

C H A P T E R 1

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HISTORY AS  
PROLOGUE  
WESTERN THEORIES  
OF THE SELF

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JOHN BARRESI  
RAYMOND MARTIN

IN philosophical theory, as well as in common parlance, the words *self* and *person* are often used interchangeably, usually, but not always, in an effort to express the same idea. For instance, John Locke, in one of the most consequential discussions relating these terms, declared that: ‘PERSON, as I take it, is the name for . . . self. Wherever a man finds what he calls himself, there, I think, another may say is the same person.’ But when Locke actually defines *person* and *self* he defines *self* as ‘that conscious thinking thing, whatever substance made up of (whether spiritual or material, simple or compounded, it matters not), which is sensible, or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends’. By contrast, he defines *person* as ‘a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself,

This brief historical survey of theories of self in Western thought is based in part on our earlier work, especially, Martin and Barresi (2000, 2006). For a fuller appreciation of this history, we recommend reading these works as well as Sorabji (2006) for the ancient period, Seigel (2005) for the modern period, and Taylor (1989) for a full history but with a somewhat different emphasis.

the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it.' (Locke 1694/1979: 346, 341, 335). Yet, despite these differing definitions, Locke bases identity over time of both self and person on consciousness. In the present chapter, we use the terms *self* and *person* interchangeably, to express the same idea.

## SELF AS SPIRITUAL SUBSTANCE: PLATONISM

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In the *Phaedo* of Plato (429–347 BCE), Socrates equated his essential self with his *psyche*, or soul. Earlier Greek thinkers, such as Homer, thought that the psyche or life principle separated from the body at death and went to Hades as a shade. But individuals did not identify with their shades. By taking the soul to be one's essential self, Plato turned a new leaf on this traditional belief. He argued for the immortality of each person's soul, which he took to be 'immaterial' and akin to the divine. In his view, the soul's simplicity ensures both personal survival of bodily death and each person's 'pre-existence' prior to incarnation into a body. It also ensures personal survival of changes undergone while one is alive and embodied.

Plato did not ask what accounts for the unity of the self at any given time. Had he raised this question, he might have answered that the soul's immateriality and, hence, its indivisibility, accounts for its unity. Six centuries later Plotinus (c.204–70) did raise this question and answered that unity of experience would be impossible if the soul were matter, because matter is inherently divisible in a way that would destroy its own and also the mind's unity. While conceding that the soul too is divisible, he argued that its divisibility is different: '[The soul] does not consist of separate sections; its divisibility lies in its presence at every point in the recipient, but it is indivisible as dwelling entire in any part.' If the soul 'had the nature of body', he continued, 'it would consist of isolated members each unaware of the conditions of each other'. In that case, he wrote, 'there would be a particular soul—say, a soul of the finger—answering as a distinct and independent entity to every local experience'; hence, 'there would be a multiplicity of souls administering each individual'. Since the mental lives of such individuals, he pointed out, would be unlike our own mental lives, each of us cannot be administered by a multiplicity of (equal) souls. 'Without a dominant unity,' he concluded, our lives would be 'meaningless' (Plotinus 1952: 140). So far as is known, no one had entertained such thoughts before.

Plato's view that one's soul is immaterial, provoked, for the first time, the problem of explaining the relationship of this immaterial essence—one's true

self—to the body, and hence that of explaining how, in general, dualism as a philosophy of nature is possible. Plotinus later provided one such account, which involved an elaborate cosmology with gradations of being, including immaterial substances, material substances, and activities. Later still, Descartes, in whose view consciousness would play a central role, provided a different account—one which distinguished more sharply between mental and material substances. In spite of the problems raised by dualism, the view that the soul is an immaterial substance proved to be remarkably persistent, mainly because it was endorsed by the Church, but also partly because it has seemed to many that each of us has a kind of mental unity that could not be explained if we were wholly material. When, in the twentieth century, self and personal identity thinkers en masse finally did embrace materialism the question of how unified we are mentally and how whatever mental unity we have can be explained came to the fore.

## SELF AS HYLOMORPHIC SUBSTANCE: ARISTOTLEANISM

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Aristotle (384–322 BCE), in opposing Plato’s dualism, showed little interest in individual selves. In his view, the soul is related to body as ‘form’ to ‘matter’, which are integrated into a unified whole—the individual organism. While this form is the same in all humans, matter varies with the individual. Aristotle’s interest was not in particular persons, but in human nature. Thus, he shifted the focus from the self as a special part of the human organism to human nature in general and to individuals only as particular instances of human nature. In his view, every living thing has a psyche, or soul, which is its vital principle—that is, what it is about it that accounts for its being alive. For plants and most animals, the soul is inseparable from the body that it informs. However, Aristotle seems to have held that for humans, the soul’s rational part—*nous*—is separable, although some scholars dispute whether he really held this view. Assuming that he did hold it, it is not clear whether it was also part of his view that *nous* can retain personal individuality when it is separate from a body. When, in the late middle ages and early Renaissance, Aristotle achieved among Christian scholars an authoritative status almost equal to divine revelation, the implications of his view of the psyche for personal survival of bodily death became a contentious issue, with some thinkers even suggesting that his true view must have been that no parts of the soul, not even *nous*, are separable from the body.

## SELF AS MATERIAL SUBSTANCE: EPICUREANISM ATOMISM

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In addition to the tradition in Greek thought that went through Plato and Aristotle, then to Plotinus, and afterwards to the church fathers, there was in classical Greece and Rome a tradition of materialistic atomism that was sparked by Leucippus (fl. 440 BCE) and Democritus (460?–370? BCE) and included the Epicureans and Stoics, who developed atomist metaphysics into a philosophy of life. Epicurus (341–270 BCE), for instance, taught that pleasure is the only good, pain the only evil, and fear of death a needless source of human distress. The problem posed by death, he claimed, is not death itself but the fear of death, and the way to resolve that problem is to accept death for exactly what it is, the physical coming apart of the complex of atoms that is one's self, resulting in the cessation of any subject that can experience pleasure or pain.

