

WHY *the*
HUMANITIES
MATTER



A Commonsense Approach

FREDERICK LUIS ALDAMA

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HUMANITIES MATTER**

A Commonsense Approach

FREDERICK LUIS ALDAMA



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*For those students who keep me on tiptoes,
those oh-so-smart and generous colleagues at OSU,
and to precious Mei-Mei Bruno, Anna, and Corina Isabel.*

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INTRODUCTION

A New Humanism

In *Enemies of the Enlightenment* Darrin McMahon details the witch-hunt-like hysteria fanned by eighteenth-century French obscurantist clergy, aristocrats, Sorbonne-censoring *penseurs*, and other representatives of the ancien régime challenged by a progressive generation of thinkers and writers (*les philosophes*) who argued that reason, truth, and knowledge are universal pursuits based on universal human faculties. My intellectual and political interests are not confined within the eighteenth-century French worldview or, more generally, within the European Enlightenment, a fascinating yet veritable mélange of progressive and reactionary figures and outlooks. However, McMahon's scholarly reconstruction of the struggle of obscurantism against scientifically oriented thought in France is timely because that struggle has found new expressions in the academy and society, especially in the past thirty years or so, in America and also in some rather unexpected places.

For me to bear this statement out, I ask for some anecdotal indulgence. Invited to give a lecture on diasporic literature at a university in Switzerland, I suggested that we begin to look past poststructuralist paradigms in our analysis of Latin American, U.S. ethnic, and South Asian postcolonial literature and move forward to the use of tools provided by narratology and cognitive science—not exclusively, though centrally—to explore how authors creatively reframe identities and experiences that are located within postcolonial literary traditions and engage readers belonging not only to those traditions but also to many other, quite different ones. In this context, I suggested too that the study of postcolonial literature would find it conceptually useful (and scientifically interesting) to proceed within a world literature paradigm. I proposed that we keep in mind that literary analysis is as capacious as literature itself in that it may contain all kinds of approaches and evaluations, including, of course, political assessments; but no matter how much meaning and per-

formative theories may be stretched or curtailed on a Procrustean bed, a work of fiction, a book review, or a literary theory dealing with politics can never become the same animal as an organized, actual doing of politics. (For instance, Louis-Ferdinand Céline's or Paul de Man's wartime pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic articles drew their efficaciousness not from themselves but from the social, political, economic, and military barbarism they were supporting as it was spreading and vanquishing along with the deployment of Hitler's, Mussolini's, and Hirohito's troops.) Also, I indicated that the self is not a conceptual construct designed on a blank slate, but a material agency capable of modifying reality and being modified by it in specific circumstances located in time and space. I therefore suggested that the approach I advocate offers interesting means for the advancement of our literary and humanistic endeavors because it is based on hypotheses that are susceptible to empirical verification or refutation and it allows for true research programs. Therefore, I reminded my audience that history is paramount for us. Cosmology, physics, molecular biology, genetics, paleontology, psychology, sociology, economics, history, and most other scientific disciplines deal with time, change, and evolution and are thus in a strict sense historical disciplines. In the case of the human subject and of humanity as a whole, all sciences show that humans are inseparably both the products and the shapers of their bio-social-psychological-historical existence. Following many others before me, I made evident that it is scientifically rewarding to acknowledge the fact that since the ancient division of society into antagonistic social classes (masters and slaves, for instance), the struggle against oppression and exploitation has never ceased.

Today, such a division takes the specifically historical form of a system of class rule based on the private ownership of the main means of production (held by a tiny minority of families) and the exploitation of the vast majority of the planet's inhabitants. Because of the barbarism this system increasingly generates (the gigantic slaughters of two world wars, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Iraq are but a few of its manifestations), the very survival of the human race is at stake, and humankind must continue the struggle to achieve a classless society, that is, a society in which the world's population is free from oppression and exploitation because all wealth is no longer produced, distributed, exchanged, and consumed according to the ever-insatiable profit-making and capital-accumulation prerequisites of capitalist society. I thus recalled that while all humans share a cognitive and emotive architecture that emerged even before we began our

