Persons: Understanding Psychological Selfhood and Agency

Jack Martin · Jeff H. Sugarman ·
Sarah Hickinbottom

Persons: Understanding Psychological Selfhood and Agency

Jack Martin
Simon Fraser University
Department of Psychology
8888 University Drive
Bumaby BC V5A 1S6
Canada
jack_martin@sfu.ca

Jeff H. Sugarman
Simon Fraser University
Fac. Education
8888 University Drive
Bumaby BC V5A 1S6
Canada
sugarman@sfu.ca

Sarah Hickinbottom
Kwantlen Polytechnic University
Department of Learning Communities
12666-72nd Avenue
Surrey BC V3W 2MB
Canada
sarah.hickinbottom@kwantlen.ca

ISBN 978-1-4419-1064-6 e-ISBN 978-1-4419-1065-3
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-1065-3
Springer New York Dordrecht Heidelberg London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2009935338

© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010
All rights reserved. This work may not be translated or copied in whole or in part without the written permission of the publisher (Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, 233 Spring Street, New York, NY 10013, USA), except for brief excerpts in connection with reviews or scholarly analysis. Use in connection with any form of information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed is forbidden.
The use in this publication of trade names, trademarks, service marks, and similar terms, even if they are not identified as such, is not to be taken as an expression of opinion as to whether or not they are subject to proprietary rights.

Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

Preface

The discipline of psychology is primarily concerned with understanding human action and experience for the purpose of bettering the lives of persons both individually and collectively. However, for the most part, psychologists have given little attention to the question of what a person is. Rather, in the attempt to achieve the precision and control of the natural sciences, much mainstream psychology, perhaps somewhat unreflectively, has adopted a materialist perspective that considers all psychological phenomena to be reducible to underlying biological and neurophysical substrates and/or computational and psychometric models. The challenge to this view in recent years launched by social constructionist thinkers (e.g., Gergen, 1985; Shotter, 1993), who reject the notion of fixed, essential selves in favor of an interpretive self that derives meaning from the sociocultural and historical traditions and practices in which it is embedded, overcomes many of the difficulties associated with biophysical and computational forms of reductionism. Yet, this alternative may be no less problematic.

When one considers that the ability to make choices and act on these choices to impact one's own life and the lives of others is the most distinctive feature of personhood, it becomes clear that neither essentialist nor constructionist approaches provide an adequate account of psychological phenomena. From the essentialist view, our experience of selfhood and agency is illusory, reducible to biological foundations. From the constructionist view, our experience of selfhood and agency is merely a fiction, determined by cultural scripts that might have easily been otherwise. Either way, the reality of psychological phenomena is dismissed as reducible to underlying biological or sociocultural determinants. Consequently, it becomes questionable just what, if any, role psychology has to play in furthering understanding about the human condition.

This volume represents the efforts of theoretical and philosophical psychologists Jack Martin and Jeff Sugarman to resuscitate a psychology of personhood. Martin and Sugarman retrieve ontological questions from obscurity with the aim of formulating a viable conception of persons that retains their most distinctive features, and explore the implications of their account for disciplinary psychology and other domains that call for adequate conceptions of personhood and selfhood. Persons, Martin and Sugarman argue, arise from, but are irreducible to, their biological and sociocultural constituents. To support this argument, Martin and Sugarman provide

a unique synthesis of philosophy and psychology in the form of a developmental account of a self with biological capacities for prereflective thought and action that is thrown into the world and, as it develops, appropriates the linguistic and relational practices of the pre-existing sociocultural context to structure thought and transform its mode of being from prereflective actor to reflective, intentional agent. Such genuine psychological beings require a biophysical body, but are not reducible to it. They are shaped by the sociocultural practices in which they are embedded, but they are not fully determined by them. Perhaps more importantly, such psychological agents are real in that they exert influence on their own lives and the lives of others and can contribute to and change the sociocultural traditions and practices within which they emerge.

