OBJECTIVITY - DOES IT EXIST?
by Mark S. Tucker

Objectivity is an excuse for journalistic cowardice. - Ian Masters -

The above quote has deeper meaning than is readily apparent, especially in an era where journalism has become a corporate commodity. It is cited here, however, not to explore issues of journalism - so-called objectivity is much in disarray in the political and journalistic processes nowadays - but because Ian Masters put his finger on a subject I'm not sure he even understood the greater import of. He also providentially uttered it at about the same time I'd begun putting thought to paper (er, in this age: to electron), and the implications of his observance served as invisible editor to goad an even more penetrating look at the process of what we allege to be objectivity.

In later re-editing the manuscript just before submittal to this journal, I ran across the December 2011 issue of The Atlantic, whose cover trumpeted Daniel B. Klein's "The Myth of Objectivity" (the essay is actually titled "I was Wrong, and so are You" - it appears an editor may be responsible for the semi-amusing errancy), and a moment of exasperation grasped the corners of my heart. Had someone beaten me to the punch? But no, upon the read, Klein was writing about...well, frankly, I'm not sure exactly what (nor, it must be assumed, was his editor; thus the strange cover claim), all appearances indicating the gentleman's Libertarian wont was engaged in the usual Rand-ian exercise of circular thinking upon whatever it is the Chicago School mindset instills in those unlucky enough to have swallowed its...odd matters the progeny of the Friedmans, Hayek, von Mises, and that gaggle expostulate upon. I'm told such subjects are of burning importance but can agree with the burning aspect only: in trash barrels, preferably to provide warmth for the indigent. Much more interesting are the investigations of science and the tenets of Eastern philosophy in co-relating actual phenomena.

The above two paragraphs should serve to indicate the set and tone with which I'll be embroidering my exposition.

In a meta-anarchic newsletter I've been issuing (since being ousted as a "too Left" political commentator in OpEdNews.com), a project now past its 700th issue, I - and please note the first person voice will be unavoidable in many places - wrote that the very issue of subjectivity/objectivity is a thorny one though I tended to land on the side of there being no such thing as the latter, nonetheless disinclined to state so with 100% firmness. Milton Dawes, a reader of the newsletter and ambassador-at-large to the General Semantics Institute, responded to that comment, triggering a chain of extrapolative thought. He wrote:

"If by objectivity one follows the dictionary reference - 'Objectivity: having reality independent of the mind' - this is clearly non-sensical if one says or writes anything at
all about something they imagined, saw, heard, experienced, etc.; a subject is involved”.

That generated an etymological crisis. Whenever a logo-gistical problem arises, my default position is always, always, ALWAYS to inspect etymology (this, btw, if you happen to be a teacher or tutor, is an excellent practice to pass on to student linguaphiles, akin to handing a microscope to a biologist) in order to decide whether the too oft-clumsily applied practice first of the basic use and then of the augmentation of words has been observed with any degree of propriety at each level. To my mind, the flow a writer must observe in semantic choices runs in the following general fashion:

word base --> affixes --> true meaning --> metaphorical applications --> etc.

...and if the end product seems to indicate inattentiveness somewhere in the process, I want to know where the screw-up occurred. Imagine my surprise, then, going to that most luxurious-short-of-Oxford dictionary, Webster's 3rd Int'nat'l., and finding only this:

"objectivity: 1. the quality, state, or relation of being objective, 2: an objective reality".

Sigh! As is common to us among the unfortunately minute cadre of logo-idolators, it was immediately inevitable I was going to have to pursue a word chain. Loading up the thirty-ought-six, should fell muttering lexicographers be scampering through the 3-volume set, I trotted over to 'objective'. That's where the bugbear arose, bit me, and stole the 30-06.