In his Epicurean poem, *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius (95?–54? BCE) denied both the existence of an immaterial soul and personal survival of bodily death. In the context of his making the point that we have nothing to fear from bodily death, he argued that 'if any feeling remains in mind or spirit after it has been torn from body, that is nothing to us, who are brought into being by the wedlock of body and spirit, conjoined and coalesced'. He then considered the possibility that 'the matter that composes us should be reassembled by time after our death and brought back into its present state'. He claimed that, even if this were to happen—that is, were we, in effect, to be resurrected—it would be of no concern to us 'once the chain of our identity had been snapped' (Lucretius 1951: 121).

Why of no concern? Lucretius's answer seems to have been, first, that whatever parts of us may survive, we cease at our bodily deaths and, second, that our persisting—that is, our continuing as the same people we now are—is a precondition of any egoistic concern we might have for the experiences of any parts of ourselves that survive our bodily deaths. What is impressive in these thoughts is not so much his answer to the question of what matters in a person's apparently self-interested desire to survive (his view was that what matters presupposes personal identity) but rather his asking the question in the first place. No one previously, at least in the West, had asked it. Because Lucretius was so widely read into the modern period, he introduced into the discussion of self the question of *what matters* in survival, that is, in one's egoistic concern to survive.

## CHRISTIANITY AND THE RESURRECTION OF SELF

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So far as one can tell, most people in classical Greek and Roman culture did not have a deep, self-interested longing to survive bodily death. Of course, they did not want to die in the first place, but that is a different matter. By contrast, in today's Western industrialized cultures many people are not only curious about whether they themselves will survive, but *long* to survive, particularly in some way that is better than their earthly lives. Such attitudes, which are foreign to Greek philosophy, seem to owe their prevalence, if not also their very origin, to Christianity.

According to Christian scripture, not only do people survive their bodily deaths, but they survive them in a bodily way. And the very same people, and bodies, that lived on Earth are rewarded or punished in the afterlife. But most people, when they die, are in bad shape physically. Critics questioned how it could be a good thing that the bodies that people have in the afterlife are the ones they had at the times of their deaths.

In reply, the ~~apologists~~ went out of their way to make the case that the body which is resurrected, while identical to the earthly body, is somehow spiritualized, glorified, or at least repaired. Such claims provoked questions. From what parts is the body that dies reconstructed? What happens if the matter of the previous body is subsequently shared by more than one body, as, for instance, in cannibalism? And how is the reconstruction of the body compatible with its being the very same body as the one that died?

From the first through the twelfth centuries Christian philosophers offered answers to these questions from the perspective of NeoPlatonism. In considering their answers, it is helpful to distinguish among three views about personal identity: first, that it depends only on the continuation of an immaterial soul; second, that it depends on the continuation both of an immaterial soul and a material body; and third, that it depends only on the continuation of a material body (which was thought by those ~~apologists~~ who were materialists to include a material soul). Some Christian thinkers, such as Origen (185?–254), who had a Platonic view of survival, adopted something like the first of these options; others, like Tertullian (160?–230?), who ~~under the influence of~~ Stoicism ~~became~~ a materialist, adopted something like the third. Eventually, due importantly to the influence of Augustine (354–430), most gravitated toward the second: that personal immortality requires the continuation of the very same immaterial soul and the very same material body. This view then became an integral and enduring dogma of Christianity.

Augustine was among the first to become self-conscious about the problem of explaining the relation of the soul-substance to the body. Plato had maintained, in effect, that the soul is related to the body like a pilot to his ship. In his view, the soul at death always leaves forever the specific body with which it had been associated,

and when sufficiently purified eventually leaves body itself forever. Augustine's view, in contrast, was that the dogma of bodily resurrection requires that soul and body together form an intimate unit: 'A soul in possession of a body does not constitute two persons, but one man' (Augustine 1995: 259).

## THE ARISTOTELIAN SYNTHESIS

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In the early middle ages the only works of (and on) Aristotle that had been translated and so were available to Latin philosophers were his *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, together with Boethius' (480–525?) commentaries on them. From the mid-twelfth to the mid-thirteenth centuries, most of the remaining works of Aristotle were translated and became available. These newly translated works, which in the thirteenth century would stimulate and confuse European intellectuals, provoked novel questions and cast old ones in a new light. So far as the self and personal identity are concerned, the essential problem was that since the third century most Latin philosophers had become accustomed to thinking that each human has just one soul, which is a simple, incorporeal substance that somehow inhabits the body. On the views inspired by Aristotle's *De Anima*, there is not just one soul per human, but several, each of which is more intimately related to the body. The trick, for Christian European thinkers struggling to assimilate Aristotle, was to explain the relationship of Aristotelian souls to each other and to the body in an account that preserved the Christian dogma of personal immortality. For the first time in Europe since Christian Neoplatonism had become the received view, the soul was undergoing a process of naturalization. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it would happen again, only more radically, until eventually a self that is a product of the brain displaced the soul altogether.

## CARTESIAN DUALISM

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The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century rise of modern science, spearheaded by Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), and René Descartes (1596–1650) spawned theories in which there was no place either for substantial forms or teleology, both of which were central to Aristotelian science. Instead, the

universe and its parts were conceptualized as if they were clocks, pushed along by springs and pulleys, which—as efficient causes—have no prevision of the ends they might achieve.

Descartes was the first major thinker to start using the word mind (Latin, *mens*) as an alternative to the word soul (*anima*). In his view, the self is the mind, which is an unextended substance whose essence is thinking. Although he thereby freed the Platonic soul from its Aristotelian accretions, he also inadvertently exposed its scientific irrelevance, a consequence that would not become apparent to most philosophers until the end of the eighteenth century. Insofar as the self was concerned, there was one main question both for Descartes and his critics: how does the self as immaterial substance fit into an otherwise wholly material world governed by mechanistic laws?

