

SELVES ON SELVES: The Philosophical Significance of Autobiography

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Introduction

Philosophers of literature do not take much of an interest in autobiography.¹ In one sense this is not surprising. As a certain prejudice has it, autobiography is, along with biography, the preferred reading of people who do not really like to read. The very words can conjure up images of what one finds on bookshelves in Florida retirement communities and in underfunded public libraries, books with titles like *Under the Rainbow: The Real Liza Minnelli* or *Me: Stories of My Life* (Katharine Hepburn).² Hardly rousing material, at least from the philosophical point of view.

But on a moment's reflection, it becomes clear that the initial prejudice is unfounded. Never mind the fact that there are obviously examples of autobiographical writing that succeed wildly as literature (just think of Rousseau's *Confessions*); it isn't the literariness of autobiography that should interest philosophers. It is the fact that autobiography, at its best, offers highly detailed, concrete case studies of something of deep and abiding philosophical interest: the self. If one considers that in recent years there has been a so-called "narrative-turn" in the philosophy of the self, the timing seems perfect for the philosopher to discover autobiography. For if selfhood is even in part a kind of narrative achievement, as a good many philosophers and psychologists claim it is, then what better place to explore what a self is than in the narratives the autobiographer weaves?³ Seen from this perspective, autobiography looks to be one of the last unexplored frontiers in literary aesthetics, and a place where the interests of the philosopher of literature and the philosopher of mind can come together and mingle in unexpected and fruitful ways. Literary aesthetics, like aesthetics more generally, is constantly looking for new ways to show that artworks can occasion and guide philosophical reflection, and it is striking that so little attention has been paid to the role that autobiography can play in this.

There is one exception to the above, a recent book that attempts to carve out a space for the philosophical study of autobiography, and a discussion of it provides the occasion for this essay. The book is Garry Hagberg's *Describing Ourselves: Wittgenstein and Autobiographical Consciousness*.⁴ What Hagberg's book does extremely well is show that the philosophical study of autobiography offers a new way to look at many of the old problems in the philosophy of the self: problems of self-knowledge, self-interpretation, and self-expression, among others. Like all bold books that take a first step into new territory, *Describing Ourselves* raises almost as many questions as it answers, which is just as well, since it gives the rest of us something to think about. And like all good books, Hagberg's leaves one with the urge to continue the conversation, and that is what I shall do here. After surveying some of the most striking features of Hagberg's theory, I'll outline some of these further questions it raises, and I'll hazard an answer to what I take to be the most pressing of them.

Hagberg's Sense of Self

Hagberg's central goal in *Describing Ourselves* is to undo the Cartesian theory of the self and replace it with a Wittgensteinian account (for various reasons it is best not to describe what Wittgenstein does as offering a "theory" of the self). It might seem odd that a book that is interested in autobiography would be concerned with such a thing, but it turns out to be an inspired move. Casting the competition as Wittgenstein *contra* Descartes⁵ is admittedly nothing new — Wittgensteinians have been doing this for a good many years now — but Hagberg's use of autobiography to guide his discussion makes his critique of Cartesianism feel surprisingly fresh. Since the point of much of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is that the mind is not an inner "thing" that we can explore through introspection, it would thus seem that we can only study it in action, as it manifests itself in various forms of public activity. As Hagberg argues, autobiographical writing is the best example we have of selves publicly exploring themselves, and it offers the philosopher new ground on which to conduct a study of competing views of the self.

Hagberg is right to insist that the Cartesian picture of the self still has an uncanny ability to make its presence felt in standard ways of talking about self-expression in general and literary expression in particular. Indeed, the Cartesian view of the self, or something very much like it, is probably more deeply entrenched in our talk about the nature and value of artistic expression than anywhere else. If very few contemporary philosophers explicitly endorse a Cartesian theory of the self,⁶ when philosophers and critics talk about artistic expression, they very frequently end up sounding Cartesian. This is because it finds such a natural home in the still very influential *romantic* conception of literary expression. According to popular — one might say 'pop' — romantic views of literary expression, what exemplary forms of poetic and novelistic writing do is, among much else, bring to public light the deepest parts of a person, and this is understood in a very particular way. A perfect piece of writing, on this picture, is a perfect piece of expression. And what is given expression is the self, that core of feeling and thought that constitutes the inner life of the mind, indeed of the person. And it isn't simply any old self's expression. It is an *artist's* self-expression and, ever since romanticism stepped on the scene, artists are reputed to have the most expressively interesting selves around. On this view, the quality of sentiment and insight we find on the printed page always gestures towards the self that is its source.

