon in therapy in terms of intersubjectivity (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992; Stolorow, Atwood, & Brandchaft, 1994).

But significant developments have also taken place in modern philosophy. Philosopher-theologian Buber (1970) evocatively drew attention to the "I-thou" relationship, and the philosophical-social psychology of Mead (1967) explained how knowledge of "me" is a result of internalizing some external "you." And in contemporary sociolinguistics and linguistic philosophy, Habermas (1984, 1992) has developed a detailed account of the intersubjective-social basis for consciousness in his "theory of communicative action." These three are by no means the only thinkers who have addressed the problem of intersubjectivity, but theirs is the most

significant contribution toward an understanding of the kind of radical intersubjectivity I am proposing here. I will now turn to an examination of the theories of Mead and Habermas-by way of Buber's original insight.

*Buber's "I and Thou.* " Probably the theorist most readily associated with the notion of intersubjectivity (as a mutual engagement of interior presences) is the philosopher-theologian Martin Buber. As he himself acknowledged, he picked up the germ of the idea in 1843 from philosopher of religion Ludwig Feuerbach:

> The individual man does not contain in himself the essence of man either in so far as he is a moral being or in so far as he is a thinking being. The essence of man is contained only in the community, in the unity of man and man-a unity which rests upon the reality of the difference between "I" and "Thou." (Marcel, 1967, p. 42)

Feuerbach, however, did not pursue the idea, and Huber's priority, rightly, rests on the fact that he devoted his professional career, and a long list of works, to developing the implications of Feuerbach's revolutionary insight.

For Buber, Feuerbach's insight was comparable to the Copernican revolution, opening up new vistas in understanding about the nature of human beings-a shift not only with profound epistemological relevance but one that is also ontologically revealing. In Buber's hands, these implications were worked out in great detail (Buber, 1961,1970). Specifically, the essence of human being was *relationship,* and Buber gave ontological status to the "between"-a mysterious force, "presence," or creative milieu, in which the experience of being a self arises. Relations, then, not the relata, were primordial, if not actually primary. "Spirit is not in the I but between I and You" (Buber, 1970, p. 89).

Only when "I" respond to "you," a fellow locus of presence or spirit, does my own being transcend the "oppressive force which emanates from objects" (Marcel, 1967). According to Buber, human beings have two responses available to the world: to relate to what is present either as an object ("I-it" relationship) or as another responsible being ("I-thou" relationship). When we engage with the "other" as l-thou, relationship is mutually cocreating. The ontological status of the relationship, the "between," is emphasized by Buber when he refers to I-thou as "one word," representing a fundamental human reality of mutuality.

However, Buber is not always consistent about whether the relationship, the "betweenness," is fundamental, or whether, as logic seems to require, any relationship must always be between some pre-existing entities. Wheelwright (1967) sums up Buber's position in *Between Man and Man,* which appears to support this latter view: "By nature each person is a single being, finding himself in company with other single beings; to be single is not to be isolated, however, and by vocation each one is to find and realize his proper focus by entering into relationship with others" (p. 75).

*Mead's Intersubjective Alter Egos.* Buber approached intersubjectivity from the theological perspective of *presence.* His contemporary George Herbert Mead approached

it from a sociological perspective of communities and language. In their different ways, both men opened up a new set of possibilities for Western philosophy.

Ever since Descartes introduced his famous *cogito-the* isolated, individual thinking ego—and Kant placed the transcendental ego beyond knowledge in the eternally elusive *numenon,* Western philosophy has struggled to break out of an epistemological impasse known as "the problem of other minds," How can one subject or self reach across the great divide and *know,* not simply infer, the presence of another subjective being? Buber gave us the idea of-and the invitation to experience-the "between." Mead (1967), for his part, introduced the crucial element of the *second person,* a way to fill in the gap separating "I" from "it."

Mead showed how it was possible for the self to know itself by mirroring itself in an "object." But this was no ordinary third-person object; in fact, it was not an "object" at all. It was another self-a second-person, *alter ego.* Instead of the epistemological contortions of a first-person "I" attempting to adopt the third-person perspective of an external observer of itself, the self becomes known through the interactions of first-person and second-person perspectives of participants in active linguistic communication.