The work is structured in three parts that reflect the progression of Martin and Sugarman's thoughts. Part I, *A Theory of Persons and Selves for Psychology*, introduces the problem that instigated this corpus of work and provides the reader with a detailed account of Martin and Sugarman's developmental ontology of psychological phenomena, as well as an exploration of the implications of this perspective for political thought. Part II, *Human Agency and the Irreducibility of Persons*, offers a sustained examination of two aspects of Martin and Sugarman's theory. First, drawing on philosopher Charles Taylor's claim that personhood consists in relation to moral goods and commitments, the ways in which Martin and Sugarman's theory can clarify this relation and its implications for understanding moral agency are explored. The question of irreducibility is then tackled through systematic examination of theories of emergence and the proposal of a "levels of reality" approach that demonstrates persons are both substantively and relationally emergent within a biological and sociocultural world. Following the articulation of these two aspects of Martin and Sugarman's theory, the section is brought to conclusion with a review of the work of Scottish philosopher John Macmurray. This alternative, yet compatible, developmental conception of persons as irreducible agents emphasizes the importance of action, rather than reflection, as the appropriate starting point for psychological theorizing. Such a position is shown to challenge nativist psychological theories that view human relations as secondary to biology, developmental stages, psychological capacities, or social categories. In Part III, *Perspectives, Selves, and Persons*, the examination of the ways in which psychological theory and inquiry may be informed by philosophy is extended through reviewing theoretical accounts of perspective taking (e.g., those contained in the work of George Herbert Mead, William James, and others). It is suggested that the construal of self as perspectival has implications for the training of psychologists, understanding moral deliberation and moral problem solving, education, and developmental inquiry.

For those familiar with Heidegger's ontology of being, Vygotsky's developmental theory, Macmurray's philosophy of the personal, Mead's fallible perspectivism, or philosopher Charles Taylor's claims about the moral nature of selfhood, these ideas will cover some familiar territory. What will be unique is the coherent synthesis of these disparate views into a viable ontological account for psychology. It is an argument that is at once philosophical and psychological. Moreover, it is

a perspective that demonstrates the rich possibilities that arise for psychological inquiry when theory is philosophically informed. The way in which this is done can breathe new life into a discipline that has become overly focused on technique, method, and formulaic accounts of human action and experience. The psychology endorsed here is an interpretive psychology that is cognizant of the emergent, yet irreducible, nature of persons, selves, and agency. Following the hermeneutic tradition, such a psychology accepts the perspectival nature of understanding but rejects the strongly relativistic conclusions that some have drawn from such acceptance. Thus, this approach will be of interest to those concerned about ethnocentrism in psychology and the need to develop approaches that are more appropriate to our increasingly globalized world. Such a psychology also involves a radical reconceptualization of theories of mind, behavior, morality, politics, and education. While readers may not agree with every aspect of this view, they are certain to come away from this volume with a fresh perspective on psychological research and theory, and the unique contributions psychology can make in attempts to better understand the human condition.

Acknowledgements

Some of the ideas expressed in this book have been articulated previously, although somewhat differently by Jack Martin and/or Jeff Sugarman in articles in the *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* (2003, 2005), *Theory & Psychology* (2005), *New Ideas in Psychology* (2003), *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* (2006), and in chapters in the volumes *Between chance and choice*, edited by Harald Atmanspacher and Robert Bishop (Imprints Academic, 2002), *About psychology*, edited by Darryl Hill and Michael Kral (SUNY press, 2003), *Studies of how the mind publicly enfolds into being*, edited by William Smythe and Angelina Baydala (SUNY Press, 2004), and *Social life and social knowledge*, edited by Ulrich Muller, Jeremy Carpendale, Nancy Budwig, and Bryan Sokol (Lawrence Erlbaum, 2008) . We thank Imprints Academic, SUNY Press, Lawrence Erlbaum, Wiley-Blackwell, Sage, Elsevier, and APA Journals for generously granting permission to reprint some of this work here.