It is here that long-standing habits of philosophical thought make it so easy to lapse into a kind of Cartesianism. When explaining what goes on when an author looks within himself in search of expressive content, we often end up invoking the image of an artist introspecting his, as Hagberg nicely puts it, "private Cartesian interior" (p. 104). A writer may write about worldly affairs, of course, and it would be silly to think that this broadly Cartesian picture insists that all literature does is talk about the soul's secret places, which would be self-indulgence rather than self-expression. But, as Whitman did when he wrote "Song of the Open Road", when an author writes about the outmost world, he also offers record of a self's inmost way of experiencing it. This is what makes the literature a writer produces *expressive*, and so literary writing on this picture always gestures in two directions: the public world and the inner subject that responds to it. To make a play on a well-known line from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, on this view the implicit title of every literary work is *The World As It Strikes Me*. And the "me" here refers not quite to the author — to the "human being considered as whole", to use Galen Strawson's phrase⁷ — but to that part of the author that registers her worldly encounters in all of their emotional, aesthetic and cognitive richness: to her self.

With this in mind one can see why Hagberg finds autobiography fertile ground on which to

mount an attack on Cartesianism, for it is that form of literary writing that seems to embody most perfectly the Cartesian view of the self. Indeed, the picture of a fundamentally “private”, inner self can easily seem to be *implied* by the idea of autobiographical writing. It goes without saying that no one can write my autobiography but me.⁸ And if one thinks long enough about why this is so, at a certain point it will appear attractive, if ultimately mistaken, to claim that the reason for this consists in my access to a very special kind of information, information that is, for reasons metaphysical and otherwise, *in principle* inaccessible to others. If you and I both look within and introspect, only I will find out that I’ve always secretly wanted to be an accountant, that despite all my pleasantries I actually hate my colleagues, or that I am a closet Cartesian. This is, in effect, what is special about the first-person perspective. Without this notion of a kind of information that is accessible only to those — to the *one* — who can assume a first-person stance in respect to it, it is unclear what sort of philosophical barrier prevents me from writing your autobiography. What would it be, besides a mere difference of name and a handful of social conventions, that should prevent me from writing an autobiography entitled *The Life and Times of Garry Hagberg*? And why would Hagberg’s own telling of this tale carry so much more weight than mine, if not because Hagberg has access to an archive that I can never enter, an archive in which this, as one might call it, *self-constituting* information is stored?

In this sense we must acknowledge the privilege, the authority, of the first-person point of view, at least in respect to this reserve of autobiographical information to which we each have unique access. One has room to maneuver when fleshing out these notions of authority and privilege, and it is easy to go astray here, either by exaggerating or downplaying what it amounts to, as Cartesians and behaviorists, respectively, do. But as the above helps us to see, we need *some* recourse to these and similar ways of capturing what is special about *self*-description, indeed about an agent’s relationship to her own mind. And the great challenge, as Hagberg demonstrates in his book, is that of acknowledging these features of first-personal awareness and experience without also embracing the picture of an inner self accessible only by way of introspection. What Hagberg offers is a philosophical reëducation of sorts: a lesson in how to speak and think about autobiography — and the form of self-reflective thought it exemplifies — without giving life to the Cartesian view with which it has become so intertwined.

Since Hagberg is a Wittgensteinian of the later sort, he is not interested in replacing one theory with another. For the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* (and arguably elsewhere, depending one’s reading of Wittgenstein’s other writings), philosophical theories are for the most part not a solution to but a symptom of intellectual disorder, and they are usually responsible for the very thing they are enlisted to clear away: confusion. Wittgenstein’s method was to seek a kind of clarity of expression and thought that reveals how to speak about some region of human concern without confusion, without the attendant sense that something is amiss or stands in need of theoretical explanation. In fine Wittgensteinian fashion Hagberg does the same, offering not a theory of the self but a kind of “conceptual perspicuity”, as he often puts it, that attempts to set straight how we think and speak about selves. This makes it extremely difficult to summarize Hagberg’s views, since he does not offer a competing theory of the self that one might paraphrase, certainly not one that is developed gradually and linearly over the course of the book’s discussion. What Hagberg instead does is attend to the particular case, offering careful and nuanced readings of works in which questions of the self arise. He explores the fictional confessions of Dostoevsky’s underground man (in *Notes from Underground*) and the real ones of Augustine, and he finds much of interest in

autobiographical writings of Goethe, Nabokov, Cavell, Kierkegaard, Frederick Douglass, among many others. In careful, case-by-case studies, Hagberg tries to show us how to speak about these authors' achievements of self-description without giving life to Cartesianism. Hagberg's goal is to identify precisely those points at which the "Cartesian urge", as one might call it, makes itself felt and then to show us how to silence it. It is, in this sense, an exercise in philosophical therapy. Hagberg wishes to free us from the faulty picture that prevents us from understanding aright the forms of self-reflexive thought that autobiography embodies, a form of thought Hagberg calls — hence the title of the book — "autobiographical consciousness."