journey as *Homo sapiens sapiens*, each member of our species is unique in the way she uses this universal endowment as well as in how she participates in the transformation of nature and society. There are certainly genetic and psychological factors involved in the love of cruelty and violence by some, but the evidence shows that those proclivities become actions most frequently in social environments that encourage them. I think of today's massive violations of the rights of immigrants, the massive detentions of citizens or aliens—indefinitely, without any due process, right to counsel, or human rights protections—the prescribed use of torture, and the attacks against key constitutional rights, including the right to abortion, the right to vote and to have votes fairly counted, the right to medical care, and the right to a secular and scientific education. Last, I suggested that the approach I advocate is, all in all, beneficial to literary studies and to the humanities in general because it does not require reliance on “gurus” or “master thinkers.” I mentioned the findings in the work of Patrick Colm Hogan, David Herman, James Phelan, H. Porter Abbott, Lisa Zunshine, and Kenan Malik, among many others, to show what direction this research is taking today.

This is not the place to enter into particulars. My examples showed, to state it here in its most abstract terms, how postcolonial literature draws its readers into new puzzles—cognitive webs and labyrinths they must negotiate—as well as new forms of personal and social empathy—emotional proximity or distance with respect to the many events, situations, mores, and cultural and individual traits so inadequately summarized by the words *difference* and *other*. Mostly, the talk fell flat. Several scholars in the audience declared the subject and the world socially constructed and indeterminable; others said my approach was tainted by an epistemology of Western essentialism; one acknowledged the importance of a materialist grounding to postcolonial scholarship, attaching to it a “new humanism.”

In this book I offer above all a critical view of issues that concern the humanities. And while each chapter deals with specific and delimited questions and problems, making it possible to read them in any order, the book is conceived as a whole. Arguments and findings in one chapter form a chain with discussions in another, and so on. Thus whether a chapter aims to think through the problems of translation, justice, music, literature, or the role of the scholar in society, to name but a few, the result is a prism of analyses and reasons that holds together by the materialist and humanist light shed on each and all.

Disciplinary demarcations are necessary for pedagogical reasons. But they do not mirror reality. Ours is an interconnected and ever-changing world—a supersystem composed of interconnected subsystems of various kinds (physical, cultural, social, and so on) that possess their own peculiar properties and laws. And so, just as nothing in our society is isolated, so these chapters are linked, making up a whole that aims to explore as deeply as possible many of the activities we spin out of ourselves to transform a reality that exists independent of our creating and that in turn shapes us and our subsequent activities. This book keeps centrally in mind, then, not only the fact that in our society nothing is isolated, but also that in our odyssey as *Homo sapiens sapiens* we have been evolving a self able to refine, revise, and create anew all variety of cultural phenomena and a capacity to enjoy them. This book keeps centrally in mind that we are all situated in history. We are all a part of history. We all make history. We are all made by the historical conditions we create.

This book is a formal attempt to move away from the erstwhile free-for-all construction and consumption of notions that see “truth” as “something that must be created” (Friedrich Nietzsche) and the study of the world as “eternal recurrence” (Nietzsche). It is to propose that objectivity and reasoned argument can help to show how arguments used to justify racism, sexism, and class exploitation are specious. As such, my book does not take the position that the material realm is unobservable; that science is *de facto* bad; that it is the root cause of capitalist enslavement or an appendage to patriarchal power or both. Rather, while science is not perfect in its measurements, it has allowed us to understand more clearly how certain aspects of reality work. We would not get on a plane and fly across the country if this were not so. Not all our ideas about the world are fictions. Indeed, it is because of our building and revising of verifiable facts that we can better understand the earth’s history and the evolution of life as well as the economics of capitalism—a system based on profit (surplus value) residing in the use of labor power by the private owners of the means of production.