Now, the self is not mirrored as an object from a third-person perspective, but as communicating egos mutually reflecting each other. My self, then, is perceived as the alter ego to your alter ego. I am "other," *as a self,* to you as another self: an encounter of mutually acknowledging selves. I perceive you as a subject in the second person, and "me" as *your* subject in the second person. From the second-person view, *who I* am-the self I experience myself to be-is shaped, or informed, by being with you.

Given this circle of intersubjectivity, of mutually participant subjects engaged in linguistic communication, how do we account for individual subjects? Underlying the "intersubjective project"---common to theorists from Buber and Mead to Habermas-is a motivation to not only counteract the exaggerated subjectivist bias in philosophy of consciousness, but also to avoid swamping the individual in overwhelming social norms of the collective, thereby depriving the individualized person of his or her autonomy and spontaneity. Intersubjectivity aims to create a middle course between the extremes of Cartesian subjectivism and Marxist collectivism (Voloshinov, 1996).

But if, as Mead argues, the self shows up only in the linguistic circle of intersubjectivity, how do we account for the individual subjects that intersubjectivity would seem to presuppose? How can there be a circle of intersubjectivity unless there are *subjects* already present to start with?

Mead recognized this problem and proposed as a solution that in the same moment the self encounters an alter ego-the moment "I" encounter "you"-the concrete organism establishes a relationship to itself, "The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience" (Mead, 1962, p, 140), The self is thus "first encountered as a subject in the moment when communicative relations are established between organisms" (Habermas, 1992, p. xvi).

The self thus has two components: the theoretical "me," my consciousness of myself, and the practical "me," the agency through which I monitor my behavior (such as speaking). "The 'I' is the response of the organism *to the* attitudes of the others; the 'me' is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes" (Mead, 1962, p. 175). Hohengarten explains:

> This practical "me" comes into existence when the subject establishes a practical relation to herself by adopting the normative attitude of an alter ego toward her own behavior ... such a conventionally constituted self is nonetheless a precondition for the emergence of a nonconventional aspect of the practical self: the practical "I," which *opposes* the "me" with both presocial drives and innovative fantasy .... Yet the *self is intersubjectively constituted through and through;* the relationship to a community is what makes the practical relation-to-self possible. (Hohengarten, 1992, pp, xvi-xvii)

Mead's emphasis on the intersubjective constitution of the self, of the subject's sense of continuity and identity, accounts for self as an "individualized context" for the contents of experience. But it still does not account for the "metacontext"-the nonindividualized ontological context that underlies all contents of consciousness. Mead's "self," although a context for contents of individual experience, is itself a content within the ontological metacontext of consciousness-as-such. Mead's intersubjectivity still leaves unexplained ontological subjectivity-the fact that at least some loci in the universal matrix have a capacity for interiority, for a what-it-feels-like from within. It would still be possible, in Mead's theory, for a universe consisting wholly of objects to produce, via linguistic and social relations, what he calls "intersubjectivity." But this could logically be an "intersubjectivity" without any interiority, without any true subjectivity (in other words, intersubjectivity 1)-—and therefore not truly intersubjectivity (as defined here) at alL

*Habermas: Language and Consciousness*

Building on Mead's view of the subject in *Mind, Self & Society,* and incorporating developmental ideas from Piaget (1954) and Kohlberg (1981), Habermas (1992) emphasizes that the process of individuation of the self depends on the development of a postconventional identity-a subject who simultaneously is shaped in intersubjective communicative action *and* who transcends the otherwise binding norms of that linguistic society. Although the claim of radical authenticity depends on the recognition (though not necessarily the acceptance) of others, by the imaginative act of projecting a "universal community of all possible alter egos" the subject authentically retains autonomy-remaining a true subject within a creative web of intersubjectivities:

> The idealizing supposition of a universalistic form of life, in which everyone can take up the perspective of everyone else and can count on reciprocal recognition by everybody, makes it possible for individuated beings to exist within a community-individualism as the flip-side of universalism. (Habermas, 1992, p. 186)

Habermas is preeminently concerned with the role of language in shaping who we are as human beings. However, his concern is not limited to an analysis of the structure or grammar of language, to its propositional content-he is not a linguistic analyst.