While Hagberg refuses to offer a theory, his various positive descriptions of autobiographical consciousness cluster around a few central themes, and so it is fair to say that a certain conception of the self and autobiographical consciousness arises in *Describing Ourselves*. It is put most succinctly in the following passage. Hagberg is here discussing self-interpretation, and he argues that:

Our relation to our past is no more passive than is our relation to what we presently visually perceive: we are not the containers of memory-images that a true narrative would accurately describe. Rather, we are in a continual process of reconsideration [...] of reflective restructuring, and of repositioning the actions, events, occurrences, interactions, efforts, aspirations, achievements, intentions—in short, our words, deeds, and everything in between that, taken together, form the teleological trajectories, the narrative threads, of our selves. Such a developmental retrospective is never finally settled beyond the reach of rejuxtaposition with other related (and in some cases seemingly unrelated) life-events; such retrospective self-understanding is the result of an active labor of self-investigation, the content of which is dynamic, not static. And our relation to it is, in Murdoch's sense, 'unfrozen'. Memories, understood in this way, are not inert visual images filed into storage by time and date. They are remembered experiences of all composite kinds, and, like works of art and like human selves, they take on and cast off relational properties, networks of interconnections to other experiences both similar and different. (p. 236)

To see what this amounts to, first consider something deeply odd about the popular Cartesian view of the self. If I wish to know who I am, I look within and there I encounter, in one way or another, my self, that inner hub of mental life that is reflective of who I most basically am. But there is something bizarre in the very idea of *seeing myself* in introspective acts. On this picture there is a queer sense of distance between the person introspecting and the self she witnesses. The question is how these two things — me and my self, the introspecting I and the I it introspects — can be separated such that one can witness the other? To use a worn analogy, it is as hard to imagine what this amounts to as it is to imagine an eye that can look at itself. This sense of queerness arises because the Cartesian model of introspection makes self-perception seem both too third-personal and too passive. It seems too third-personal because it casts the self as ultimately in the *object position of perception*, as something we witness from a vantage point alien to it, which seems to get things precisely backwards and at any rate hardly captures the nature and intimacy of first-personal awareness. This is part of the reason why philosophers like Richard Moran claim that *estrangement* is built into the traditional picture: we seem to come apart from ourselves in introspection, so understood.⁹ And it is too passive because it casts the self as being whatever it is *apart* from and *prior* to our attempts to know and interpret it. Selves are just "there", in some awkward sense, and when we look within we merely report on what we find them to be like.

The tradition Hagberg is a part of wishes to see the self as partly *constituted* by our interpretations of it. It casts the nature of first-person experience not as the ability to witness what no one else can — my inner self — but as a kind of activity of self-creation that can be undertaken by only one person: the one who can use the “I” when declaring “I am...” This way of looking at the self can be seen as having its roots in Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s famous proclamation that “a *self posits itself*, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it exists,”¹⁰ and one finds it in the thought of twentieth centuries philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Paul Ricoeur, among many others.¹¹ Like them, Hagberg recasts self-understanding not as passive grasp of facts that are found within but as a creative act in which I give definition to the very self I invoke in acts of self-description. Self-understanding is, as Hagberg puts it, a form of “retrospective” rather than “introspective” understanding. To come to know myself is to look at everything that constitutes my history and then *to do* something with it, namely, to forge from all available raw material of selfhood (memory, etc.) a specific sense of self.