Descartes answered that, independently of the immaterial self, the neural organization of the brain accounts for sensation, perception, and imagination, and that in animals this entirely mechanical system is all that there is. According to his theory, during sensation ‘animal spirits’ in the sense-organs of non-human animals are stimulated mechanically by the sizes, shapes, and motions of the matter impinging on their organs, thereby transmitting physiologically to the brain, and eventually to the pineal gland in the brain decodable information about objects external to the organism. This information in the pineal gland is then redirected to some other region of the brain or body. In the case of humans, the process works much the same, with two exceptions: what humans sense and imagine is directly experienced by the immaterial self; and the immaterial self’s thoughts are its own mental acts, which remain in that substance and are not coded in the brain at all. Nevertheless, through the pineal gland thoughts do sometimes causally affect, and are affected by, the motion of the animal spirits and hence the behavior of the organism.

It seemed to some of Descartes’s critics that, on his view, the mind should be related to the body as a pilot to his ship. In response, Descartes seems to have tried to say that individual non-material minds and their associated bodies form one substance in virtue of their unity as a causal mechanism. In other words, they systematically affect each other, but not other things, in ways that make the two of them together function as if they were one.

## NATURALIZATION OF THE SOUL

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The seventeenth century ended with the dazzling theories of Isaac Newton (1642–1727), who showed once and for all that there could be a natural philosophy

of the external world. Quick on the heels of his triumph came an unprecedented confidence in human reason. Thinkers at the forefront of progressive developments wanted to do for ‘moral philosophy’, that is, the science of human nature, what Newton had done for ‘natural philosophy’. In the early seventeenth century, rationalists, such as Descartes, had been at the forefront of this progressive extension of natural science. By the end of the century empiricism’s time had arrived, nowhere more consequentially than in the work of Newton’s contemporary, John Locke (1632–1704).

So far as self and personal identity are concerned, Locke had two main ideas, one negative and one positive. His negative idea was that the persistence of selves and persons cannot be understood as parasitic upon the persistence of any underlying substance, or substances, out of which persons might be composed. His positive idea was that the persistence of selves and persons could be understood in terms of the unifying role of consciousness:

For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things; in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being: And as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done. (Locke 1694/1979: 335)

Locke thereby motivated the decisive break with substance accounts of the self, or person, toward relational accounts, according to which each self, or person, is a complex composed of physical and/or mental elements that persists as long as the elements in the complex are properly related.

When in the context of talking about personal identity Locke talked about consciousness, most of the time he meant memory. His eighteenth-century critics invariably took him to mean this. They, thus, attributed to him the view that a person at one time and one at another have the same consciousness, and hence are the same person, just in case the person at the later time remembers having experienced and done what the person at the earlier time experienced and did. Whether or not this was Locke’s view, his critics were right in thinking that it is vulnerable to decisive objections. However, almost all of them wanted to defeat the memory view of personal identity in order to retain the view that personal identity depends on the persistence of an immaterial soul. They failed to see that even the memory view that they attributed to Locke was riding the crest of a wave of naturalization that was about to engulf them. As the century wore on, their vision improved.



## PERSONAL IDENTITY VS. WHAT MATTERS IN SURVIVAL

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The first extended discussion of fission examples in connection with personal identity occurred between 1706 and 1709 when Samuel Clarke (1675–1729) and Anthony Collins (1676–1729) confronted each other in a six-part written debate in which Clarke argued that it is not possible for a system of mere matter to think, and Collins argued that matter does think. In this debate, Clarke introduced fission examples as a way of objecting to Collins's (and Locke's) relational view of personal identity. He did this by pointing out that if God in the afterlife can make one being with the same consciousness as someone who had lived on Earth, then God could make many such beings, which on Collins's view would be the same person. Clarke took it as obvious that such multiple fission-descendants would be different people. Subsequently he and Collins discussed fission examples several times. Because their debate was well-known, both fission examples and the idea that they have implications for personal identity theory were brought to the attention of eighteenth-century theorists.

During most of the eighteenth century fission examples were used to argue in support of an immaterial substance view of self. But Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), toward the end of the century, and William Hazlitt (1778–1830), at the beginning of the nineteenth century, used fission examples in more progressive ways. Hazlitt, for instance, not only conceded but embraced and celebrated the idea that fission examples implied that it is 'wild and absurd' to believe in 'absolute, metaphysical identity' between our present and any future self (Hazlitt, 1805/1969: 6). And in his view, fission examples have the further implication that people have no special ('self-interested') reason to value their future selves. At least to his own satisfaction, and in a way that anticipated the work of Derek Parfit and others in our own times, he then tried to explain how the idea that the notion of an identical continued self is a fiction, far from being destructive to theories of rationality and morality, actually makes them better. In the process, he sowed the seeds, albeit on barren ground, of a modern psychology of the acquisition of self-concepts and of a modern approach to separating the traditional philosophical problem of personal identity from the question of what matters in survival. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, F. H. Bradley (1846–1924) returned to the consideration of the implications of fission examples for theories of personal identity. However, after Bradley, a serious discussion of fission would have to await the latter third of the twentieth century, when it would help revolutionize personal identity theory.

Around 1970, the discussion of fission examples, together with puzzles provoked by the high-visibility experimentation done on split brain patients, precipitated two major developments. One of these is that the intrinsic relations view of

personal identity was superseded by the extrinsic relations (closest-continuer, externalist) view. According to the older intrinsic relations view, what determines whether a person at different times is identical is just how the two are physically and/or psychologically related to each other. According to extrinsic relations views, what determines it is not just how the two are physically and/or psychologically related to each other, but also how they are related to others. For instance, in the memory version of Locke's intrinsic relations view, you right now are the same person as someone who existed yesterday if you remember having experienced or having done things which that person of yesterday experienced or did. In an extrinsic relations version of Locke's memory view, one would have to take into account not only whether you remember having experienced or having done things which that person of yesterday experienced or did, but also whether, besides you, anyone else remembers having experienced or having done them.