Habermas is concerned with the real-world *speaking* of language, to its impact on who we take ourselves to be and on how we act in the world. He is hardly interested in the *theory* of language but is emphatically concerned with the *practice* of language-with its *peiformative* function. Language engages speakers and hearers in such a way that both participate and risk themselves in communication. In the process, consciousness intersubjectively creates and reveals itself.

We can identify three central elements of Habermas' work-the three "Ps":

.. emphasis on *practice* away from theory,
.. the *public* or *intersubjective* origin and role of language and meaning, and
.. the *peiformative* function of language.

*From Theory to Practice.* Habermas is concerned to show that philosophy, to have any value and meaning, must engage with the world. Abstractions without the meat and muscle of practical action are little more than intellectual self-indulgence. Such philosophy can do nothing for us. In this earlier phase of his work, Habermas displays the deep influence of Western Marxism in his thought and political engagement. (Habermas was active in German student political action in the 1960s.)

*The Public Sphere.* Later, Habermas reveals what has become a consistent theme throughout all his work: that language is first and foremost a *public* or social enterprise. At this stage, Habermas' central concern is political rather than philosophical (although in his work the two are never far apart). His focus is on working out an intellectual and practical basis for public discourse so that everyone, not just the bourgeois elite, would participate in effective control of public policy.

*Communicative Action.* Implicit in his political stance of discourse in the public sphere is a philosophical insight that Habermas later made far more explicit: Meaning is not dependent on the grammatical structures or private "monological" subjective intentions of a speaker's language; meaning is derived from interaction of intersubjective communication. Language and meaning unfold from the "dialogical" reciprocity of "I-speakers" and "you-listeners." The two most dominant influences on Habermas here are pioneer linguist-philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt and philosopher-psychologist George Herbert Mead.

Language and meaning are products of the "public sphere," not the creation of individual subjects operating on their own. Hubermas' central concern is to argue that all language involves a *peiformative* function. That is, language does not merely describe the world but *engages the subject with the world through the listener.*

*Intersubjective Meaning.* Although Habermas agrees that meaning cannot be understood independently of the conditions of its occurrence, he denies that these conditions are determined exclusively by structures of power and dominance, as claimed by deconstructive postmodernists. Instead, Habermas argues, the conditions for "interpretant relations" (that is, meaning) are dependent on conditions of *intersubjective communication* oriented toward *mutual understanding.* This is a picture of language relations, and the consequent role of reason, very different from that of postmodernists

such as Derrida (1967) and Foucault (1970). Instead of individual and separate subjects engaged in interminable power struggles, Habennas' theory of communicative action refers to communities of subjects who partially create each other and therefore strive for mutual understanding. Reasoning thus becomes a public enterprise.

In *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (1992), Habermas observes that language performs three distinct, but intimately and invariably interconnected, functions: ea) a *speaker* comes to an understanding with (b) *another person* about (c) *something* in the world. In turn, these three functions of language correspond to three types of *validity claims.*

In Hahermas' theory, meaning is not a product of any "picture theory of language" (as early Wittgenstein believed in the *Tractatus);* it is not a description of correspondences between words and facts or states of affairs. There is no independent subject unilaterally turning out "word pictures" that match *some* objective reality. Nor is meaning a matter of Humpty-Dumptyesque arbitrary choosing what words mean. Nor is meaning an indefinite and indeterminate deferral of *différance,* forever sliding beyond reach, so that nothing really has any meaning at all (as Derrida and his deconstructionist followers would have it). Rather, says Habermas, meaning is constituted in the shared speech-acts of a communicating community of *mutu-*al-determining, uncoerced subjects.