Mr. Dawes was correct: no matter how you look at an object, a 'subject', according to the dictionary, is inextricably involved. Webster's tells us that being objective is a matter of "relating to the thing known considered merely in its relation to the knowing subject". There was more, but the remainder got so unholy that I had to summon an exorcist to thwart demons and djinn emerging from the printface. However, thinking about it, one must conclude that even that much is a bit dicey because once an exterior thing is perceived, the perceiver is automatically involved as a perceptic unit in a relationship. Here, then, is where the manifestation of the grammatical sentence as a communicative device must be brought in because sentences mimic life itself; that is, we gauge, in the sentence's and our perception's most basic functions, cognizance of the flow of linear events by always designating subject and object: we the subject. Here we must depart for a moment into pure grammar.

When I tutor, which I've been doing for a decade after an aerospace career, I do not use the hideous 'subject / predicate' method, a process so unwieldy that I've attempted Congressional legislation to retroactively condemn the so-called grammarians who devised the idiotic methodology, have their corpses disinterred, then burned at the stake on national television, their ashes scattered in the nearest sump. I do not abide subject / predicate for a moment except to field the sadistic urges of teachers inflicting
incoherent burden upon students, me helping the latter get through yet another set of ultimately incomprehensible English exercises. No, instead I teach the S-V-O (subject-verb-object) method learned in Massachusetts as a child. I do this because the sentence in and of itself, as mentioned a moment ago, is a mirror for life-as-it-is, measuring time as action. That's right: proper Grammar is nothing more than a purely mechanistic progression structuring communication on a time and motion basis (and Frederick Taylor is most likely grinning in his grave upon hearing that). Not grasping this very fundamental keystone or its extrapolations has not only hobbled Grammar for hundreds of years but recently formed the most elementary realization process in my as-yet-unrevealed book re-encoding all Grammar rules. More, for reasons that will have to go unaddressed for the moment, that Rosetta is crucial in fully adjusting consciousness, something Confucius understood well but which has been either ignored or suppressed since his day, hard to determine which.

The matter is quite simple: an S-V-O sentence, that which underlies all English language (and all language, even if only inferentially, I must suspect though I've not investigated more than my own tongue), is a flow line of three seconds. Here's the sentence "I shot God" properly deconstructed time-wise - SECOND ONE: I (existent subject), SECOND TWO: shot (verb, action of subject), SECOND THREE: God (object receiving the action). That's a progression in time of an executed action (and an executed deity as well, something, post-Nietzsche, long overdue). It describes every action in human life...

…but there is actually an even more stripped-down model, the two-second version, one that truncates even Descartes: "I think". That verity states that the I exists (1st second) and then does something with its mind (2nd second). Matters don't end even there, though. If we want to get reductionist to the-almost-Nth degree, we could just cite the more basic philosophical "I am", a curious existential one-instant completeness in two words just as easily expressed as, and now we arrive at the barest irreducible core, "I", a single word ironically self-containing its own verb, as we're asserting that "I" *exist* (<-- the occulted verb). All of that is the multi-tiered real deal of reality, but the three-second model suits our need without entering into an abstruseness unnecessary to the problem at hand. I merely hang the entirety in the air for thought in a venue more than capable of it...save perhaps for one last notation as to the existence of subject-as-object: after all, my sentence could've been "I shot me" (whereupon the aforementioned non-existent godthing may well smile after reading the previous paragraph).

But here's where we begin to see relationships in dichotomies or paradoxes. In its most basic ego-sense, 'subject' is self and 'object' is not-self. However, to the object, object is subject and subject is object. That is, the object thinks itself the center of the universe (subject) or as the originator of an action (also subject), and thus reverses the playing field on the onlooking first-cause subject. Who's right here, subject or object? Neither. The problem is in thought and words.
Mr. Dawes then addressed this:

"In the field of general semantics, the notion of objectivity is related to the principle of 'elementalism': separating verbally, conceptually, etc., what is actually not separate".

