

SELFHOOD AND SUBJECTIVITY

“Mayest thou by learning come forth as what thou art.” Pindar



Is the self an artichoke? Or is it an onion or a garlic clove?

Discuss:

- Is there a heart or core to your being? Or are you socialized from the outside in? A compartmentalized self? Consider the relation between this metaphysical question of authenticity and epistemology. How can you give or receive sound advice if you don't know yourself, or don't have a self to discover?

Although cultures have differed as to where in the body lies the “seat of the soul” (e.g., brain, breath, or heart) the traditional view is that such a core exists, and that it possibly survives the corruption of the body (i.e., an immortal soul). In contrast to either Plato or Kant, postmodern philosophers are opposed to this kind of foundationalism and essentialism. Writing from a neo-Nietzschean, historical perspective on “arts of self-creation,” Michel Foucault wrote in his essay “Truth and Power”:

“One has to do away with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains, objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history.”

Question: How certain can you be of the soundness of advice, compared to certainty of truth in claims from the sciences or maths, or from history and literature studies?