Indeed, scientific investigation works to eliminate, as Adam Katz remarks, “as many false paths as possible” (24) and to demystify “obscurantist ideological generalities” (25). Our failure to defend a materialist-based politics—instead of pursuing a “politics” of dismantling reason and causality—will result in a loss of any possibility of using science to open “spaces previously closed to scrutiny” (25). If there is no truth—no content and no meaning of subjectivity and only its effects—then, as Katz writes, “experience and interpretations of experience can . . . no

longer be seen as either legitimating existing social relations due to their obviousness or naturalness . . . or as providing the kinds of knowledges necessary for emancipatory movements seeking structural transformations” (65). Hence, the general aim of this book is to promote methods and approaches that make a difference and that advance our knowledge of the world.

My book grows out of a restless concern with those who declare that my generation has arrived just as the world is dying: at the end of history, the end of art, ideology, science, the entirety of Western metaphysical thought and philosophy, the end of social classes and class warfare, the end, even, of social reality. To mark this end, scholars of all walks of life—from Latin American, Chicano/Latino, and postcolonial cultural studies scholars, translation theorists, to the high priests of poststructuralism—seem to be dishing out healthy servings of a philosophical Idealism that lead only to endless speculation.

In response, I have written this book, which takes a materialist approach to the self and all the things we spin out of our selves in our transformation of nature—a nature that in turn transforms us. Each chapter treats a subject to enliven critical debate and explore productive new directions of study. Each is an attempt to answer as completely as possible the questions raised by my readings and by students I encounter year after year in my teaching who are hungry to know how the world works. Among the topics the chapters explore are the following: What is music? What is film? What is literature? What are we reading when we read a translation? Is translation nation? How does translation work? What is this thing called modernity? What is language? What is culture? What do cultural phenomenon do in the world? What is the nation? What is the subject? What is justice? What is the role of the scholar/intellectual in the classroom and in society at large? Each of the fourteen chapters puts one such topic under the microscope to understand it as fully as possible.

Rather than give an overview of each chapter, as is the custom, I ask instead that you imagine the book *in toto* as a Venn diagram composed of a series of sets that overlap and give shape to the individual chapters. The book aims to show clearly to scholars, students, and curious readers alike that there are distinctions that make a difference when we talk about ideas, culture, history, and society; that each matters, but in significantly different ways, in our shaping of the material, cultural, and social conditions that make up present and future reality. In its materialist,

humanist, anti-Idealist thrust there is a commitment to clarifying the correspondence between our assertions and reality. The book is committed to upholding the achievements humanity has achieved in its odyssey and to showing that the material and social conditions of the future lie in the labors, struggles, and accomplishments of peoples worldwide. It is also an affirmation of those hardworking, faithful, time-honored, and much-regretted concepts of truth, good, and beauty and of the other concepts and categories, such as time, space, substance, quantity, quality, relation, position, possession, action, and passion.

SELF, IDENTITY, AND IDEAS

INTRODUCTION

I begin at the beginning: what constitutes the self? Of course, I'm not the first to ask this, nor will I be the last. However, I begin with this seemingly limitless domain of inquiry—approached from so many disciplinary angles, such as history, philosophy, political science, sociology, economics, linguistics, biology, physics, chemistry—because when all is said and done, all of the chapters that make up this book wind back to the many cultural webs we spin out of our selves in the transformation of (our) nature.

In this chapter I will first outline several of the main critical threads that have informed various approaches to the understanding of the self. I will then turn to a discussion of the importance of taking into account the historical and social as well as the biological dimension in the deepening of an understanding of what constitutes the self. I will explore not only the significance of neuro- and cognitive science research on the brain, but also the importance of how the individual, how the higher-minded self (brain + qualia) is always social; from birth to death we are at once biological and social creatures.

From time immemorial, questions of what makes up human consciousness or self-awareness—the uniqueness of the human self—have led to all variety of humanistic and scientific method and approach. We see, for instance, a privileging of the mind (ideas) over the material world (body) whereby mental activities are distinguished from (and set above) physical acts and an objective nature out there (René Descartes). There is a subjectivism whereby transcendental categories, or predetermined mental structures, control experience (Immanuel Kant). There is also

the reduction of the world to ideas (George Berkeley) as well as the total denial of any evidence of the existence of the mind (brain) and body or anything beyond direct experience (David Hume).¹ One way or another, such formulations of the self have gravitated around the notion that we are separately bodies (matter) and souls; such formulations consider that in our everyday existence there is a distinction and separation between the executive (brain), an eternal spirit (mind), and the body.