Language, then, in this view, is a pragmatic, holistic act. Its smallest unit is not some disembodied or abstract sign, word or phoneme, but an *utterance* that involves three mutually interacting components-the speaker, the hearer, and the world in which they are situated. Each language utterance, or speech act, is like a token that the speaker offers to a listener (or community of listeners). This "token" *expresses* an experience of the world claimed to be true, right, and sincere by the speaker, and it may be either rejected or accepted by the hearer. In either case, the *validity claims* of "true," "right," and "sincere" can be tested by the community of speakers and hearers. It is here, in Habermas, where "intersubjective agreement" (through linguistic tokens) and "intersubjective cocreativity" (through shared experience) come together. The first is a foundation for consensual scientific knowledge established between communicating individual subjects (Velmans, 1992). The second is true intersubjective mutual *beholding-where* the experience of self, of consciousness, arises as a felt experience from the encounter.

A final quote from Habermas sums up his intersubjective posiiion:

> The ego, which seems to me to be given in my self-consciousness as what is purely my own, cannot be maintained by me solely through my own power, as it were for me alone-it does not "belong" to me. Rather, this ego always retains an intersubjective core because the process of individuation from which it emerges runs through the network of linguistically mediated interactions. (Habermas, 1992, p. 170)

*The Missing Perspective: Why Intersubjectivity is Transparent*

In this article, I have introduced key ideas of three philosophers who have attempted to focus on what I take to be a conspicuous oversight in Western philosophy in

general and in philosophy of mind in particular. With these and a few other exceptions-such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, Søren Kierkegaard, and contemporary French theorist Francis Jacques (1991)-1 know of no philosopher in the Western tradition who has systematically approached the problem of subject-world relation, and particularly *the question of consciousness,* by invoking the *second-person perspective* as an alternative to the first-person perspective of subjectivists and idealists, and the third-person perspective of the objectivists and materialists.

The standard approaches to the study of consciousness have bifurcated along apparently irreconcilable methodologies derived, respectively, from Cartesian-inspired philosophy of the subject (first-person epistemology) and from Hobbesian-inspired philosophy of matter (third-person objects). In the first case, knowledge of the objective world remains problematic; in the second, knowledge of the knowing subject (of consciousness)-and therefore of *all* knowledge-is inexplicable and radically problematic. Hardly anyone, it seems, in philosophy of mind has been drawn to approach the study of consciousness from a second-person perspective (of mutually engaged subjects). For a long time, I have wondered why there is this glaring omission.

We all use all three ways of knowing-objectivity, subjectivity, and intersubjectivity-in one form or another most of the time. We all deal with external material objects, we all feel what it is like to be a being from *within,* and we all participate and communicate with other human beings. But whereas for centuries both objectivity and subjectivity have been investigated as ways of knowing in Western science and philosophy, intersubjectivity has been ignored for the most parl-particularly with reference to exploration of consciousness. Why?

I wonder if this oversight is an example of a "fish-in-water" syndrome. We tend not to notice the second-person perspective because it is right in front of our noses every day. It is the medium in which we most naturally live. For third-person perspective, we need to set up controlled (and artificial) laboratory experiments to induce (at least the illusion of) a separation between observer and observed and thus step back, or step out of the stream of natural living and human interaction. This stepping back allows us to notice the third-person perspective in action-because it's not "normal." Similarly for first-person perspective: In meditation (or other contemplative or introspective) disciplines, we "withdraw" from the "normal" world, and the subjective perspective shows up in contrast.

But normal day-to-day living, interacting with and encountering other people, is the usual medium for consciousness; the mutuality of shared perspective is at least available to us throughout the day in every encounter (even if we actually rarely consciously engage in it). Like first- and third-person perspectives, the second-person perspective can be another mode of *conscious inquiry-where* consciousness (and the reality that consciousness reveals) can be investigated as a process of mutual "taking account of' the other(s). Something different happens in consciousness when we engage like this. Physicist David Bohm recognized this potential for consciousness exploration in his approach to "dialogue" (Bohm, 1985, 1996).

Clearly, our language already presents us with *three.* not just two, options-first,

*second,* and third-person pronouns, "I," *"you."* and "it." And the second-person per-spective, *both* theoretically and experientially (that is, *pragmatically),* is a logical and natural bridge between the apparent dichotomy of the knowing subject and the world of objects-between "I" and "it," between interior "I" and exterior "other."

