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Toward a Science of Persons

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Research in Progress

The main goal of my research program has been and continues to be to develop a science of persons. Basic to this project is developing a notion of person that would best facilitate the scientific study of persons. To this end, I have taken three complementary approaches to the category of person: theoretical, empirical and historical. Theoretically, I have been interested for some time in trying to determine the boundaries that distinguish persons from inanimate objects, like robots, that might behave like but perhaps not be persons (Barresi, 1987; 1995; 1999; Bolivar & Barresi, 1995). Given that human persons form a biological kind, I have been interested in the evolutionary processes that make possible organisms with the capacities that we attribute to persons and also interested in the stages in development where children begin to exhibit these capacities (Barresi, 1996; 1999; Barresi & Moore, 1996). Among these capacities is our ability to extend our self-consciousness into the future as well as into the past. Thus we plan for the future and forgo current rewards in favour of more valuable future rewards. What mechanisms are involved in this capacity has been a focus of some of recent empirical research done in collaboration with Chris Moore and Carol Thompson (Barresi, 2001; Moore, Barresi, & Thompson, 1998; Thompson, Barresi, & Moore, 1997). I have also recently extended the Barresi & Moore, 1996 model to adult social cognition, providing an intentional relations account of the actor observer effect, as well as of intergroup cognition (Barresi, 2000). In collaboration with Tim Juckes, I have attempted to understand better the narrative and cultural processes involved in adult achievements of personhood (Barresi, 1999; Barresi & Juckes, 1997; Juckes & Barresi, 1993).

In recent years, I have also developed an interest in the history of psychology, particularly in the history of concepts of person, self, soul, consciousness and mind, and have written a number of papers and books, for the most part in collaboration with Ray Martin, a philosopher currently at Union College (Barresi, 1994, in press; Martin & Barresi, 1995; Martin, Barresi & Giovannelli, 1998; Martin & Barresi, 2000; Barresi & Martin, 2005). In our book, *Naturalization of the Soul*, Martin and I focused on the transformations of concepts of personal identity and self in the eighteenth century, but we also briefly sketched out the prior history from the Greeks to the eighteenth century as well as developments subsequent to the eighteenth century. Recently, Martin and I have published *Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity* (Martin & Barresi, 2006), a book which traces the full history of conceptions of self from the ancient Greeks to the present and attempts to assess the meaning of this

history for self-understanding. I hope to reflect further on concepts of person and self in future historical and systematic studies.

Representative Publications:

Barresi, J. On becoming a person. *Philosophical Psychology*, 1999, 12, 79-98.

Barresi, J. & Moore, C. Intentional relations and social understanding. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1996, 19, 107-122.

Martin, R. & Barresi, J. *Naturalization of the Soul: Self and Personal Identity in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Martin, R. & Barresi, J. *Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006