In the 1970s, fission examples also provided grist for a second major development in personal identity theory. Philosophers began again to question whether something other than personal identity might be what matters primarily in survival. That is, they faced the possibility that people might cease and be continued by others whose existences they would value as much as their own and in pretty much the same ways as they would value their own. Derek Parfit, perhaps the leading analytic personal identity theorist of the twentieth century, has a Neo-Lockean view of personal identity and what matters in survival, according to which what binds the different stages of us into the individual people that we are is not just memory but psychological relations generally (including, beliefs, intentions, character traits, anticipations, and so on). And, unlike in Locke's view, but similar to Collins's, Parfit holds that it is not necessary for each stage of us to be directly related to every other stage, as long as each is indirectly related through intermediate stages. Parfit also claims that it ought to matter less to us whether our identical self persists into the future than that our psychological continuity is maintained in what might be a non-identical continuer.

## SELF AS FICTION AND THE ORIGINS OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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In ancient Western philosophy, the question of whether the self is a fiction did not arise. Locke's view pushed it to the fore. Subsequently, while the notion of soul continued to have a life in religious thought and in ethical theory, for scientific purposes it was all but dead. It was replaced by the notion of a unified self. However, there was a major difference in the history of these two notions. When

the notion of the soul was introduced as a scientifically useful notion, it was posited as a real thing. There was never any suggestion that it might merely be a useful fiction. Not so in the case of the notion of self/person. In the second edition of Locke's *Essay*, this notion plays a theoretically prominent role in his relational account of personal identity alongside the suggestion that it is 'a forensic term', which suggested to some readers, but may not have been Locke's intention, that selves and persons are not real entities but only useful fictions.

Subsequently David Hume (1711–76) argued, in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, that the idea of a substantial, persisting self, is an illusion. In his view, since all ideas arise from impressions and there is no impression of a 'simple and continu'd' self, there is no idea of such a self. He formulated his alternative 'bundle' conception of the self and compared the mind to a theater in which none of the actors—the 'perceptions [that] successively make their appearance'—are either 'simple' at a time or, strictly speaking, identical over time. Beyond this succession of perceptions, Hume claimed, humans do not even have minds, except as fictional constructions. Thus, in his view, there is no site for the mental performance, at least none of which we have knowledge; rather, there 'are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos'd.' (Hume 1739/1888: 253).

Hume then turned to the tasks of explaining why people are so susceptible to the illusion of self and to explaining how certain dynamic mentalistic systems in which we represent ourselves to ourselves, as well as to others, actually work. When Hume moved on to these largely psychological concerns he became deeply involved in what today we would call social psychology of the self. He, thus, completed a transition from skeptical philosophy to the most general sorts of associational issues, and then to specific psychological hypotheses about how self-representations function in our mental economy, as for instance in his explanation of how sympathy works. He thereby shifted the emphasis from conceptually analyzing the notion of personal identity to empirically accounting, first, for how it arises and, second, for its functional role.

In the case of many, if not most, eighteenth-century thinkers, it is difficult to tell whether they are employing the notion of the self merely pragmatically, as a useful fiction, or as a realistically understood scientific postulate. Hume often seems to have had a foot in both camps. By the end of the nineteenth century, in the case of some thinkers, it was no longer difficult to tell. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), for instance, having publicly proclaimed 'God is dead', privately noted the perhaps deeper truth that the self also is dead. 'The concept of substance', he wrote, 'is a consequence of the concept of the subject: not the reverse! If we relinquish the soul, "the subject," the precondition for "substance" in general disappears. One acquires degrees of being, one loses that which has being.' The subject, he said, is but a 'term for our belief in a unity underlying all the different impulses of the highest feeling

of reality'. But, he claimed, there is no such unity, only 'the fiction that many similar states in us are the effect of one substratum: but it is we who first created the "similarity" of these states; our adjusting them and making them similar is the fact, not their similarity, which ought rather to be denied' (Nietzsche 1901/1968: 268–9). There is neither subject nor object, he concluded. Both are fictions.

Nietzsche claimed that, rather than unity of consciousness, we have 'only a semblance of Unity'. To explain this semblance, rather than a single subject, we could do as well by postulating 'a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general'. We have no reason to believe that there is a dominant subject overseeing this multiplicity. Philosophers have bought into the fiction of self, he continued, by supposing that if there is thinking, there must be something that thinks. But the thought that 'when there is thought there has to be something "that thinks" is simply a formulation of our grammatical custom that adds a doer to every deed'. Intellectual culture, he wrote, has made several 'tremendous blunders', including an 'absurd overestimation of consciousness' in which it has been transformed 'into a unity, an entity: "spirit," "soul," something that feels, thinks, wills'. We have been victimized by our language, he concluded, by 'our bad habit' of taking a mnemonic, an abbreviative formula, to be an entity, ~~finally as~~ a cause, as when we say of lightning that 'it flashes' (Nietzsche 1901/1968: 270, 268, 285–6, 294).

## THE DEVELOPMENTAL AND SOCIAL ORIGIN OF SELF-CONCEPTS

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As commonsensical as the idea of a developmental account of the acquisition of self-concepts may seem to us today, it did not begin to emerge until the middle of the eighteenth century. David Hartley (1705–57), one of the first to turn in this direction, had a developmental, associational account of the mind, but focused on the development of the passions and did not consider the acquisition of self-concepts. Thomas Reid (1710–96), late in the century, had a developmental psychology, but because of his commitment to the immateriality of the soul and to the reflexive nature of consciousness (if I am aware, then necessarily I am aware that I am aware), he may actually have made an exception in the case of the idea of self. Priestley, largely under the influence of Hartley, did think that a developmental account could be extended to the acquisition of self-concepts, but he did not elaborate.

Toward the beginning of the nineteenth century, Hazlitt distinguished three developmental stages in the acquisition of self-concepts: first, young children

acquire an idea of themselves as beings who are capable of experiencing pleasure and pain; second, and almost ‘mechanically’ (since physiology insures that children remember only their own pasts), children include their own pasts in their notions of themselves; finally, they include what they imagine to be their own futures. Hazlitt then raised the question of how a child’s formation of self-concepts is related to its development of empathy and sympathy. No one previously had asked this question. With the exception of Hazlitt, no British thinker until Alexander Bain (1811–77), late in the century, considered either how self-concepts are actually acquired or the impact of social context on their acquisition. German and French theorists did somewhat better on these issues.