When I communicate with *you,* particularly in a face-to-face encounter, something about who I am and something about the world shows up *through you-and* vice versa. The "I" that encounters you (as the locus of another "I") is different from the "I" that encounters the world as a conglomeration of "its." Who I am can be revealed (at least partially) through my encounter with you, whereas I-as-"I" remain entirely unattainable if I encounter the world as merely a collection of "its." I (as subject) am never reflected in things (objects), only in other "I"s such as *you.* The "I" that can show up as an object either in first-person introspection as "me" or in third-person analysis (as in standard materialist philosophy of mind and psychology) is never truly "I" (as experiential subject) but only "me" or "it" as spatia-temporal object.

There is something about the nature of consciousness, it seems, that requires the *presence* of the "other" as another subject that can acknowledge my being. (When I experience myself being experienced by you, my experience of myself—and of you—is profoundly enriched, and, in some encounters, even "transformed.")

What is intriguing about Habermas' philosophy is that it is precisely this missing component of the second-person that is central to his work. Whereas Habermas restricts this "other" to what cun be communicated through hwnan language—i.e., "you" would havc to be another human being-I remain open to the Whiteheadian possibility that all organisms are centers of subjectivity and therefore available to me as "I-thou" partners, not only as objective "its." I am, however, certain that the quality of human-human intersubjectivity is significantly different from human-nonhuman intersubjectivity.

Nevertheless, Habermas' emphasis on the intersubjective nature of language and con-sciousness strikes me as a major step forward, and may, more than Wittgenstein's or Heidegger's linguistic moves, finally lead Western philosophy beyond the perennial dualisms of subject-object and mind-matter, providing a philosophical agenda for a science of consciousness that includes a second-person perspective to complement third- and first-person perspectives.

Having surveyed a few pioneers in intersubjectivity and outlined some of their rea-sons for exploring the second-person perspective, I will now outline my own theo-retical perspective on the role and significance of intersubjectivity in the evolution of consciousness.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

*The Original Meaning of Consciousness*

The *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies seven varieties of consciousness (Natsoulas, 1983; Hunt. 1995), which I have summarized in the mnemonic

"SAIPRUD"--eonsciousness as sentience, awake/awareness, interpersonal, personal, reflective, unitive, and dissociative.

All varieties reveal a common characteristic, *subjectivity-they* are known from "within." And, with one notable exception, all are private-the privileged domain of the individual knower. The exception is the interpersonal variety of consciousness, because it means "knowing or sharing the knowledge of something together with an other" (Hunt, 1995). What is interesting about this is that it is actually the form of consciousness that originally gave rise to the very concept itself-consci-*entia,* meaning "knowing with" others (Gtize1dere, 1995). This reveals that, originally, the word "consciousness" implied a *dialogic* process-an interaction or communication between two or more knowing beings. To be conscious meant that two or more people were privy to some item of knowledge not available to others outside the privileged circle. In this sense, "consciousness" is similar to "conspire" (to "breathe with" others). "Consciousness" meant that the privileged circle of knowers *knew that each of their conspirators knew. too:*

Consciousness, therefore, originally implied a "shared secret" or "knowledge of a privileged few." Consciousness, in other words, was originally *communal.* a property of the group. This sense remains today in forms of consciousness referred to as, for example, "social consciousness," "political consciousness," "feminist consciousness," "racial consciousness," and is manifested in such diverse groups as church congregations, religious movements, political parties, sports teams and fans, and religious and political cults. Such forms of "social consciousness" imply changes in the beliefs of social groups, rather than of individual people. Social consciousness essentially refers to the contents of consciousness-only this time on a large scale within a community, rather than in one person. However, since it still deals with contents-with changes in consciousness at the level of groups-it is still a form of "psychological" consciousness (we might call it psychosocial consciousness). Social consciousness often masks the deeper, metaphysical, intersubjective nature of consciousness-the very condition that allows for any individual or social form of consciousness to emerge in the first place.