This is purest zen, taoism, etc., and I have no quibble with it - how could one? - but, turning back to the mechanics of a sentence with that thought in mind, something has to originate an action upon something else. That's what life is, that's all it is. Though Dawes continued that "[s]tudents of general semantics endeavor to think in terms of 'non-elementalism - interconnectedness, and interrelationships' rather than 'objectivity' ", there is still time and motion beyond pure beingness. I contend that interconnectedness is the way things are but that interrelationship is more complex if we wish to status it as other than a synonym for interconnectedness. I proceed on that assumption.

"In the sciences," he concluded metonymically, "quantum physics 'talks' about 'observer-observed interaction' ", and this of course is precisely what I'm referring to: interrelationship. Interconnectedness is just the way the entirety of reality operates - it's a whole, it must be, as it is purely by its nature itself, having no choice in the matter. Interrelationship is what brings selectivity in, but not always. The observer-observed state of being in fact, taken to reductionistic extremes, shows how delicately this operates: you and I might be in the same building on different floors, so we're interconnected - and in fact are so no matter where we may be - but when I ascend to the floor you're on and suddenly gaze upon you, now we're interrelated in an observer/observed state. And if you turn and see me, the flow abruptly goes both ways.

Only a condition of such action can create subject and object, and, as mentioned, the subject can be the object of itself. That's what meditation is said to be, though the true point purports to ultimately be to get away from any element of self-identifying attachment thus allowing, more irony here, subject expanding into object, therefore losing self/subject, everything eventually shedding separated identity entirely. Entities have no individuated external basis other than in highly arguable existential, stoic, and nihilistic conceptions. Again: what could possibly be external to reality? Interconnectedness would really mean that a state of individuation never exists at all. The most one could do would be to change position in the flow-field of reality. Then, from the interconnected state, one element acts interrelationally, setting off a chain of causality applicable only to that one incident...though the object can, as noted, if it wishes, react, switch positions, and begin a new chain.

Ah, but is that relatable to "subject" and "object". Did the object-becomes-subject situation arise from your action or from mine when I reached the floor you were on? Did you sense my presence before I perceived yours, did you otherwise sense my attention before you looked upon me, was the interconnectedness thus amplified into
interrelatedness, or was it pure coincidence? Is there such a thing as coincidence (an interesting word)? The Butterfly Sneeze may be sauntering through mosquito netting at this point. By the same token, any interrelational effect will also be felt interconnectionally. It can't help but be so if we are to credit interconnectedness in its panoply. So...what is objectivity?

As 'object' is the base term, we need to explore it in its utility of meaning to our purpose. That turns us to a HUGE ground-floor problem in semantics: affixing. To 'affix' is just to add an element to something else, as when the upper right hand corner of an envelope tells you to affix a stamp to it. In language, when you add a suffix or a prefix to a word to alter its applicability, you're affixing. So, to 'object' we first affix '-ive' to get 'objective'. '-Ive' means "that performs or tends towards", which is perfectly fine, making 'objective', in our particular use, refer to tending towards being an object, not a subject, in a situation.

To be completely subjective means to be concerned with self to the exclusion of all that is not-self. To be non-completely subjective would mean to figure the self as the center of concern in interaction with other things (and even that's putative if you inspect the logic therein), and incomplete subjectivity is what we're concerned with, so now we set objectivity as the contrast in order to understand what subjectivity is not.

Let's say you're a guy named, oh, I don't know: Bruce Banner, and you're fascinated by atomic blasts. One day, you become so enamored with the hideous beauty of the phenomenon that you stand enthralled, watching as an a-bomb goes off not far from you, fascinated by the event as it unfolds, not for a moment thinking about consequences to yourself, completely lost in the event outside your skin. That, if anything, would be, I imagine, as close to complete objectivity as one could get. No sense of self as far as could be produced other than *existing* in the equation...and *thinking*...and *emoting*...and *interrelating*. And that's where we begin to see the problem once more. Is all that "objective"? Hmmmmm.