Contents

Part I A Theory of Persons and Selves for Psychology

1 Introduction: The Problem of Selves and Persons in Psychology . . . 3
A Brief, Selective History of Persons and Selves . . . 10
Plato to Locke . . . 10
After Locke . . . 16
Psychology's Hobbesian Legacy . . . 19
Hobbes' Compatibilist View of Human Agency . . . 20
Problematic Aspects of Psychology's Hobbesian Legacy . . . 21

2 A Theory of Self and Personhood for Psychology . . . 27
A Brief Conceptualization of Personhood . . . 27
A Developmental Theory of Situated, Agentive Personhood . . . 28
Our Developmental Theory . . . 33
Self as a Kind of Understanding that Discloses and Extends Particular Being Within Traditions of Living . . . 36
Possible Challenges to Conceptualizing the Self as an Understanding . . . 38
Implications for Understanding Human Agency . . . 40
Concluding Remarks . . . 42

3 The Political Disposition of Self as a Kind of Understanding . . . 45
Liberal and Communitarian Dispositions of Self . . . 46
The Political Disposition of Self as a Kind of Understanding . . . 50

Part II Human Agency and the Irreducibility of Persons

4 Persons and Moral Agency . . . 57
Taylor's Critique of Naturalism . . . 58
Moral Ontology . . . 59
Personhood in Question . . . 63
Taylor's Moral Ontology in Question . . . 65

Persons and Moral Agency: A Psychological Perspective 67
Conclusion 70

5 Emergent Persons 73
Examples and Claims of Recent Emergentist Theorizing in Psychology 75
Shared and Disputed Claims 77
An Emergent Ontology of Persons 79
Reductionism Versus Emergence 79
Additional Assumptions Concerning the Emergence of Psychological Persons 80
Levels of Reality 82
Phylogenesis 82
Ontogenesis 84
Concluding Comment 85

6 John Macmurray's Philosophy of the Personal and the Irreducibility of Persons 87
Human Agency and the Form of the Personal 88
Human Relations and the Form of the Personal 90
Implications for a Psychology of the Personal 96

Part III Perspectives, Selves, and Persons

7 Real Perspectival Selves 103
Against Strong Naturalism and the Illusory Self 104
Against Strong Constructionism and the Fictional Self 106
The Perspectival Self 109
The Developmental Emergence of the Perspectival Self 111
What is Real? 113
Conclusion 116

8 Perspectival Selves in Interaction with Others: Re-reading G.H. Mead's Social Psychology 117
Mead's Theory of Perspectives: Sociality and Agentive Selfhood . . 119
Mead's Dialectic of Self and Other 125
Engagement with Others: A Neo-Meadian Perspective 127
Conclusions 135

9 Perspectives and Persons: Ontological, Constitutive Possibilities 137
Perspective Taking, Perspectives, and Persons 138
Perspectives and Persons: A Selection of Extant Formulations . . . 143
Practices, Perspectives, and Persons 148
Some Possibilities for the Study and Promotion of Perspective Taking 150
Conclusion 152

10 The Psychology of Persons: An Idea Whose Time Has Come (Again) 155
Conceptualizing Persons 156
The Coordinating Activity and Interactivity of Embodied, Embedded, and Emergent Persons 158
Phylogenesis 159
Ontogenesis 162
Agency as the Self-Determination of Persons 164
Further Ontological and Epistemological Considerations 165
The Psychology of Persons: Today and Yesterday 170
Toward a Psychology of Coordination: The Emergence and Transformation of Persons 172

Afterword 175

References 179

Index 189

Part I
A Theory of Persons and Selves for Psychology

Chapter 1
Introduction: The Problem of Selves and Persons in Psychology

> It must be some one impression that gives rise to every real idea. But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are supposed to have a reference. If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same through the whole course of our lives, since self is supposed to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable.... It cannot, therefore, be from any impression... that the idea of self is derived, and consequently there is no such idea. (David Hume, *A treatise of human nature*, 1963, p. 173)