*/ntersubjectivity and Interpersonal Consciousness*

In the previous section, I noted that "consciousness" originally meant to "know with" others-it was interpersonal or intersubjective. However, I now want to unpack this claim and propose some further subtle distinctions that may help clarify why we may now have an opportunity to explore intersubjectivity in a way that was not available to our predecessors. These distinctions will borrow a concept central to Ken Wilber's critique of the evolution of consciousness in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995).

Wilber argues that it is a fallacy to equate "pre-egoic" consciousness (or self)—-as in the so-called participation mystique of animistic worldviews-with "trans-egoic" consciousness of mystical experience. There is an evolutionary progression, Wilber argues, from pre-egoic, through various stages of egoic, to trans-egoic consciousness. And it is a serious category mistake to equate (confuse or conflate) the "pre" with the "trans."

Similarly, the SAIPRUD mnemonic of varieties of consciousness I introduced earlier may be viewed as an evolutionary sequence-from consciousness as sentience, awake, interpersonal, personal, reflexive, to unitive. (D, dissociative, is a pathology that may occur at any stage in the process; for this reason, it may be better to write the mnemonic as SAIPRU[D].)

In this model, it is clear that interpersonal consciousness precedes personal consciousness-intersubjectivity is prior to subjectivity, it is "pre." This accords with the position implicit in Bubel' and explicit in Jacques and Habermas. However, taking a cue from Wilber's "pre/trans" distinction, I want now to distinguish between "intersubjective" and "interpersonal."

If, as claimed, subjectivity (I.e., experienced interiority) is the essential, key characteristic of consciousness, then it is present throughout the entire spectrum of consciousness, from raw sentience to mystical unity. In addition, if, following Buber, Mead, Jacques, and Habermas, we take *relations* as ontologically primary, then subjectivity is *always* embedded within a matrix or context of mutually cocreating inter-subjectivities. Thus, even at the level of raw sentience (be it an embryo, a worm, bacterium, atom, or electron), intersubjective interiority (what-it-feels-like to be that entity) is ontologically fundamental, and similarly all the way up, through consciousness-as-awake to unitive consciousness. Thus, if the interpersonal variety of consciousness is present throughout, it no longer serves as a useful distinction-or indeed, a valid stage—in the *evolutionary* progression. *It* is *not* a stage; *it is* a *condition* of aU stages. So, our mnemonic, minus the interpersonal, would now read SAPRU(D). However, this model is incomplete; it does not account for interpersonal dialogic consciousness.

Now let's revisit the pre/trans distinction from the perspective of the evolution of "individual self," Historically, the notion of the "individual" as an autonomous self that could separate from the collective or community is itself an evolutionary phenomenon. Prior to the time of Alexander the Great, from Homer down to Aristotle, the "individual" was identified with the group or city-state (Tamas, 1991; Onians, 1994). At this stage, consciousness was *pre-personal* (Wilber's "pre-egoic"), pre-individualized self. Thus, although intersubjectivity was present, its character was still "pre." Consciousness as "knowing with" was group consciousness, where members of the group had little or no sense of individual self-identity, Their identity was with the tribe or group (Crook, 1980; de Quincey, 1995; Jaynes, 1976).

Following the great unification of the Hellenistic world during and after Alexander's time, the uniformity of the empire made it possible and practicable for individual members to leave their city-state, for example to travel from Athens to Alexandria. The way was opened up for a *detachable,* individual self that could move around the empire. Result: the birth of the individual. Only then could consciousness evolve to the stage of personal consciousness (de Quincey, 1995).

I now want to propose a similar model (or extension of this same model) for the emergence of *trans-personal* intersubjective consciousness. Just as it was almost impossible for the average citizen prior to Alexander's empire to experience individual self-identity (pre-personal)-they just did not *notice* the personal quality of

consciousness embedded in the group—it has been almost impossible for the average individual in contemporary society to experience intersubjectivity at the level of transpersonal consciousness. Until now (and perhaps even still), we have been too embedded in our personal consciousness, in our Cartesian-Enlightenment individualism, to *notice* that the deeper reality or grounding of our consciousness is the intersubjective matrix of interdependent relationships.