It gets worse when there is an involvement to any degree of sentience in the not-self. Setting aside drops of water or atomic explosions, sentience is the element making it impossible to be completely objective about other sentient things. The moment we detect intelligence, awareness, is the moment we start to see ourselves to greater or lesser degree; we have to. We find no evidence of ourselves in, say, a rock, other than pure existence, but we do in an insect. Bugs have SO much in common with us (the search for food, need for shelter from inclement weather, social phenomena, etc.) that it's impossible not to immediately start setting up correlates. That's precisely subjectivity because, well, what's the 'co' in 'correlate' (co-relate)? It's us. It can't be someone else because we're not them, insect or otherwise. Whatever we see, we immediately begin to establish definitions for it from within ourselves. Definition has two estates: it describes is-ness and then considers similarities and contrasts. It probably shouldn't do the latter two, but certain things aren't fully knowable until one
reveals what a thing also is not. I suspect this is due either to the incompleteness of language or the relative poverty of our intellectual capacities, but, for the moment, it stands.

Return now to the atomic explosion. What attracts the intellect is its completely foreign nature. There's nothing there to correspond to purely biological events...or is there? We're enthralled by the demonstration because it's so wildly contrasted to human action...or is it? What are we trying to do when we regard such events? Well, we're not just stimulated by the spectacle, which is certainly engaging enough, but are also attempting to understand what's occurring and why. How does the human mind do that? Through similarities and contrasts; hence, in just one instance among many, after the invention of dynamite, one "exploded" with fury. With the ancient Greeks, the parallel was drawn through volcanoes, and persists to this day: one may now possess a "volcanic" or "smoldering" temperament. Whenever we can, we see everything as a reflection of self to one degree or another. Where is the objectivity occurring? Is it occurring at all?

So we take 'object + ive' and make it 'object + ive + ity'. '-Ity' means "quality, state, degree'. I think we'll find that Webster Funked up again, a little anyway. 'State' should've been sufficient, as it encompasses full elementality whereas 'quality' and 'degree' look only to affects, attributes of that full-blooded beingness, that 'state'. Thus, 'relativity' is a 'state of being relative', and thus 'objectivity' is 'a state of being objective'. With that, I'm tempted to say we're done, but we're not. There are always the things unstated.

Here's the last hurdle. There's a scene from *The Matrix* where a little Buddhistically garbed boy is bending a spoon with his mind. Neo asks him "How do you do that?". He answers "Do not try and bend the spoon. That's impossible. Only try to realize the truth". Neo asks "What truth?". The child answers that "There is no spoon". Neo holds the spoon and questions him, "There is no spoon?". The boy answers "Then you'll see that it is not the spoon that bends, it is only yourself".

That's a conflation and slight simplification of the Sanskrit 'Tat tvam asi' ('Thou art that') with the taoist/zen/Buddhist teaching wherein the master avers to the monk: "The flag in the breeze does not move, it is your mind that is moving". In such things, absent occupying the mindset generating such oblique assertions, it's difficult to know whether to agree or disagree with such gentle remonstrances of too much single-point causality. I, for one, must take sharp issue with this brand of viewpoint but, as such claimancies come from minds far superior to my own, must also consider them. If, as the Upanishads and succeeding philosophical schools contend, there really is no differentiation between things, science increasingly proving this, then objectivity must be an impossibility. There is no other scenario. Or is there?
That's precisely what Dawes gestured towards, sparking in me no end of an internal pondering of connotations and denotations, all of them extensions upon zen ruminations. The implications are enormous, demanding that we are always in touch with everything in all reality at all times. Michio Kaku and his string theory cement this rather nicely, and the observer/observed phenomenon is just an increase of awareness multiplied by proximity - and, of course, the shorter the distance, the greater the effect. All of this touched directly upon that earlier claim that I tend to land on the side of, the near-certainty that there's no such thing as objectivity. Even now, I'm not 100% dead certain, some mysterious X factor yet nags far away at the back of my mind, but it's damnably close. Let's say 99.999999%.