A memory, as Hagberg rightly notes, is not static, which is one way of registering the fact that, unless interpreted, the implications of a given memory for my sense of self are endless. My remembering my many years of writing in abject poverty is the stuff of the story of either a dedicated artist who put his craft above all else or of a narcissist who was incapable of acknowledging the needs of his family. My memories, my history, are made into a story of one or the other self by virtue of this retrospective interpretative act. It is not looking within that gives me access to this self but looking across the expanse of a life that has been mine and making it *mean* something for me. The kind of “restructuring”, then, that forges a sense of self is, as Hagberg puts it, “dynamic”: it is never settled in advance of a self-constituting narrative act, an act the conclusion of which is an articulated sense self. As such, the self we arrive at in retrospective understanding is a work in progress, which harmonizes nicely with our pre-theoretical sense that whatever a self is, there is no one moment in time at which we can offer a definitive account of it, a self-story, as it were, that captures us *completely* such that it will not be open to revision as time rolls on. Put differently, if I live past the publication date of my autobiography, I will, on Hagberg’s view, need to write future editions of it, at least if I wish to have in circulation an *au courant* account of who I am.

Hagberg’s account of selfhood isn’t willy-nilly self-creation, as though we may weave whatever story of selfhood we wish. We are constrained in all sorts of ways when determining how to go on when proclaiming “I am...”, and Hagberg is careful to acknowledge this. What we see in autobiographical consciousness — and in the autobiographical works that exemplify it — is the elusive but essential link between retrospection and self-constitution, that is, between our awareness of our histories and the forms of self-articulation it makes available to us. It thus does not imply that we have as much freedom in describing ourselves as a writer of a work of fiction does when inventing characters, and so it is not an inherently anti-realist account of the self. But it does ask us to model the activity of self-articulation on the image of an author rather than a reporter: it is the image of one who can weave a certain kind of narrative and not of one who can bear witness to a kind of inner “thing.”

This is still a fundamentally first-personal account, and note how nicely it makes sense of the two features of first-person experience I argued the idea of autobiographical knowledge requires: privilege and authority. At the end of the day we still have these on Hagberg’s Wittgensteinian account. But they are recast in terms of a creative act I and only I can perform, not an inner object I and only I can introspect. The privilege, and the concomitant authority, of first-person reports arises

from the “grammar” of first-person language, since I enjoy what is in effect a grammatical right that no one else enjoys: the right to regard the uninterpreted mass of my history and then say in respect to it, “this is what it means and so this is who I am.” No one else can speak this way, at least not if using language honestly (or competently). Thus the kind of philosophical education autobiography offers is, on an account like Hagberg’s, more a lesson in self-creation than self-discovery. It is a writerly rather than “perceptual” model of self-awareness, and it asks us to abandon the Cartesian view of the self in favor of a conception of self-description as an imaginative and, ultimately, literary activity.

Selves, Persons, and Lives

I am sympathetic to all of this and I have very little to offer by way of criticism. But I do want to raise a small point. I cannot shake the feeling that what Hagberg’s arguments demonstrate is something slightly different from what Hagberg takes himself to have shown. This issue is, in a sense, purely semantic, but, as Hagberg himself will acknowledge, it is crucial that we deliver our philosophical points in the right language. I’ll begin by canvassing an unconvincing argument scholars have attributed to Wittgenstein, and I will use this to bring to light the issue I am really interested in discussing.

There is a tradition of reading Wittgenstein — this would be the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* — as dissolving entirely the philosophical problem of self. On this reading, what Wittgenstein argues is that the Cartesian picture is a paradigm case of philosophers letting language “go on holiday.” When I use the second-person pronoun “you”, I simply refer to you, *the person*, and certainly not to some hidden aspect of your psychological interior, some “self” that is hidden from view but to which the pronoun refers. Yet if this is so, then why think “I” refers to anything other than to me *as a person* when I engage in self-description? If we follow this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion, at a certain point the idea of a “self” — as something other than “myself” or me as a person — will begin to appear gratuitous, unmotivated, at least from the standpoint of ordinary language use. We actually have no need for a notion of something called a self at all; we just need the (philosophically unproblematic) notion of a person, of the human taken as a whole. As Galen Strawson puts it when (unsympathetically) glossing this reading of Wittgenstein,

[T]he so-called problem of the self has a quick and complete solution. It doesn’t require any high or heavy metaphysical exertions, because it’s certain...that the use of ‘I’ to refer (or apparently refer) to the putative self doesn’t stand out as distinct from the use of the ‘I’ to refer to the human being in ordinary talk unwarped by philosophy. More strongly, it follows that we can’t legitimately draw it, and that we are talking a kind of philosophical nonsense when we do. But if this is so — and it is — then we can prove that *my # self*, the putative inner self, is either nothing at all, or is simply *myself*, the living, embodied, publicly observable whole human being. For we’ve already established that the term —‘I’— that allegedly refers to the putative former thing, the ‘self’, undoubtedly refers to the latter thing, the whole human being. But that means that either the self is the whole human being, or it’s nothing at all. There is, by the logic of identity, no other possibility. So the self, considered as something distinct from the human being, ‘is a mythical entity,’ in [Anthony] Kenny’s phrase.¹²