In Germany, Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841) wrote several works that were primarily psychological, in which he claimed that initially the idea of self comes from humans’ experience of their bodily activities, which provides them with information about themselves as well as objects in the world with which they interact. Subsequently, as they more thoughtfully relate past to present thoughts, they come to identify more with their ideas than with their bodies. Thereby, they develop a notion of an ego or subject of their thoughts, which they then generalize as an abstract ego, or identical subject of experience, that persists throughout their lives.

In France, Maine de Biran (1766–1824) described the human self as developing through a purely sensitive, animal phase, to a phase of will and freedom which finally culminates in spiritual experiences that transcend humanity. As a developmental psychologist, he was concerned especially with the active or voluntary self, which infants first notice in experiencing the resistance of the world to their desires. He claimed that the continuity of voluntary agency provides children with a basis for their concept of themselves as extended over time.

Somewhat later, in America, James Mark Baldwin (1861–1934) said that soul theorists seemed to have assumed that ‘the man is father of the child’, that is, that ‘if the adult consciousness shows the presence of principles not observable in the child consciousness, we must suppose, nevertheless, that they are really present in the child consciousness beyond the reach of our observation’. The proper procedure (‘the genetic idea’), Baldwin claimed, is precisely the opposite of this (1894: 2–4).

In Baldwin’s view, rather than first becoming aware of themselves as persons, children become aware of others. Later, by becoming aware of their trying to imitate others, they become aware of their own ‘subjective’ activity. Next, they come to understand what others feel by ‘ejecting’ their own inner states onto others: ‘The subjective becomes ejective; that is, other people’s bodies, says the child to himself, have experiences in them such as mine has. They also have me’s.’ In this last phase, Baldwin concludes, ‘the social self is born’ (1897: 8). Yet, while Baldwin’s developmental account in bringing in the social succeeded in relating self to other, it under-emphasized the role of recognition by the other in self-consciousness.

Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807), had earlier famously claimed that self-consciousness arises in an individual not through an act of introspection and not in isolation from others, but by means of a dynamic process of reciprocal relationships in which each recognizes the other as a self-conscious being, becomes aware of that recognition of himself in the other, and ultimately becomes dependent on the other for his self-consciousness. The notion that self-consciousness arises from our reaction to recognition by others played an important role in the twentieth century both in the existential phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80) as well as in the social-developmental psychology of George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), and through them on many subsequent theorists both in philosophy and psychology. In Sartre’s account, for instance, there is a pre-reflective self-consciousness that precedes objective self-awareness—an idea going back to Fichte (1762–1814)—but a more developed self-consciousness requires the ‘gaze’ of the other, so is essentially a social product.

## A SELF FOR SCIENCE, RELIGION, MORALITY, AND POLITICS

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Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), focused on an understanding of the operations of the mind, particularly with respect to the limits of human knowledge. He there posited a distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal world, which was not only the key to his project of making a secure place both for knowledge and for faith, but provided him with a theoretical framework for understanding the self.

On one interpretation of Kant’s view, there are two selves, one phenomenal and one noumenal. The phenomenal self is extended temporally and perhaps also spatially and is capable of being experienced both subjectively and objectively. The noumenal self lacks spatial and temporal extension and is not capable of being experienced. On another interpretation, there is only one self which is capable of being considered either noumenally or phenomenally. On either of these interpretations, the task of accounting for the phenomenal self is no different in principle from that of accounting for any other object or event that exists in space and time, such as planets or atoms. Thus, the phenomenal self is part of the subjectmatter of what today we would call the science of psychology. The noumenal self, on the other hand, cannot be known. Even so, Kant held that it affects the way the phenomenal self is structured in experience.

Personal identity over time concerns only the phenomenal self. Locke thought that personal identity could be known empirically if it consists in sameness of



consciousness. Kant disagreed. He thought that in principle the consciousnesses of two people could be qualitatively identical. Delusions of memory, which Locke acknowledged may occur, are an obvious case in point. Kant concluded that if personal identity is to be known, rather than its consisting solely in sameness of consciousness, it must consist, at least in part, in some sort of physical continuity.

In Kant's view, there can be no experience which is not the experience of a subject. This can sound like the view that thought requires a thinker, which is more or less the move that Descartes made in attempting to prove the existence of a substantial self. The difference, however, is that by *thinker* Kant doesn't mean substantial self, but something more intimately connected with experience. He tried to explain what this 'something' is by saying that 'in the synthetic original unity of apperception, I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am. This representation is a thought, not an intuition' (Kant 1781/1965: 168). Hence, accompanying every experience is the conscious thought, 'I think', which is the logical subject of the experience. What Kant meant by these dark remarks is a matter of scholarly dispute.

There is another side to Kant's thoughts about the self, which has to do with the self as a source of autonomous agency and meaning. This other side appears in Kant's practical and moral philosophy, where he celebrated what all rational beings have in common, in the process giving birth to a dominant strain in modern liberalism according to which the principle of equal respect requires that people be treated equally, in a way that is blind to their differences. In the latter half of the twentieth century, this sort of one-size-fits-all approach to the self became contentious. A number of theorists, convinced that an oppressive dominant majority has ignored, overlooked, and repressed what is distinctive about the marginalized groups with which they identified, turned their attention to what differentiates people from each other. Various groups—women, gays, lesbians, ethnic minorities, and others—articulated their own accounts, each indexed to their particular marginalized group, of what it is to be a self and to have an identity.

## THE QUEST FOR AN INTEGRATED THEORY OF THE SELF

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In the nineteenth century, philosophical views of the self and personal identity were dominated by the philosophies of Kant and Hegel. Concurrently there was a growing spirit of naturalized science, typified by Charles Darwin (1809–82), but independently including inquiry into the development of self-concepts, mental diseases such as dissociative disorders, and the physiology of the brain. The

American philosopher and psychologist William James (1842–1910) integrated this naturalizing impulse into psychology by proposing a scientific philosophy of the self.