Hegel and Kant are losing the race. In a diet of ingestibles hopeful of catalyzing internal change, the strange obliquities of gentlemen like Nisargadatta Maharaj prove to be curiously efficacious. I can't, as with zen koans, understand much of what that peculiarly abstracted gentleman is saying but one day hope to. That's how I'll know I've evolved. One must always reach beyond the current self to re-create into the new self...or probably most properly: to find the full self, if that's possible. I'm told it is, we all are capable, but who's telling us? Human beings. Hm. So, in that, if one cannot question assumptions, presumptions, and even science, then one knows the directions from which one will be blindsided. As our individual and holistic/social intelligences increase, we are either finding that reality changes (observer/observed racing back to denude - ennude?, who the hell comes up with these internally self-nullifying terms like 'denude' anyway? - itself/themselves at least partially) or that it wasn't what we thought it was. That ominous presence again: thinking.

I lately prefer to nominate the whole mishigas we are heading towards as 'meta-anarchy' (under which I self-identity as a 'social autocrat', the as-yet-undiscovered reality of classical and contemporary anarchological pursuits and a political class so far of exactly 1) (and the reader would be very much in error in accepting the dictionary mis-definition of the term 'autocrat' rather than it's etymological verity). It seems to me, within what is suggested merely by a concept package that must inevitably bloom outwards (and in fact has ever been in that state), that one would have to admit one's inability to be objective in order to even conceive any degree of the argument. That re-introduces semantics: wouldn't 'co-subjective' be a better term? After all, objectivity alleges that in order to truly understand, we have to stop injecting ourselves into the thing or the situation.........but we can't! We're there, involved, enmeshed, the moment we cognize *anything*. We have to be.

This, to rescue a few petals from the fraying flower, is a natural progression flow-lined this way:

Event/thing exists --> self becomes aware of it --> mind explores factors in event/thing --> similarities and contrasts arise --> mind explores for more similarities/contrasts --> repeat --> some form of understanding occurs.
What is all that but an ever deepening involvement of self with not-self, sentient or otherwise? The moment we open our eyes and view the world, we cannot help but establish resonance with it, even if only in silent interior assimilation/modeling (is the thing what we model it to be?). That assimilation will influence how we interact, and once again the inevitable observer/observed effect pops up. In fact, that's the modus of life, period, not just an adjunct. Quantum mechanics seems to agree with this (it helps to keep in mind that Feynman said there perhaps are only a dozen in the world who truly understand that science). How can life conduct itself unless everyone and everything is enmeshed in a web of uncountable observer/observed units?

We return to the central problem. Is it possible to be outside reality? How on earth would that occur? The mind cannot begin to grasp the least shred of such an obtuse state, and any attempt at affirmation reverts to fantasies of God, gods, goddesses, and suchlike, plainly ridiculous mentations. Thus, finally, not only is there no objectivity but there *can be* no such thing. Even the alleged godthing, when one cares to involve oneself within the infantilisms of religion, cannot escape that. After all, he/she/it/they is/are reality and must be or they don't fit the concept at all. Zen speaks to that directly but in completely different context: whatever it is that all this is, it's all one…

...but what is that 'one'?

The dilemma just resolved...it seems. Unless someone comes along and can defeat this line of reasoning/actuality, objectivity does not exist. Oh wait...perhaps a rock in Tau Ceti could be pretty confidently said to be objective to a leaf in Trafalmadore, three billion galaxies hence. On the other hand, if Kaku's right, that's wrong. Ah, but, heads insufficiently spinning, there's even more.