Most of us have a somewhat inconsistent attitude toward our being selves and persons. On the one hand, we frequently act as if there is nothing that is more real or true about our lives than the seemingly obvious fact that we exist as thinking, feeling individuals. Indeed, so powerful does this idea seem that René Descartes (1960) established an entire philosophical tradition based on it. On the other hand, most of us experience at least occasional difficulties in determining exactly who we are, what we want, and what makes for a meaningful life, and not infrequently describe such difficulties as stemming from problems of knowing our true selves or the kind of person we really are. To complicate matters, what we mean by "self" or "person" is not at all straightforward, and most of us would experience considerable difficulty in giving a clear and consistent definition of these terms. Nonetheless, we mostly believe that it is important to understand and feel good about who and what we are as selves and persons as a prerequisite to doing and living well. And, despite difficulties of definition and accessibility to what we might regard as our true selves or the kind of person we are, the possibility that we might not have selves at all or exist as persons would seem more than passing strange to most of us.

Compounding the problem of self and personal knowledge, it increasingly has become apparent that the configuring of persons and selves is far from universal. Mounting interpretations of the historical record (e.g., MacIntyre, 1981; Reiss, 2003; Seigel, 2005; Taylor, 1989) and anthropological evidence (e.g., Harris, 1989; Skinner, Pach III, & Holland, 1998; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; White, 1992) reveal that persons and the ways in which they have understood, articulated, and expressed their subjectivity vary widely throughout history and across cultures. In fact, the term "self" did not enter the English language until the fourteenth century, and the distinctively modern notion of an inner self as an autonomous center of experience,

J. Martin et al., *Persons: Understanding Psychological Selfhood and Agency*,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4419-1065-3_1, © Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2010

capable of retreating from its own immediate activity through reason and reflection to arrive at knowledge of itself and the world, is much more recent.

For the ancient Greeks and right up until the late middle ages, society, family, the material world, and the divine were not seen as conditions external to individual persons. They were not optional, accidental, or matters of one's own choosing, but rather aspects of existence central to human life. These were the substance of a person's constitution—what he/she was. Reasoning and knowing were not self-initiated processes, but rather meant identifying oneself among the reasons and knowledge already and ever present in the universe. The Socratic injunction to "Know thyself" is best interpreted as advice to know one's place in the scheme of things. For Socrates and Plato, self-knowledge was a matter of understanding one's role in a cosmological order, in part by attempting to interpret the ideals for human functioning believed inherent in that order. It was not a matter of turning inward so as to be one's self, but of comprehending one's place and function within preordained contexts. In a somewhat similar vein, what the comic figure of Polonius is really telling us in the context of Shakespeare's Hamlet is that we should be true to ourselves so that we might be true to others. There is no suggestion that being true to one's self is possible in inner isolation or desirable as an end in itself.

History is populated by a variety of personhoods and selfhoods. However, over the past 50 years, anthropologists and other cross-cultural researchers have encountered notable cases of contemporary peoples whose versions of person and self are composed much differently from those of Western modernity. For instance, Mageo (1998) describes the Samoans as showing muted interest in the subtleties of individuals' thoughts, feelings, and volitions, which they subsume under a single term, *loto*. Not only do they eschew distinctions among mental functions and processes, but moreover, they tend to dismiss even the possibility of subjective knowledge. Their actions are not interpreted as expressions of an individual private self, but rather as manifesting the state of a person's relationships with others. For the Samoans, the substance of all things, including people, is characterized by their *aga*, which translated means "nature" in the sense of essential character. However, *aga* also means "personal," which, for them, refers to a social mask or role. According to the Samoans, it is the performance of roles—positioning in a social order and relations with others—and not an inner subjective life that defines a person's nature.

The Newar of Kathmandu also interpret personhood as the enactment of culturally prescribed roles. Parish (1994) describes how for the Newar, one is a person by virtue of fulfilling ritual obligations stipulated by one's position in a moral order. While the Newar have no equivalent for the English "self," what accounts for the elements of subjective experience is believed to reside in the heart. The heart is the source of thoughts, memories, emotions, and the impetus for action. However, these functions of the heart are considered transcendent. They are linked to Hindu religious beliefs and hold sacred and moral significance. According to the Newar, gods not only inhabit the world, but also reside in the human heart. However, Narayana or Bhagaban, the heart god, is not simply the Newar's positing of the source for an individual's subjectivity. It embodies and conjures the divine moral order within

and commands moral duty. The Newar believe that fulfilling one's moral duty, or dharma, is that which makes us distinctively human.

