

Christopher Peacocke. *The Mirror of the World: Subjects, Consciousness, and Self-Consciousness*. Oxford University Press 2014. 296 pp. \$45.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780199699568); \$34.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780198776826).

It was Hume who first brought to light the transparent nature of the subject within experience. Though I might scan the inner depths of consciousness, I never do find the subject (qua object of experience) that I call myself. At the same time, to say that the subject is nothing more than a bundle of impressions, a logical or narrative construct appears to contradict the inner testimony of experience where we each seemingly do have something of an acquaintance with ourselves as conscious and enduring subjects.

From this perspective, Christopher Peacocke's *Mirror of the World* offers a compelling alternative to standard accounts of the subject. Relying on his theory of non-conceptual content elaborated in an earlier work (*A Study of Concepts*, 1992), Peacocke offers a sophisticated account of the subject as materially realizable coupled with support for various features related to first person conceptual phenomena.

The book itself is divided into eleven chapters which I here subdivide for the sake of simplicity into three parts. The first part (Chapters I-III) offers the conceptual and as he notes, metaphysical foundations of the account of the subject given within the work. The second part (roughly Chapters IV-VII) addresses the immunity principle, anticipates objections to the theory (notably Kantian and Strawsonian) and defends the cogency of the Cartesian cogito. Finally, the third part (Chapters VIII-XI) discusses and explains associated phenomena including perspectival, reflexive and interpersonal self-consciousness. It is worth noting that the latter chapter on interpersonal self-consciousness serves as a welcome contribution to discussions within analytic literature that have long had a place within continental phenomenology.

In what follows, I focus upon what I consider to be the pivotal thesis of the text, viz., the response developed to Hume's complaint that the subject is never given as an object of experience. Following this, a few remarks will be made regarding his illuminating defense of Descartes in the second part.

In the introductory chapter, the aim of the work is stated in the form of a question, 'What is it to represent something as yourself?' (1) The given response to this question is developed most notably in terms of the distinction thereafter made between first-person conceptual content and *de se* non-conceptual content. This distinction is further refined in terms of 'three degrees' of self-representation in the second chapter. Broadly characterized, the distinction is between Degree 0 subjects who 'enjoy conscious states but do not self-represent'; Degree 1 subjects 'who do self-represent but who do so only in mental states with contents that contain a non-conceptual form of the first person'; and Degree 2 subjects of consciousness 'who employ the genuine first person concept' (189).

A criticism that may be made here is that Peacocke is generally austere in offering concrete examples in support of the above division and in particular for Degree 0 subjects. Precisely which kinds of subjects would qualify as enjoying Degree 0 states (plants, bacteria, amoeba, artificially intelligent machines)? To what extent would it be accurate to speak of such subjects as conscious, if at all? Evidence in support of such states and their peculiar features would have been desirable. Of course, it may be the case that access to such states (since we cannot 'see' inside the consciousness of such subjects, if there are such subjects) may well be impossible, but if this is in fact the case, then

in what way does or would this affect the distinction developed? Such questions are in fact never addressed. Despite this, the above distinction is thereafter applied throughout the book so that the reader is left to accept (or reject) the initial separation of conscious states upon the basis of its being a hypothesis having, at the very least, explanatory cogency and power.

The third chapter turns to the metaphysical foundations of the subject and it is here that Peacocke defends and offers an interesting solution to the initial problem pointed out by Hume. Indeed, analysis of Hume's argument reveals an inconsistency. To understand why this is the case, Peacocke distinguishes two types or kinds of attentiveness, viz., that of *original* and *derivative* attending. Original attending involves cases where the subject directs its attention to a given object of experience, e.g., watching the road, stepping on the brakes as a traffic light changes and so on. Here the subject does not attend to itself but instead merely attends to an object. In contradistinction, derivative attending involves cases of attending to oneself through the medium of a given object, e.g., looking at oneself in the mirror, examining one's hand, or thinking about the way in which someone is viewing us. What is evident is that every instance of self-attending is an instance of derivative attending. Stated otherwise, 'a case of attending to yourself cannot be a case of original attending' (46). Applying this distinction and conclusion to Hume's criticism we obtain the following (invalid) argument:

Premise 1. For any x, if x can be originally attended in experience, then x exists.

Premise 2: The subject cannot be originally attended in experience.

Conclusion: Therefore, the subject does not exist.

On the basis of this argument, Peacocke is able to conclude that: 'Hume drew incorrect ontological conclusions from what was right in his premises' (52). The objection is that even if the subject cannot be originally attended in experience, this need not automatically disqualify the subject from an ontological point of view. Indeed, the subject can both be in some way and yet be capable of being only derivatively attended in experience. Taken in isolation, the book serves in many ways as a defense and explanation of the nature of derivative attending itself.

Where Peacocke's theory and distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual content finds further application can be seen in particular in that fact that ontological claims made about the substantive nature of the subject remain in many ways indifferent to the theory itself. As long as one holds to the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual content, the theory retains its explanatory power.

An interesting example of this can be found in his defense (or clarification) of the Cartesian cogito that commences in Chapter VI. The above distinction explains how the subject can logically affirm its existence with certitude. Simply stated, the non-conceptual content of our conscious states is taken to be self-ascriptive so that first-personal judgments about those states will naturally be satisfied by reference to those states themselves, 'So, for example, when you have a perceptual representational state with the nonconceptual *de se* content *i am f*, you will be entitled to judge the corresponding conceptual content *I am F*' (126). When Descartes concludes that 'I am' since 'I am thinking', the conclusion remains sound, since the conceptual content refers to the non-conceptual content through the first-person concept. Here it is important to note that the conclusion hinges upon Peacocke's earlier formulation of what he calls the *Thinker Rule* (following Frege) that states, 'What

makes someone the reference of *I* in a thinking is that he or she is the producer of that thinking' (107).

A further point to note regarding the defense of Descartes coupled with his theory is that Peacocke is thereafter able to explain traditional properties often attributed to Cartesian (immaterial) subjects on a material basis. This is again accomplished through the use of his three degrees of self-representation. A conscious subject at Degree 0 would satisfy the basic criteria of an immaterial subject without being immaterial. It would be non-representing so that it does not contain material parts. Alternatively, lacking material parts, it would be without extension (153).

I have throughout focused on what appeared significant in regards to the driving thesis of the work itself, viz., the question of how and in what way the subject is able to self-represent itself. Overall, I found the book stimulating, though at times the argument tended to veer in directions that led the discussion outside the confines of the central problem at issue. This may perhaps be due to the fact that the work resulted originally from a series of lectures. Alternatively, we cannot forget, as Peacocke notes (and Aristotle before him), the sheer difficulty of the problem under investigation.

I might direct a final criticism at Peacocke's use of the word 'represent' and 'self-represent.' Although he draws a parallel between the self-representing subject and the mirror as reflecting and hence re-presenting an object, discussion of what it means ontologically speaking for anything to represent, whether itself or another, is in many ways omitted (though admittedly the later treatment in Chapter IX of reflexive self-consciousness does address the issue at another level). The point may appear minor at first glance, but further inspection reveals that analysis of the underlying ontological assumptions, foundational to any theory of (self-)representation, has in many ways been omitted.

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