I am proposing that a crucial aspect of the oft-announced "new paradigm"—a worldview of nonlocal interdependence—may be the emergence of *transpersonal* awareness of our deep intersubjective nature. Elements or facets of this emerging worldview would include, for example, the discovery of nonlocality in quantum physics (Albert, 1992); accumulating documentation of evidence for nonlocal psi phenomena (Schlitz & Braud, 1997); increased globalization of economies (Korten, 1995); awareness of ecological interdependence (Roszak, 1992); and, perhaps, even the globalization and interconnectedness of communications technologies such as satellite TV, telephones, and the Internet (Elgin, 1993; Russell, 1995). It is becoming less and less easy to deny our deep interconnectedness. We might also include in this list a growing awareness of the central doctrine of codependent arising in Buddhism, as it continues to spread into modernist, Western societies and worldviews (Macy, 1991).

I am proposing, therefore, that interpersonal consciousness evolves out of a prior personal consciousness. As a transpersonal mode of consciousness, it involves not only awareness of the prior personal, and of the emergent interpersonal, but also of the ontological grounding (or context) of all consciousness which is intersubjective.

So now we have I-SAPRIU(D):

- Intersubjective (primordial condition and foundation for consciousness shared between all intersubjects-what many traditions refer to as "spirit");
- Sentience (primitive capacity for feeling and self-motion in any individual organism);
- Awake/awareness (higher form of sentience where organism can be either conscious or unconscious, awake or asleep);
- Personal (individualized awareness with a sense of self-identity); (capacity for self to be "aware that I am aware"-gateway to altered states of consciousness: "aware that I am aware that I am aware...");
- Interpersonal (gateway to transpersonal consciousness, involving awareness not only of personal identity, but also of deep intcrsubjectivc foundation of all consciousness);
- Unitive (integrates all prior forms of consciousness into experienced unity);
- Dissociative (pathological failure to integrate prior forms of consciousness).

According to this view, intersubjectivity is not, strictly speaking, a variety, or a state or level of consciousness like the other seven. It is the context or condition for all varieties of consciousness and permeates the entire evolutionary spectrum. As consciousness evolves, it eventually becomes aware of this context.

The sentience and awake/awareness varieties of consciousness are prepersonal; the personal and reflexive varieties are personal, with interpersonal evolving out of personal and emerging as the first stage in transpersonal consciousness. The integration

of all stages from sentience to interpersonal is unitive consciousness. (D, as before, represents the potential for dissociation at any stage, the pathological shadow side of *intersubjective* consciousness that prevents unitive consciousness.)

CONCLUSION

*Methodological Implications of a Second-Person Perspective*

How does one access the second person perspective? In other words, how can we tell the difference between relating to "you" and relating to an "object"—or how do we persuade someone else of the difference? This can be a challenge: If someone does not "feel it," then no amount of ostensive argument is going to win that person over. I can point all I like, but if the referent I'm pointing at just isn't available for that person, then it will seem to be an "empty set" to them. I've tried to point to the most obvious distinction that I take to be a likely element in just about everyone's experiential set: namely, the experience of love, of being in love. I can't really believe that any reader of this arlicle has never felt the difference I'm pointing out between an intimate (love relationship) and a nonintimate one (say, a next-door neighbor, or the local shopkeeper), *That is* the kind of difference I'm pointing at when I speak of "engaged presence."

The difference, however, is not absolute; it is graded on a continuum. It is possible to have a second-person experience with the neighbor or shopkeeper. What matters is our willingness and ability to acknowledge and be open to the *presence of the other as a locus of experience that can reciprocate that acknowledgment.* We can interact with the shopkeeper (and, indeed, with a lover) mechanically and habitually without experiencing them as a reciprocating center of experience (many of us do this more than we would care to admit)-or we can interact intersubjectively. The experiential difference is dramatic. Unfortunately, I can no more give a prescription for how to do this than I can for how to fall in love. But I trust that the ability is innate.