Clearly there is an argument to be made that those such as the Samoans and Newar are no less individual actors than persons of Western cultures and that it is misleading to characterize them as simply conforming passively with expected roles. An equally plausible account is that their constitution and orientation as persons is no more social or less individual than that of Westerners, and, as agents, all individuals actively attempt to create a coherent autobiography within the constraints of cultural scripts (Sökefeld, 1999). Nonetheless, what these various examples are intended to show is that an historically and cross-culturally informed approach to the study of persons draws attention to the importance of historical, cultural, social, spiritual, political, and physical contexts in which persons and their subjectivities are located and produced. Further, it cautions against attributing a universal form of self to all persons.

In both evolutionary and historical terms, the story of the self is a surprisingly recent one. The species *Homo* first appeared approximately 2 million years ago, with our particular subspecies, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, arriving on the scene some 125,000 years ago. Sapient humans displayed significant biophysical changes from their ancestors, especially in the brain and vocal tract, which helped make them uniquely "culture capable" (Donald, 2001). From primitive cultural beginnings, they invented important tools and crafted objects, including weapons, boats, complex dwellings, simple musical instruments, and several kinds of self-adornment. Spoken language and the oral culture that attended it were, of course, the most significant of the accomplishments of early *Homo sapiens*.

Approximately 40,000 years ago, human language and cognition began to be driven by culture and technology itself. Subsequently, and very recently, cultural storage devices such as books, museums, computing and measuring tools, clocks, and calendars developed as external aids to our thinking, remembering, and organized acting. Such devices gradually provided cultural liberation from more biological consciousness and memory and provided new options for thinking and acting. But there is little evidence that such a culturally supported, linguistically aided consciousness quickly manifested in contemporary Western forms of self-consciousness per se.

As recently as the time of the Homeric epic works, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in the eighth or ninth century B.C.E., there is little to suggest the self as a center of experiencing, reflecting, and acting. For example, early in the *Iliad*, when Achilles addresses the Greek army that has been besieging Troy for 9 years, and is ravaged by death from fighting and plague, it is the goddess Hera who puts into his mind the words he speaks. Nonetheless, by the sixth century B.C.E., Buddha had begun to attribute human thoughts to our experiences, and Confucius was stressing the power of thought and choice that lay within each person (e.g., "A man can command his principles: principles do not master the man"). Shortly thereafter, the Greek philosophers initiated the idea central to Western thought that human beings could examine, comprehend, and ultimately control their own thoughts, emotions, and actions.

From the time of Plato and Socrates, the Western intellectual tradition has claimed a unique personal existence for each human being. However, the modern idea that the self can be known empirically (in the manner assumed by contemporary social science) appears much later, typically being attributed to John Locke in his seminal, *Essay concerning human understanding*, which first appeared in 1690. Here, Locke treats the core of the individual human being as an observable natural phenomenon. In this work, Locke asks the question, how do I know that I am the same person I was in the past? His answer, in terms of a continuity of consciousness accessible through one's experiential memory, is in many ways a typically modern psychological response and one that we shall examine in greater detail in the fifth chapter of this book.

So, the kind of self that now is taken for granted by most modern individuals proves to be a very recent invention indeed. It seems almost impossible to imagine that the vast majority of persons who have lived on earth have not been consumed by those questions of self-worth, self-awareness, self-fulfillment, and self-control that have come to dominate contemporary life. However, this simple historical fact also points to the possibility of living our lives without such heightened self-concern. Today, we sometimes seem to have taken the Socratic and Quixotic injunction to know ourselves all too literally. The media-hyped "me" generation may have come and gone, but popular culture seems fixated on issues of self and personal identity. Socially and politically, we demand recognition for our apparently unique perspectives and ways of life, both as individuals and as groups. Consequently, self-studies have become a major cinematic, scholarly, therapeutic, publishing, and commercial enterprise, even as some intellectuals (including many postmodernists, philosophers, and scientists) declare the alleged death of the self to a growing market of the self-absorbed.