Let me explore briefly a case in point: Descartes's *Meditations*. Here we see an attempt to provide a more solid foundation to the folk-psychology belief in the existence of two ontologically different and independent entities: mind (soul) and body (matter). The grounding of this foundational separation led Descartes (1) to give philosophical expression and logical rigor to a Platonist innatism (or theory of ideas) as well as to legitimate the contemporary dogma of the church; (2) to give philosophical expression to a merchant-class worldview (and the new rulers of society) whereby the individual is the self-enclosed center of knowledge and of legal and economic accountability; (3) to give expression to that entity that fills up the space between the mind versus body duality: God. The mind and body are totally separate and totally different in nature; only through the pineal gland (as he called it) do the body and mind interact. He grounds his epistemology in the individual as an atomic, separate, distinct entity, in contact with God, placing the self outside of society; all of society is bracketed, and the self is simply an aggregate of, say, Robinson Crusoes. Descartes's dualistic conception of mind versus body brings together and blesses all at once the church, logic, science, and individualism.²

We can add to Descartes's dualism Kant's transcendental argument, which weaves itself into many of the explorations and formulations of the self, even in several of today's research programs, including those within mathematics, linguistics, and the hard sciences generally. There is a relativism at work in Kant's concept of knowledge as determined by subjective experience and sensation and where forms of intuition and a priori truths reside in the mind. If the mind constructs the world, then, as Leonard Jackson sums up, it "makes no sense to talk of a world existing independently of any point of view" (*The Dematerialisation of Karl Marx* 40). We are determined by our subjective perspective of the world. (While the approach and method differ, this ultimately takes us to the kind of relativism of B. F. Skinner's blank slate and the Sapir-Whorf linguistic hypothesis whereby culture (among other things) determines everything.)³

Whether in opposition or to further entrench, such relativist/subjectivist formulations inform the hypotheses and explorations of the self in many of the research programs of today's physical sciences, mathematics, linguistics, and the humanities generally. Chomsky has been using mathematics and linguistics to identify our innate modular faculty, like a bodily organ, to possess language and to have this language that one possesses grow. Just as we have genes that will propel the formation of the kidney, the heart, and so on, so we have a language organ. However, even here we encounter two problems that connect back to the mind/body split. Chomsky's idea of a language organ fits in with Jerry Fodor's modularity hypothesis that the brain is not like a general computer or any other multipurpose learning device (the reward/punishment system seen in, for instance, the behaviorist approach). It is composed of many kinds of specialized modules—a language module, a math module, an intuitive biology module, a mental map module, and so on—that work individually and also in a unified way; each module has a specific function and at the same time works simultaneously with all the other modules. Even in Chomsky we see a certain Cartesian influence. While he maintains that there are questions we can ask and even find answers to concerning the self, there are questions and problems posed that will forever remain “mysteries” because we as humans are not endowed with the necessary cognitive equipment to explore and find answers to such questions. Chomsky's default position: even if we can understand the chemical/neuronal workings of the brain, we can never know or quantify the sensations and feelings—the qualia of the mind—that are produced by the activity of the brain.

Chomsky follows the Cartesian split of mind from brain (as do others, like Colin McGinn, for instance), but others like Antonio Damasio consider the brain and mind one. In turning to the advances made in mirror neuron systems at work in the brain—that “actual vision perceptions correspond to external objects” (“Minding the Body” 21)—Damasio confirms that the brain is in a constant state of knowledge, so to speak, about the functioning of the body; the brain is constantly registering the body when we feel cold, pain, or tiredness, and all these feelings and sensations can appear as representations—as conscious events—but for the most part, we are not conscious of a whole series of our body's functions. As Damasio argues, the only part of our body whose functioning we don't have a representation of is the brain in its many manifestations; I can see something like a picture and be aware of the fact that my brain is registering, say, the red pigment in the picture, but I don't actually feel the

brain working. That is, the brain can have a perception and representation of the body and its functioning at any given moment. I can feel pain and at the same time feel the representation of pain, or grief and the representation of grief. By basing myself on these experiences in my body, I can extrapolate and, say, *read* feelings and thoughts and body functions in other people. I can ascribe to other people the same thoughts, feelings, representations I have experienced. For Damasio, then, there is not a split of mind and brain (body); they exist in a continual loop-back system.