This does not mean, however, that there is no methodology we can use to facilitate second-person inquiry-we just cannot guarantee the methodology will work in every case, every time. The procedure I have found to be most conducive to this kind of intersubjective experience is the form of dialogue developed by Bohm (1985, 1996). Numerous tapes, books, and articles are available, as well as practicum courses and meetings, where any interested inquirer can learn and practice this method of dialogue (Gerard & Teurfs, 1994). A description of the parameters of Bohmian dialogue would be out of place in this article. I think it is sufficient to let readers know a "recipe" is available; they must "bake the cake" for themselves. Fewer things arc as dry and as uninspiring as a step-by-step procedure for how to attain a particular experience. If you want to experience the joys of sex-go do it. Similarly, if you are interested in researching intcrsubjectivity, follow the procedure for yourself. Any interested reader can take the necessary steps to learn the methodology.

*From Mechanism to Meaning*

How might the philosophical approach *to* second-person perspective discussed here translate into a science of consciousness-resulting in a body of empirical data and

testable hypotheses? Methodologically, how might it differ from first- or third-person perspectives? As we have seen, the most obvious difference is that the intersubjective approach would involve two or more people committedly engaged in the presence of the other(s)-an epistemology of *presence* (Ha'iri Yazdi, 1992). It is the difference hetween an "I-it" relationship (third person) and an "I-me" relationship (first person) and an "I-you" (second person). In this last case, consciousness is experienced truly as "intersubjective" and transpersonal, that is, transcending thc individual Cartesian subject. Loosely, we might say it occurs "somewhere between and enveloping" the participants (recognizing, of course, that the use of the spatial "somewhere" and "enveloping" are just metaphors).

The point is that consciousness "shows up" as a cocreativity between or among the participants. The implications range from, in philosophy, prompting us to reconsider our basic ontology-from discrete physical substances to a more process-oriented relational ontology of interpenetrating experiences (Whitehead, 1979) to, in philosophy and science, providing a different way to approach the problem of other minds, or even possibly elucidating the mystery of parapsychological phenomena.

As an epistemology of "presence," second-person intersubjectivity opens the way to a deep exploration of *relationship-an* approach that could take science beyond the epistemology of objects; beyond methodologies of objectivity, measurement, and quantification; beyond a preoccupation with mechanisms. As in first-person methodologies, the emphasis in second-person science would be on engagement rather than measurement, meaning rather than mechanism. Explanations in terms of mechanism are inappropriate for consciousness and mental phenomena because mechanisms involve exchanges of energy. They can provide explanations only of objective, physical things and processes. Where consciousness is involved, where subjective, interior experience is concerned, connections occur through shared meaning, not physical mechanisms. Thus, instead of third-person explanations in terms of physical causes and effects, consciousness invites us to look for *understanding* or *insight* in terms of intersubjective, shared participation in the meanings of things and their relationships-and in the meaning of the world as a whole.

In conclusion, we could say that standard third-person inquiry leads to a science of external bodies, first-person inquiry to an interior science of the mind, and second-person engagement to a communal science of the heart.[2] Whereas the ultimate ideal of objective knowledge is control, and the ultimate ideal of subjective knowledge is peace, the ultimate ideal of intersubjective knowledge is relationship-and, dare I say it, love.

NOTES

[1] Socrates' method of engaged questioning. which hypassed the normal rational, cognitive faculties, was directed at the soul or essence of the other person—a process that often left the other perSall with a feeling of great discomfort and, sometimes, of transformation. Socrates was a master at penetrating behiud perceptual and emotional surfaces to the deeper, core "presence" of the other person. To be in dialogue wilh Socrates was to find your precious opinions and certainties based on appearances dismantled and shattered-to discover some deepcr [mth about yourself. See, for example, the famous encounter between Socrates and the slave boy in the Meno. where by a process of engaged questioning, Socrates draws out of the uneducated slavc a "recollection" of knowledge of geometry that the boy didn't know he knew.

[2] I thank my friend Peter Russell for this ohservation, for our many dialogues on consciousness, ami for his generous feedback on an earlier draft of this p'lpcr.

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