James's general empirical approach, in his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), is primarily a 'study of the mind from within'. Hence, in his account of self the experience of self is primary. He describes the properties of consciousness from a first-person point of view, arguing that each of us is, or has, a 'personal consciousness' and that we experience only the content that occurs within it. We have no first-person experience of the content of any other personal consciousness: 'My thought belongs with my other thoughts, and your thought with your other thoughts' (James 1890: i. 224–5).

However, after claiming that no psychology that hopes to stand can question the existence of a 'personal self', James immediately conceded that in cases of dissociation an individual human could have more than one personal self. Moreover, he continued, each personal self may be regarded both as an object and as a subject (a *me* and an *I*). The self as object may be further divided into the *material self*, the *social self*, and the *spiritual self*, each of which can be still further divided. For instance, James said that 'a man has as many social selves' as there are individuals and groups 'who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind'. He further said that a person's spiritual self may be regarded as a set of 'psychic dispositions', including the abilities to argue and discriminate and to have 'moral sensibility', 'conscience', and an 'indomitable will'. Alternatively, he elaborated, one's spiritual self can be seen as 'the entire stream of our personal consciousness', or more narrowly as the 'present "segment" or "section" of that stream'. When James speaks of the *I*, he further parceled the stream into thoughts, adding that the *I*, a thought, is at each moment a different thought 'from that of the last moment, but appropriative of the latter, together with all that the latter called its own' (James 1890: i. 294, 296, 401).

On James's account it is the passing mental state, 'the real, present onlooking, remembering, "judging thought" or identifying "section" of the stream', that is the active agent in unifying past and present selves. It is the thought that takes note of past thoughts as having the same feeling of warmth as the present feeling and thereby unifies them through a process of ownership that he calls appropriation. The subjective phenomena of consciousness do not need any reference to 'any more simple or substantial agent than the present Thought or "section" of the stream'. The immaterial soul, he said, 'explains nothing'. According to James, the core of personhood is 'the incessant presence of two elements, an objective person, known by a passing subjective Thought and recognized as continuing in time' (James 1890: i. 338, 344, 346, 371).

James resolved to use the word *me* for 'the empirical person' and *I* for 'the judging Thought'. Since the 'me' is constantly changing: 'the identity found by the *I* in its *me* is only a loosely construed thing, an identity "on the whole," just like that



which any outside observer might find in the same assemblage of facts'. But while the 'me' is 'an empirical aggregate of things objectively known', the 'I' which 'knows them cannot itself be an aggregate'. Rather, 'it is a Thought, at each moment different from that of the last moment, but appropriative of the latter, together with all that the latter called its own' (James 1890: i. 373, 400–1). In other words, what one calls 'the I' is constantly changing and the I as a persisting thing is relegated to fiction. In James's view, one doesn't have to settle metaphysical or ontological questions in order to give a scientific account of the self. Getting clear about the empirical relations between one's experience, one's brain, and one's social relations is enough. A generalized version of this idea resonates strongly with some philosophers in our own times (see, for instance, van Fraassen 2002).

## THE STREAM DIVIDES

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From the beginning of the century (after James) until the 1960s, no important philosopher of the self took the view that philosophy properly done is continuous with empirical science. That idea, which among analytic philosophers is so widespread today, owes its popularity to the ascendancy of analytic pragmatism. So, one way of thinking about the philosophy of the self in the twentieth century is that during the first half of the century it labored to separate itself from science and in the last half to reintegrate itself with science. The relevant sciences were biology, psychology, and sociology. In addition, in both analytic philosophy and phenomenology, but earlier in phenomenology, the idea caught on that immediate experience is suspect. Rather than a basis on which a view of the world, but particularly of the relations between self and other, could be securely constructed, it became commonplace to suppose that immediate experience must be understood as a product of social and historical influences and, hence, may need to be cleansed of misleading accretions.

In the phenomenological tradition, the influence of Hegel and Marx, together with the demise of foundationalism in epistemology, gave rise to a greatly heightened interest in social conceptions of the self. Max Scheler (1874–1928) began to examine social attitudes, such as empathy and sympathy. Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and later Jean-Paul Sartre stressed that the idea of an individual isolated from social and worldly involvements is an abstraction. And, in the analytic tradition, ordinary language philosophy, inspired by 'the later Wittgenstein' (1889–1951), stressed such themes as the impossibility of a 'private language' and the epistemological significance of collectively shared 'forms of life'. While all of this was going on, psychology, for its part, became a discipline of its own, the

main focus of which was provided by experimentalists—in the early part of the century, introspectionists, and then later, from the 1920s until after the Second World War, behaviorists. Neither group had much to say about the self and nothing to say about it of lasting importance. That job was left to empirical theorists from three different traditions: depth psychology, humanistic psychology, and social and developmental psychology.

Born in the nineteenth century, depth psychology grew to maturity in the work of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), who proposed a radically new way of understanding human psychological development and of treating mental abnormality. Freud's view included new understandings of the unconscious, of infantile sexuality, and of repression. Previously, most theorists had understood the self in terms of consciousness, including rationality, free will, and self-reflection. A few, like Nietzsche, had claimed that there is an irrational, unconscious part of the mind that dominates the rational. But Freud had a much more elaborate theory of how this happens, for which he claimed support from psychotherapeutic and historical case studies, as well as from his analyses of dreams and mental slips.

In the 1930s, what came to be called existential psychology tended to look for inspiration not to depth psychologists, but to phenomenologists, especially to Heidegger. What these two approaches had in common was the goal of discovering deeper recesses of the self hidden below the surface of normal experience. In the case of Freud and other depth psychologists, this search led to the exploration of unconscious motives, rooted in the past and in human biology, that determined present behavior. In the case of existential and humanistic psychologists, the focus was not on uncovering historical and biological determinants of behavior, but on realizing in the present one's most developed and authentic self. These approaches, together with most of the phenomenology which preceded them, tended to share two underlying assumptions—that there is a real self beneath the surface of expressed personality, and that knowing who one is requires uncovering this real self.