There is always a mixture of the old with the new in discussions about approaches to the self. We see how such mixtures (scientific and mysterial) survive today in the many versions of the Cartesian dualism present in the sciences and humanities. Of course, there are certain technological limits that might not allow us to interpret and give a rational explanation of the self and world today. Aristotle, G. W. F. Hegel, and Karl Marx never doubted that their knowledge was necessarily partial, but partial because of the limitations of their times, not because the world was somehow unknowable. That is to say, we can know better what constitutes the self (mind, body, and brain) if we embrace a materialist ontology and a realist epistemology by avoiding mysterial mind/body splits and a relativism born of a perspectivism and philosophical idealism. Verifiable information and commonsense hypotheses can provide the raw material needed for us to pour a solid foundation for the building of an understanding of what constitutes the self.

As a result of the massive advances in science (biochemistry, genetics, neuro- and cognitive science, linguistics, evolutionary psychology) and the progress made in sociology and history, we can begin to study the self in a way that shuns older and contemporary behavioral and social constructionist (blank slate) paradigms. The self begins *ab ovo* and ends with death; it depends on the environment (sensory stimulation) and the functional and structural organization of the brain. It is a self that is always at once social and biological. It is our ability, as Bruce E. Wexler writes, “to shape the environment that in turn shapes our brains that has allowed human adaptability and capability to develop at a much faster rate than is possible through alteration of the genetic code itself. This transgenerational shaping of brain function through culture also means that processes that govern the evolution of societies and cultures have a great influence on how our individual brains and minds work” (*Brain and Culture* 3–4).

Let me take a further step back. At first glance, the notion of the self implies the notion of individuality. At the most basic level, this means that the self is a bounded, living organism that envelops billions of bounded cells. At this most basic level, the self is that body which distinguishes between what is *in* and what is *out*. This separate and bounded body is a first level of both sameness (our species' specific, universally shared biological blueprint that maintains a functioning internal state) and difference (me as bounded entity that is different from all that's apart from me).

Though it has yet to map the brain's complex biochemical, neuronal, and affective processes completely, scientific research on the brain can help us refine this initially crude formulation of the self. Its advances have provided a solid, material basis for understanding the self's constitution and function.⁴ I think here of the scientifically grounded and testable hypotheses formulated by those scholars included in *The Self from Soul to Brain*. Scholars and scientists such as Antonio Damasio, Giacomo Rizzolatti, Jacek Debiec, V. S. Ramachandran, and Joseph E. LeDoux, for instance, further establish how the brain's total cognitive and affective processes (the neuronal, synaptic, and biochemical activity that allows for the selection, storing, and retrieval of memory and emotion) constitute the self. This and other such research identifies the importance of the brain/body's necessary engagement with objects and organisms other than itself both at the cellular (metabolic regulation and basic learned response mechanisms) and at the more general social level; the self is the result of the complete workings of hardwired activity in the brain and simultaneously the result of engagement with that outside of itself. As Derek Sankey sums up, "Neurologically, we need other selves in order to become truly our 'self.' For this to occur, brains must first interact with one another in interactive and reciprocal dialogue, and second, each brain must have the ability to model the presumed state of the other brain with which it is in communication" ("The neuronal, synaptic self" 176–177). That is to say, the self is always biological and social; theorizing the self is thus not the result of brain processes in isolation from others (other brains). This is why, as I'll develop at various other junctures throughout this book, memory (social and individual), empathy, Theory of Mind capacity (to hypothesize what other minds are thinking and what they are thinking about what you are thinking), and emotions generally (anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise) are so central to a healthy and full constitution of the self.