In challenging the existence of the self, such contemporaries give new voice to concerns that frequently have attended the Western tradition of selfhood. For example, in the eighteenth century, the Scottish skeptical philosopher, David Hume (1963), not only disagreed with the idea of the self as an agent capable of exercising radically free will, but went so far as to challenge the very existence of the self. In his famous *Treatise of Human Nature* (from which the opening citation of this introduction is taken), Hume acknowledged that we have experiences, memories, imagination, and an idea of personal identity. However, he denied that our manifestation of any of these capabilities or our holding of this idea warranted the postulation of an entity lying behind them, in the manner supposed by John Locke (1995) and others. Through our experiences, memories, and imagination, we create a sense of identity that does not exist in any of these impressions themselves. Thus, we have experience, but no coherent idea of the experiencer of these experiences. The self or person as experiencer is an illusion that is to be resisted if we are to fashion a straightforward account of the world and our place within it. Today, Hume's skepticism has attracted a wide variety of adherents, including many scientifically inclined analytic philosophers, cognitive scientists, and some, more generally skeptical, postmodern social constructionists. Although not typically aligned in their views, and for quite different reasons, they share a deep skepticism concerning the reality of

selves and persons. At its most basic, this book is a reaction to this skepticism and, more specifically, its various manifestations in psychology.

Personhood and related terms, such as "being" and "agency," have not commonly been employed in mainstream disciplinary psychology. However, terms like "self" and "identity" saturate much of the past and contemporary literature. Of these latter terms, "self" is especially salient. Just how salient is evidenced by the results of a recent (2008) search of the PsycINFO database. According to this search, 81,779 articles containing the word "self" in their titles were published in psychology between 1909 and 2008. Of these, 30,432 appeared between 1999 and 2008 and more than 10,000 appeared in each of the 1970s and 1980s. The 1960s, as might be expected, ushered in the accelerating growth in "self" publications (with 2,964 such articles) that has continued ever since.

With all of this publishing on the topic, it might be supposed that psychologists have come to an agreed understanding of what the self is or, at the very least, have given considerable attention to conceptual issues of this kind. Unfortunately, for the most part, nothing could be further from the truth. For much of the twentieth century, the most influential theoretical work on the self within psychology was the single chapter, "The Consciousness of Self," published by William James (1890) in his *Principles of psychology*. Only more recently have psychologists like Baumeister (1986), Cushman (1995), Danziger (1997a), Freeman (1993), Gergen (1991), Harter (1999), Markus and Nurius (1986), McAdams (1997), Neisser and Fivush (1994), Neisser and Jopling (1998), Paranjpe (1998), Schiebe (1998), and Singer and Salovey (1993) returned to the task of seriously theorizing the self. This task had been mostly abandoned during the reign of behaviorism in the early to middle part of the twentieth century in American psychology, despite several notable attempts by some analytically (e.g., Kohut, 1977) and humanistically inclined psychologists (e.g., Rogers, 1959, 1961) among a few others (e.g., Goffman, 1959; Lecky, 1945; Mead, 1934) to attend carefully to such matters.

Despite this upsurge, however, the vast majority of psychological inquiries purporting to be concerned with the self remain startlingly atheoretical. In lieu of rigorous conceptual investigations aimed at clarifying what the self might be, one is confronted by empirical study after empirical study employing operational indicators of self-concept, self-esteem, self-regulation, and self-efficacy with little apparent concern for the ontological status of the "self" in these hyphenated expressions. Indeed, outside of the informative work of a relatively few contemporary theorists of the psychological self, such as those just referenced, the student of psychology who wishes to know what a self, let alone a person, might be finds little assistance in the psychological literature.