## THE SELF IN FRAGMENTS

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In the modern history of theories of the self, the Second World War is a watershed. Prior to the war, the seeds of dissolution of the self had been sown and had even begun to sprout. Yet, while some approaches demoted the self, none dismantled it. Across disciplines, the self had fragmented. Within disciplines, it was still intact. As a consequence, by mid-century the self may have been challenged, but it was not dethroned. That task was left to the second half of the century.

After the war many theorists began to think of the self more as a product of culture than as its creator. The last half of the century witnessed rampant unintegrated scientific specialization, the withering philosophical critiques of deconstruction and postmodernism, the penetrating attack in analytic philosophy on the very concept and importance of personal identity, newfound perspectives spawned by feminism, post-colonialism, gender/sexual/ethnic awareness, and by technological development. As a consequence, the self, which began the century looking unified—the master of its own house—ended it looking fragmented—a byproduct of social and psychological conditions.

Currently, in the science of psychology, when the notion of self shows up, it tends to be in one of its many hyphenated roles, such as self-image, self-conception, self-discovery, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-knowledge, self-acceptance, self-reference, self-modeling, self-consciousness, self-interest, self-control, self-denial, self-deception, self-narrative, and self-actualization. To some extent, the notion of identity has suffered a similar fate, as notions of racial identity, ethnic identity, sexual identity, gender identity, social identity, political identity, and so on have come even in scientific contexts to take prominence over the notion of personal identity.

The ontological status of these various hyphenated notions of self and identity is often unspecified. Psychologists rarely explain whether the self-notions they employ are supposed to be interpreted realistically or as explanatory fictions, such as the notion of a center of gravity. Moreover, even as theories that employ hyphenated self-notions in an individually manageable way have proliferated, there has been no concerted attempt to unify self-theories with one another. And the proliferation of competing, or at least well insulated, accounts of the self is not confined to the science of psychology. By the end of the century, virtually every discipline that took cognizance of human nature, including biology, sociology, anthropology, political science, and even neuroscience joined the fray. Their accounts, while making enormous progress with respect to limited questions about the self, increasingly separated the questions to be asked and the kinds of answers that could count as reasonable to each question. The result has been run-away fragmentation.

So, where does that leave us? The notion of a unified self was introduced into scientific theory in the seventeenth century, particularly in the theories of Descartes and Locke, as a replacement for the notion of soul, which had fallen on hard times. But eventually the notion of a unified self fell onto hard times of its own. Its demise was gradual, but by the end of the twentieth century the unified self had died the death if not of a thousand qualifications, then of a thousand hyphenations.

Of course, researchers working in different traditions or on different aspects of the self have continued to share a common focus of inquiry in that they all study the behavior of the human organism. But, lacking a refined understanding of how the human organism unifies hyphenated self-behaviors and self-phenomena, researchers lost touch with anything that deserves to be called a unified self.

Surprisingly, it has not seemed to matter. In order to get on with their research, psychologists have found little need to relate hyphenated self-behaviors and self-phenomena to a unified self, as James had tried so heroically to do. The same seems to be true of researchers in other traditions, such as neuroscience. As a result, the unified self, if indeed there ever was such a thing, has receded from view. Those who seek it today in both the philosophical and scientific literatures soon discover that none but the carefully initiated can wade into the waters of theoretical accounts of the self without soon drowning in a sea of symbols, technical distinctions, and empirical results, the end result of which is that the notion of the unified self has faded from view.

So ended the twentieth century. Prior to the Second World War, the self seemed to be a unified subject of investigation. Theorists did not agree on what to say about it, but they seemed to agree that it was something about which they had something to say. When they talked about the self, it was as if they agreed that in talking about it they were talking about the same thing, and about just one thing. By the end of the century, there was no such presupposition. What once had seemed so unified, now lay in fragments.

## PROSPECTS FOR THEORETICAL INTEGRATION

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In an article published in 1999, Eric Olson surveyed a variety of definitions of the self only to conclude that they and the ideas involved in them are so different from and unrelated to each other that there is no hope of developing an adequate single definition of self to answer the variety of issues involved in the use of the term. He proposed that ‘self’ as a term should be dropped from our vocabulary and that particular questions that once involved that term should go their separate ways.

Olson, in his later book *What are we?* (2007), divides his title question, which he takes to be metaphysical, into a number of ‘smaller questions’: ‘What are we made of?’, ‘What parts have we?’, ‘Are we abstract or concrete?’, ‘Do we persist through time?’, ‘Which of our properties are essential to us and which are accidental?’ (Olson 2007: 3–6). He suggests that the best answers to these questions lead us in different directions and that no single account of what we are is likely to give the best answer to all of them.

However, even with all the questions and answers considered in his book, Olson leaves aside other important questions about the self. For instance, he explicitly puts aside the question of ‘what we take ourselves to be’ (2007: 14). Because we might be quite wrong in our self-conceptions, he views this as a question of ‘anthropology’ not metaphysics. He’s right, of course, that it is not a metaphysical



or ontological question, but, even so, for other theories of self, whether in anthropology or not, as well as for humanistic self-understanding in which the main goal is not so much to understand the self, but ourselves, this question is a major concern. Even if our self-conceptions are wrong, if they are persistent and ubiquitous, they are an important part of who we are, and hence part of what needs to be understood in order to understand ourselves.

Olson's project and that of providing an integrated account of what we are that is not just an account of what the words *we* and *I* refer to are not in competition with each other. Both can be pursued. As we have seen, before theories of the self began to fragment at the beginning of the twentieth century, William James worked heroically to put together an integrated account of the self. In light of specialized progress in different approaches to self made since James's time, we can see that there are problems with his account. Is there any prospect for an integrated theory that avoids these problems?