Our individual brain/body's engagement with the world leads to different behaviors and habits unique to each one of us; this is what we commonly call personality. Morphological and phenotypical variation aside, this is why every person we encounter is different to an infinite degree, as each of us can behave and subscribe to ideas in an infinite number of ways. I don't mean to posit that personality (individual behavior, opinion, and so on) is a phenomenological manifestation of the self, but rather that it results from that cluster of traits (good or bad, and so on) that constitute the self of the person.

Although there are many differences (personality traits) from person to person, there is much that remains stable and the same in the organic blueprint of the self. We are individual, unique, and changing (even at the cellular level), but we are also biologically and socially constant. That we are predictable provides practical everyday advantages. If we were to behave in unpredictable and inconsistent ways, we would face some serious survival problems. Would we risk driving a car if we couldn't predict the behavior of others? So, while we might experience personal epiphanies and transformations of opinion or might change chameleonlike within different social spheres (the way I act at work is not the same as at home) such transformations don't alter fundamentally the blueprint of our biogenetic (cognitive and neural) self. Stability at the social and biochemical level supersedes individually willed self-transformations.

The self experiences constancy in change. In *The Feeling of What Happens* Damasio further elaborates, identifying the interaction between a "core self" that is a "transient entity [that is ceaselessly] re-created for each and every object with which the brain interacts" (17) and the "autobiographical self" that is "a nontransient collection of unique facts and ways of being which characterize a person" (17). In *Homo sapiens sapiens*, both core and autobiographical selves work seamlessly as one self as a result of our higher order-consciousness, which is in turn formed by our engagement with the social; that is, our sense of a coherent narrative unit as both ceaselessly regenerative and bounded as a self-reflexive (acting) agent in a past, present, future world.

For our discussion of the human self (core, autobiographical, and higher consciousness) to mean anything, it must be distinguishable from everything else. Simply identifying it as different doesn't make the self *a self*, so we must make a distinction between the self and that which is not the self that matters. For example, we can distinguish the chemical property of oxygen from that of, say, hydrogen, but we don't refer to oxygen or hydrogen as having a self. That is, in understanding what constitutes

the self we must focus on how its difference makes a difference.⁵ Thus, we must take into account not just distinctiveness and separation (isolation), but in the case of the human self, the notion of agency and responsibility. The action of, say, bacteria that causes another organism like ours to have a digestive problem is not an action with agency; hence, we never refer to the “self of a bacterium” because while it acts, its actions lack the component of agency and responsibility central to the constitution of the human self. When we do identify an amoeba as a pathological agent for dysentery we use the word in a technical sense that excludes any attribution of moral responsibility: No amoeba will be condemned in a court of law for causing dysentery.

Agency and responsibility are the differences that make a difference in determining the constitution of the human self. In the concluding essay to *The Self from Soul to Brain* Jacek Debiec and Joseph E. LeDoux have identified this central property not only as an adaptive function that arises out of our being social animals but that gives rise to higher-order consciousness that becomes our guide to “authorship of action”—and “authorship of emotion” (309). They elaborate, “The person who feels well for action typically then feels responsibility for that action, and so will also be susceptible to moral emotions such as pride or guilt depending on the action’s effects” (309). Our self is biologically constituted and it has agency (responsibility) and the capacity for knowledge of self. So while our organic biochemical makeup differs from other “minded organisms” that regulate life functions in response to the outside world, what makes a difference is how our biological organism develops necessarily within the social.

Yes, our self is grounded in our organism’s specific biological, physical, and chemical components. However, the way these elements work together determines the engagement (and sense of belonging) with the material (physical, chemical, biological) and social world. Without appropriate and adequate neural stimulation, gene expression doesn’t occur, and so those elements that constitute extended or higher-order conscious selves don’t develop. This is why child-rearing practices have much in common cross-culturally: all seek to create social environments that will most effectively trigger cognitive and emotive responses to allow for the healthy development of a sense of higher functioning self (self-reflexive, responsible, and so on). Without stimulus reinforcement and other conditioning responses (at the neuronal level), necessary gene expression would not occur; the growth of synaptic connections necessary for learning, for example, might not develop. When the thirteen-year-old

Genie was discovered naked in a closet hidden away by her mentally disturbed parents, she had been almost completely deprived of language and motor simulation. She never recovered from this deprivation and never acquired motor-driven skills necessary for a healthy life. (See R. Rymer's *Genie: An Abused Child's Flight from Silence*.) Likewise, the self of the person who suffers from chronic depression might experience a diminished will to live; the biochemical and the social interact in such a way as to create a less than vital experience and engagement with the world. (See Louis Cozolino's *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships*.)