Like many other theoretical and philosophical psychologists (e.g., Danziger, 1997a; Paranjpe, 1998; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999), we suspect that mainstream psychologists have overlooked the important task of theorizing central concepts such as "persons" and "selves" because they are not considered properly scientific. Since the latter half of the twentieth century, scientific naturalism has been understood as the doctrine that explanations appropriate to natural science should explain all phenomena. In effect, this strong naturalism identifies the physical

world with the real world and treats what cannot be expressed in physical scientific terms as illusory. Scientific naturalism concerns the study of things in the world, but “person” and “self,” by definition, designate those features of human beings that distinguish them from mere things. Consequently, many psychologists view concepts such as “person” and “self” as beyond the ken of legitimate psychological study, falling instead to the province of philosophical speculation or humanistic consideration. For this reason, the task of sustained conceptualization of personhood, selfhood, and other psychological phenomena (in contrast to the provision of narrow operational definitions) is mostly neglected.

We believe that the widespread failure of psychologists to attend conceptually and ontologically to what they attempt to study is problematic in at least two respects. First, as many philosophers of social science (e.g., Gadamer, 1960/1995; Taylor, 1989) have pointed out, when we attempt to study humans in the manner prescribed by the kind of naturalism that has come to pervade much scientific thinking in the modern era, we shrink the vocabulary and reach of psychological discourse in ways that exclude significant and unique features of persons. While there is widespread agreement that humans ought to be considered part of nature, there is something distinctive about persons. We describe and comprehend ourselves with terms not applied to other things. Persons bear certain rights and responsibilities. They are capable of making choices, of reason and reflection, of originating their own purposes, and of acting in light of their choices and reasons. As authors of their actions, they are held morally accountable for what they do and are justly deserving of praise or blame. There are features of persons that separate them from other kinds of things, and it would be difficult to make our lives intelligible in the absence of such a distinction. “Person” and “self” name a particular kind of existence, one that is assumed unique to beings like us. By reducing persons to their physical or biological constituents in an attempt to meet the demands of a naturalist paradigm, psychologists strip humans of what matters to them most and render explanations of human action and experience that are distorted and malformed, if not wholly alien.

Second, in the absence of sustained conceptual and ontological inquiry regarding the appropriate domains of psychological inquiry, psychologists often fail to grasp the broader sociopolitical implications of their work (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008). Critical psychologists (e.g., Prilleltensky, 1994; Sloan, 2000), psychological historians (e.g., Cushman, 1995; Danziger, 1997a, 1997b; Herman, 1995), and others charting psychology’s influence (e.g., Hacking, 1995; Pfister, 1999; Rose, 1996) have detailed ways in which disciplinary psychology, in its practice and research, has enormous social impact. It is clearly evident that since the beginning of the twentieth century, contemporary Westerners increasingly have come to understand themselves through the discursive lenses of psychology. It is in psychological terms that we now understand our wants and desires, assess our capabilities, address our deficiencies, shape our lifestyles, choose our partners, conduct our relationships, and parent and educate our children. The flood of psychological manuals shows few, if any, matters of personal life left untouched by psychological expertise and discussed and explained in psychological vocabulary. Moreover, given that Western systems of liberal and social democracy are animated by conceptions of the individual person

and his/her rights and responsibilities, the way in which disciplinary psychology conceives of and understands personhood has important implications beyond the confines of individual psychology (Fairfield, 2000; Rose, 1996).

The general purpose of the chapters comprising this volume is to recover ground that has been lost in psychology as the result of a failure to conceptualize adequately the appropriate domain of psychological study. The significance of such a project resides in the fact that unless it can be demonstrated that at least some features of human psychology are ontologically unique (i.e., irreducible, solely or in combination, to physical, biological, or sociocultural properties), psychology has no distinctive subject matter of its own and can readily be absorbed by fields of inquiry judged more fundamental to the constitution of psychological subject matter (e.g., neurophysiology, evolutionary biology, computational science, and cultural studies). It is our view that personhood is the ontologically distinctive subject matter of psychology and that an account of personhood of the kind advanced in this volume is necessary to reclaiming a properly psychological discipline.