Like Strawson, I do not find this argument terribly convincing. And I acknowledge that Wittgenstein's considered views are much more complex than this line of thought would lead one to believe. But this shadow of an argument is sufficient to raise a question about Hagberg's Wittgensteinianism: why not just speak about persons, about "the human as a whole"? If we take Hagberg at his (Wittgensteinian) word, there is a nagging feeling that the conclusion he should actually draw is that we'd be better off simply banishing talk of selves instead of offering a novel conception of them. Put differently, wouldn't a *real* Wittgensteinian urge Hagberg to say that autobiographies are not about "selves" at all but about "whole humans", those public, social creatures whose lives we have, for one reason or another, taken an interest in? To make it an issue of the "self" should, for a Wittgensteinian, be anathema. Or so the argument would go.

Since I do not find this argument compelling — I can think of all sorts of reasons to continue talking about the self³ — I do not think Hagberg is amiss for not saying more to convince a reader that a card-carrying Wittgensteinian should want to hold on to the concept of a "self" so intensely that he is compelled to write a lengthy study of it. But this argument does bring to view a different, more significant issue. I find the above "Wittgensteinian" argument unconvincing because our self-descriptive practices are sufficiently complex and varied that such a reductive argument should strike one as ridiculously simplistic. The argument does not sit well with me because it attempts to condense into one notion — that of a *person* — entirely too much. The array of phenomena that constitutes first-person experience is so vast that we need a much richer battery of distinction to capture it, and one should be extremely skeptical of the attempt to bring it all under the scope of a single master concept, such as that of a "person" or, for that matter, of a "self".

If we are to respect the complexity of first-person experience, the mess of terms we have at our disposal will need to be sorted out and the relationship between them clarified, terms like "person", "self", "character", "subject", "subjectivity", "mind", and, of course, "I", among others. We will need to reserve some of these terms to designate more amorphous forms of subjective experience, others to pick out highly articulated and culturally mediated forms of identity, and so on. At any rate, I think we especially need to sort these terms out if we are to offer a satisfying account of the philosophical significance of autobiography. Just as we would seem to get things the wrong way round if we were to claim that narrators are created by narratives — then who, exactly, was doing the narrating in the first place? — we seem to do the same if we offer a theory that implies that autobiographical thought creates selves. We need different terms to identify that part of ourselves that is compelled to initiate the process of autobiographical thought — that asks "who am I" and engages in this struggle to articulate an answer — and another term to identify the nuanced sense of identity that is the end product of this activity. At any rate, I think we need to speak about more than selves here, since in the end it is not one but a constellation of distinct aspects of a human that come into play in autobiographical thought and writing.

What is really at stake in all of this is not really the self or even the nature of first-person experience, since this way of looking at it makes the issue seem smaller than it is. It isn't even our ability to speak satisfactorily about the experience of being human that we are after in all of this, though this is closer to the truth. These ways of putting it make whatever it is that compels us to engage in autobiographical forms of expression appear too self-centered, even a tad narcissistic, as though the inner urge that motivates it is just a wish to give the public world a view of how I am constituted as a person, of what sort of self I happen to possess. And this leads me to the most

significant worry I have about Hagberg's project. It seems to me that it isn't so much *a concept of a self* that we struggle to articulate in autobiography as it is *the concept of a life*. In exemplary forms of autobiographical writing, what I ultimately find is not a person expressing who he or she is, as though the implicit title of every autobiography is *What it's Like to be Me*. We find a bit, perhaps a lot, of this in autobiographies, but we find much else besides. I think that the real goal of most autobiographical thought and writing is the articulation not of how one finds oneself but, in effect, of how one finds oneself in the world, of how one *lives*. And it is well that it should be this. If some inner urge to ask "Who I am" prompts the autobiographical enterprise, it quickly leads past questions of a self and to those of the relationships we have *with others*, with the world around us, and, ultimately, to those of the nature and structure of a life.

As I said earlier, this might just be a mere semantic quibble. I find much, in fact most, of what Hagberg says convincing. My point is that he strikes me as having shown us much more than simply something about what it means to possess a self, and thus that framing the problem of autobiography in terms of the problem self-description is too small to capture what truly interests him, and what he has to show the rest of us. But while I find the notion of a self too narrow to capture all that Hagberg wishes it to, I have no doubt that his discussion is an important one. Whatever we ultimately wish to call the object of real interest here — selves, persons, or lives — *Describing Ourselves* offers a fresh and exciting way of approaching it. It is an excellent book and, as I hope to have made clear here, it offers much to the philosopher of literature who is in search of a new frontier.