Do schizophrenics and people like them, whose biological functions do not allow for a sense of agency and responsibility, lack a self? This is not so much an ethical or ontological question as a question of the presence or not of a higher-consciousness self. Organisms that have a basic "mental concern over the organism's own life" (Damasio 25) in their regulation of metabolism and conditioned learning exhibit what Damasio identifies as "core consciousness"; we might identify this as a protean self where the organism is aware of the absolute "now" of itself only in the absolute now of time and space. While this might be the case in schizophrenics (and other nonnormal functioning people), this is not the normal functioning, evolutionarily speaking, of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Our organism's normal functioning is not that of a "minded organism" (see Damasio), but rather that which includes the full development of cognitive modules such as language, memory, and reason that make up our higher-consciousness self—a self aware of itself in a present, past, and future as well as with an awareness of self-agency within a world beyond its boundaries (our imaginative capacity). It is a self that has developed a capacity for imagining (world making), grammar, memory, empathy (that amplification of feeling for those separate from us), and to create maps of its own maps (as delineated in these pages, even).⁶ Our organism's normal functioning self is of a higher order; that those whose biological hardwiring or social development has precluded this possibility doesn't mean a lack of self, simply a lack of this higher-order self. It is this difference that makes a difference between us and other organisms as well as between those selves functioning as per a healthy evolutionary (reproductive) trajectory and those selves that have been left behind in the adaptive order of things.

As discussed, we are both a "basic-minded" (our habitual and "unconscious" biological functions like homeostatic regulation, metabolism,

breathing, and so on) and a “higher-minded” organism (self-reflexive, imaginative, responsible, and so on). We have evolved a protean-minded self that regulates and monitors everyday biological functions and that is an emanation of the body much like urine and mucus, as well as a higher-minded self that is the product of our engagement with the material and social world.

I will now turn to a discussion of those differences that make a difference in terms of how our higher-minded self develops in the social.

One way or another, many fashionable formulations of the self (subject/identity) theorize it as boundaryless (disembodied) and/or self-written/written upon; one way or another, they formulate the self as either willed or written into existence and/or as occupying all that exists in the universe. According to the basic principle of discernibility, this leads us nowhere in further refining our understanding of the self. Rather, as I’ve begun to formulate, the human-minded self is distinguishable from other organic and nonorganic entities, and it is so not just biologically (as discussed above), but because of this important and necessary element of the social. The human self that for one reason or another is unable to have a healthy engagement with the social never develops what I’ve identified as a higher-minded self. We don’t need to look to the example of people with schizophrenia to see this. We know from Jean Piaget’s work with children that those who are precluded from healthy social patterning (parenting, reward/punishment systems of learning) fail to develop healthy neurochemical brain functions (memory and language) that in turn allow for the development of a higher-minded self. We saw this in the case of Genie (mentioned above) as well as in that of the earlier Caspar Hauser, who was also raised in complete isolation from the social world and who likewise never developed the necessary motor and symbolic skills that would allow him to develop a higher-minded self.

Of course, the mind/body’s development of a higher-minded self begins much earlier in our development. We know from children conceived in countries where there is a shortage of food and basic health care that even before the child is born it has been deprived of the basic nutrients necessary for healthy biological development. It is our species’ blueprint that determines that we can exist, develop, and evolve only as organisms intimately tied to other members of our species. Hence, in the case of the fetus developing in conditions of insufficient nourishment, the social has already influenced the biological architecture to such a degree that once the child is born, its development of self has been already marked by such

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