In every aspect of reality, one needs to understand where one's sympathies and empaties lie (or even where one's revulsions and hatreds exist, as they too must be generated only through some sort of cognitive process) with each thing confronted and then work to strip those emotions out of the equation in order, we are told, to understand interrelationships and non-interrelationships without a cloud of magnetic and meta-magnetic forces attempting to merge observer and observed. That exteriorization process, however, if it's even possible, would be counter-evolutionary and contra-empathic. To understand anything, one must embrace it as much as possible, not recede from it. Objectivity, under the alleged necessities prescribed to the alleged estate, increases with distance, subjectivity working oppositely. Why on Earth, then, would you want distance if you want to understand a thing? Objectivity, we are told, is a superior non-egoistic mode of understanding, but, contradicting that, one can know even the most obvious physical rudiments of a thing much better from, say, three feet than from three miles. Yet the opposite is precisely the warped claim of objectivity sentimenticians.
There's a gratifyingly heavy slant on this one-is-all, merge-with-the-exterior, expand-the-self proposition in Nursing grand theory, a predisposition that will shock and gratify acolytes of the Eastern philosophies because that entire segment of the medical profession is slowly inevitably going holistic and thus becoming anti-AMA without ever quite saying it, well under wraps, existent but oddly mostly quiescent. As a person who has long advocated holism as the only possible alternative to the unending miseries of allopathy and iatrogenesis, as an individual who has studied Eastern thought since discovering Emerson's "Brahma":

If the red slayer thinks he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same,
The vanished gods to me appear,
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

The strong gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
But thou, meek lover of the good!
Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.

(and for those into such things, here's fascinating commentary by Emily Bilodeau, at the time a student at some damn college somedamnwhere: "The first stanza corresponds almost exactly to the passage in the Bhagavad-Gita where Krishna, speaking for Brahman, declares: 'He who thinks this self a killer / and he who thinks it killed / both fail to understand / it does not kill nor is it killed'. Both texts indicate that there is a sustaining force in the universe, inside of which every being always has and always will exist'. Ms. Bilodeau has almost slain objectivity as well, via antecedents, but she may have tripped herself up: is that "sustaining force" everything or other-than-everything?)

...and as a contrarian who works to find the other story (and then the other other story) (and then the other other other story) (and then...) in every single thing in order to grasp multi-manifestation, I was elated when a friend who's a nurse told me of Rosemary Parse and Pamela Reed, revolutionary thinkers in that profession. Parse touts a theory of 'human becoming' and Reed espouses a 'self transcending' line of thought very similar to Parse's (Reed's work, or so the sometimes odd direction of Nursing
theory goes insofar as I can puzzle it out, is sub-compartmental, middle theory rather than grand), both being modes of absorption, malleability, and change rather than distance, rejection, and rigidity.

These revolutionary nurse-philosophers posit the mind as the chief healer, and one easily grasps their many messages that the more frequently human beings confront and absorb their full reality while shedding the welter of damaging indoctrinations, especially including the alienated fantastical Other, the more readily they heal. The mind, in other words, can be as much obstacle as curative. Parse, Reed, and confreres are heavily involved in taoism, Buddhism, and so on. Thus, in the belly of a beast presided over by the monstrous and unholy American Medical Association sleepeth the panaceic immuno-agents of philosophy, itself always the advance feelers of onrushing sciences.

This is the very element impending in the upcoming consciousness renaissance (which may not occur, as we might all go insane, become Republicans, priests, businessmen, or other monsters): the fact that everything is involved with everything else. Not only is there just one race on Earth, as Project Genome has shown, but there really is just one *everything* intimately connected to everything else - that is, if "everything else" any longer has meaning.

As Mr. Dawes commented subsequent to reading the first part of this analysis when it was first printed: all language is metaphorical. Here's how he put it: "words are not what words are usually about" - nicely said and at which I chuckled. Language is indeed metaphor, I have to agree, but I'd also add, given the absence of individuated identity (NOT, I rush to add, the absence of individuals - and that brings up a whole new set of questions) that now must be understood to be implicit in a non-objective universe, so too are all human beings, animals, even stalactites and dog excrement: each and every one metaphorical extensions of the whatever-it-is everything is composed of. That's pure zen, but it's also problematic. The new enigma becomes, as I inserted a few moments back: what is that something and, if we cannot really grasp it, and we certainly don't, aren't we then objective to it, to - heh!- ourselves?

So, did I solve the dilemma or just re-pose it on a new level?

Words......wotta way to communicate!