It seems to us that an integrated theory of the self, were one feasible, would have to consider three major dimensions of selves, which we will call the *experiential* dimension, the *ontological* dimension, and the *social* dimension (see Martin and Barresi 2006: esp. chs. 12–14; Seigel 2005; Wiggins 1987). Each of these dimensions focuses on an aspect of self that can be viewed as independent of the others, but can also be seen to be interdependent. Each typically plays a central and sometimes singular role in theories of self, often in different disciplines.

The focus of the experiential dimension is on the first-person experience of self, not with regard to what we can infer about what sort of thing, other than experience, the self might be, but on what our experience of the self is actually like. For whatever else we are, within a common culture, and to a great extent even across cultures, people tend to experience themselves in certain characteristic ways, almost always ones that differ dramatically from the ways that non-human animals experience themselves. An integrated account of the self should take note of these characteristic ways in which humans experience themselves. What is important in such an account is not whether one acknowledges *metaphysically* the existence of experience, or even whether one concludes ultimately that the self itself is real or illusory, but whether one explains what human experiences of self are like and the role that they play in human lives.

The ontological dimension focuses not on experience but on what kind of thing or process the self is, if it exists at all. Descartes's answer was that we are a thinking, immaterial substance—the soul of Christian tradition. Subsequent theorists about mind often agreed with him that the self is a thinking thing, but they viewed the self or mind as a material substance, or as a function or process of a material substance. Currently, in our view, the human self is most appropriately thought of as something that is either an organism or constituted by an organism.

The third dimension is the social dimension. Individual humans relate socially to each other in unique ways unparalleled in any other species. How? And to what

effect, so far as the humans and their conception of themselves are concerned? Included in this dimension will be the general role that social interaction beginning in infancy plays in self-awareness and in the developmental origins of self-concepts. But it also deals with narrative accounts of self-identity, social responsibilities, practical ethical principles, and ideals of the good life that we eventually form as adults. Ultimately, the social dimension is essential to our understanding of ourselves as selves and as persons and is the basis for the rich understanding of self that is unique to our species.

Most current theorists are materialists and think of the organism and its brain as the basis for all experience of self. For those who accept this view as their starting point, ~~for the purpose of providing an integrated view of the self it is not necessary~~ to determine whether the self should be analyzed ontologically in a neo-Lockean or materialist way, but rather how the experiential and social dimensions connect to the material basis of self in the organism.

This new question is not the traditional mind–body problem, but one that already presupposes an integration of the experiential and social in an embodied self. The self is taken here as a unified organic individual extended in time, and the question is more about how that individual experiences its selfhood, including identification of the brain and body mechanisms that produce these experiences, insofar as we can figure this out through cognitive science and neuroscience. It also includes how the first-person perspective of self develops in the individual's life history. Important, with respect to this latter issue, is the role that social existence and other individuals play in the development of self-consciousness.

In the hints toward a theoretical framework that we are proposing, the human organism should be acknowledged to be the primary source of unity for human selves. Under normal circumstances the life history of the biological individual gives the self not only an objectively verifiable unique identity that persists through time, but a site for a variety of processes involving the other two dimensions of self to occur. This cannot be said for the other two dimensions. Under normal conditions, both the experiential and social dimensions of self depend on the existence of organic individuals as the basis for the self as defined by these other dimensions.

In addition, the issue of self-unity is less of a problem if the organic dimension is taken as primary than if the experiential or social dimensions are taken as primary. The issue of the identity of self over time is a problem regardless of which dimension is taken as primary. But the issue of identity over time can await the provision of an integrated theory of the self. An integrated theory does not presuppose an answer to the hypothetical puzzles that bedevil the question of self-identity over time. And an answer to those questions does not yield an integrated theory. So, the two projects can proceed apace, aware of developments in the other, but not dependent on the resolution of all puzzles in the other.



There may be better ways to define the dimensions of self that need to be brought together to form an integrated theory of self, and the dimensions that we have proposed might be reduced to eliminate the non-essential or expanded to be more inclusive. Our aim has merely been to show that there is nothing inevitable about the theoretical fragmentation of the notion of self. Admittedly theorizing in the last half of the twentieth century made it seem as if fragmentation were the only game in town. But it seems to us that integration is also an option.

Even so, it should be conceded that if one steps back and looks at Western theorizing about the self and personal identity as a whole and asks what it means that theory took the course that it did, from the earliest beginnings of theory in the West, what seems clear is that, until the last half of the twentieth century, most thinkers tried to elevate the self—the ‘I’—to an exalted status. The soul was created importantly for this purpose, and when the soul ceased to be useful, the unified self was called in to fill the void. Seemingly very different notions, but essentially the same game: to show that the self—the I—is a demigod of sorts, reigning unopposed over its domain, the human person. From a selfish point of view, much of what matters most to humankind was linked to this demigod: one’s essence, free will, consciousness, personal survival, the defeat of death. What the history of theory makes all too apparent is that there has been a persistent effort, from beginning to end, to make this case—to show that a unified self is a secure repository of many of humankind’s most glorious conceits and aspirations. And what that history also shows is that, in the face of continuing scientific development, the case for many of these conceits and aspirations cannot be made.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, science undermined the soul. The self was recruited to take its place, including providing unity and direction to the human person, as well as being the vehicle for persistence both during life and after bodily death. In effect, science took the I, as soul, out of heaven and in the guise of a unified self brought it down to earth. Like the soul, the self was to be the source of unity, power, freedom, control, and persistence. But the fly in the ointment was analysis. So, soon enough what had been one—the I—became many. What had been real became fiction. And what had been a source of explanations became itself in need of explanation. Analysis has been the self’s undoing. In sum, the story of Western theorizing about the self and personal identity is both the story of humankind’s attempt to elevate itself above the rest of the natural world and the story of how that attempt has failed. It is another saga, as if another were needed, of how pride goeth before the fall.

As a fragmented, explained, and illusory phenomenon, the self can no longer regain its elevated status. Even so, the notion of self is too important for personal and social purposes to just go away. The question, it seems to us, is not how best to get along without it, but how best to think about it—that is, not how best to think about it *instead of* the ways theorists in various disciplines are thinking about it, but how best to *integrate* what is central in those ways.



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