NOTES

¹At least it is ignored in literary aesthetics of the broadly Anglo-American sort. Literary theory has had much to say about it in the last thirty years, though it is often to dismiss the very idea of autobiography (typically under the guidance of deconstructive or postmodern theories that are skeptical of talk of selves).

² The references are to F. Mair, *Under the Rainbow: The Real Liza Minnelli* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1996) and K. Hepburn, *Me: Stories of My Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996).

³ Still among the most influential narrative accounts of the self are A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, In: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) and P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). In recent years the view has been defended by M. Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), D. Velleman, *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and A. Rudd, "In Defence of Narrative," *European Journal of Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (2009): 60-75. For influential work critical of the narrative turn in the philosophy of the self, see D. Dennett, "The Origins of Selves," *Cogito* 21, no. 3 (1989): 163-73, J. Christman "Narrative Unity as a Condition of Personhood," *Metaphilosophy* 35, no. 5 (2004): 695-713, and G. Strawson "Against Narrativity," *Ratio* 17, no. 4 (2004): 428-52.

⁴ All references are to G. Hagberg, *Describing Ourselves: Wittgenstein and Autobiographical Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

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- ⁵ Hagberg wisely notes that “Cartesianism” in this debate may have little to do with the actual thought of Descartes. But this does not make Cartesianism a straw-man, since the picture of an introspectively accessible inner realm that is central to the “Cartesian” view of the self has had countless (actual) supporters. Here is Hagberg’s own gloss of what he calls Cartesianism. “We know that the Cartesian argues for, or is under the influence of, a picture of the self in which the ultimately private and inner point of consciousness, as the first given of human existence, is introspectively knowable instantaneously, transparently, and without mediation. This Cartesian picture, we also know, holds the greatest significance for our understanding, indeed our conceptual modeling, of person-perception: other-minds skepticism, and its logical extreme, solipsism, are its natural corollaries. On the Cartesian view, we infer from outward signs (signs that are on this picture only contingently associated with the hidden inward events and contents of private consciousness) that one or another inner state is present in the mind — indeed appearing on the private inner stage—of the person we perceive.” (Hagberg, *Describing Ourselves*, 185.)
- ⁶ See K. Farkas, *The Subject's Point of View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) for a recent attempt to defend what amounts to a Cartesian view of the self. Apart from its defense of Cartesian internalism about the mind, Farkas’ book offers an interesting study of the lingering influence of Descartes on how we speak about and understand subjects and the first-person point of view, a study that confirms many of the claims Hagberg makes in his book.
- ⁷ See, for example, G. Strawson, *Selves: An Essay in Revisionary Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- ⁸ I assume here that an autobiography written by a ghostwriter isn’t really an autobiography, despite what celebrities and publicists argue when caught.
- ⁹ Note that this is not to deny that some reflective distance in acts of self-awareness and self-interpretation; the point is that we have gone astray if in our attempt to account for this distance we end up making first-personal awareness look like a kind of inwardly third-person experience. For a discussion of this and related topics, see R. Moran, *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- ¹⁰ J. G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge: With the First and Second Introductions*, trans. P. L. Heath and J. Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 93.
- ¹¹ Hagberg acknowledges Moran’s influence when he says that Moran “nicely shows (through an insightful discussion of Sartre, the recounting of which would take us too far afield at present) that once the grip of the inner-spectatorial picture is loosened so that we can see the power of agency in the very act of self-reflection, then the convergence will strike us as far more intuitively fitting than we may initially (again, in the grip of Cartesian presumptions) have thought. Indeed he characterizes what is special about mental life in just this respect: we do not invariably sit back and reflect upon pre-existent mental objects, but we rather make up our minds in and through the act of active reflection.” (Hagberg, *Describing Ourselves*, 173)
- ¹² G. Strawson, *Selves*, 20-21.
- ¹³ I won’t belabor this point, but just to give a hint of an argument, it seems to me that there are obviously times when I use “I” to designate something other than John Gibson the *person* or *the*

whole human being. I do this, for example, when I register (perhaps silently, just to myself) how I *really* feel, what I *really* think, when this is at odds with my manifest behavior, with the “person” I present to the world around me. And I certainly do not think one need embrace Cartesianism to account for this.