In the account we set forth, person, self, and agency become interrelated aspects of a theoretical reconfiguring of human psychology. We understand persons to be embodied, reasoning, and moral agents with self-consciousness and self-understanding, as well as social and psychological identity, who have unique capabilities of language use and are distinctively culture capable. As will become apparent, the psychology of personhood developed herein emphasizes worldly activity and interactivity that seeds the emergence of unique forms of intersubjectivity and self-reflexivity that constitute the self-understanding, moral and rational agency, and social and psychological identity of persons. In contrast to currently dominant cognitive and biological approaches to psychological theory, research, and practice, attention to the worldly activity and interactivity of situated human agents focuses attention on relations and coordinated activity rather than individual cognitive and/or neurophysiological processes. When such relations and coordinated agentive interactivity are recognized as crucial and indispensible constituents of personhood, the emergence of persons as unique ontological entities within evolutionary, historical, and developmental contexts and trajectories can be identified and interpreted.

An account of this kind is a radical departure from most extant cognitive and neurophysiological theorizing about human nature, psychological capabilities, and possibilities. By granting priority to action and interaction over reflection, and coordination over biophysical imposition, the relations, coordinations, and interactivity of agentive persons acting in the world are revealed as the fundamental condition of human psychological life. We take the widespread neglect in psychology of these features of personal existence as a particularly problematic consequence of specious divisions between mind and body, persons and world, and biophysical and sociocultural aspects of our psychology that, in turn, have resulted from dualistic and naturalistic assumptions implicit in much Western and psychological thought.

In this introductory chapter, we now wish to turn to a brief and selective historical overview of personhood, selfhood, and human agency in order to assist the reader

in locating the roots of the many tacit, unquestioned assumptions about persons and selves that pervade contemporary psychology.

A Brief, Selective History of Persons and Selves

Plato to Locke

A common concern for the Greek philosophers, from the pre-Socratics to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, was how *nous* (which they considered to be soul or mind or both) could be so seemingly intangible, an entity yet be connected to the body. Some pre-Socratics, like Protagoras, viewed perception as the sole source of knowledge and held highly solipsistic views to the effect that truth was specific to individual perceivers (man is the measure of all things). Democritus (c.460–c.370 B.C.E.) attempted to explain perception by an early and erroneous atomic theory by claiming that every object implants images of itself on the atoms of the air that travel to the eye, and thus to the soul, of the beholder.

Such early theories of perception were denied by Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.) and Plato (427–347 B.C.E.), who claimed the soul itself, not perception, as the source of all knowledge because of its access to abstracted, idealized, and universal forms. Knowledge of such forms (from perfect triangles to ideals of beauty and truth) was not a matter of experiencing but of reasoning that allows discovery of the knowledge of forms that exists within our souls. Soul and mind are one with the world of forms that the Gods share with man. It is this idealized world that possesses a reality far surpassing that of our everyday experience, in which we live the existence of cave dwellers who confuse their shadowy world with the real world of ideas. With such thoughts, divisions of the world into matter and mind, appearance and reality, and reason and sense perception were initiated—all of which subsequently have exercised enormous influence on our search for self-understanding.

Interestingly, Plato also introduced a tripartite conception of the embodied soul that in many ways predates the later, highly influential theories of Freud. In the *Phaedrus*, he says that the three levels of the soul (reason, spirit, and appetite) must achieve a kind of harmony if the good is to be attained. Here, Plato uses the metaphor of a team of two steeds and a driver to represent the soul. One horse that is lively but obedient (spirit) and another that is unruly (appetite) are yoked and driven by a charioteer (reason) who succeeds, with effort, in assisting them to cooperate.

Plato's most famous pupil, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) eventually came to contradict much of what he had learned from Plato and, in so doing, returned to the pre-Socratic thesis of perception as the source of knowledge and mind, but with several new twists. For Aristotle, the soul is the form of a natural body that possesses life potentiality. It is the directing force of a living organism that fulfills the body's potential for life. Unlike Plato, Aristotle considered sense perceptions not as illusory but as essential raw material that yielded knowledge when entered into thought. In opposition to the strongly dualistic thinking of Plato, Aristotle promoted a more

integrated view in which a sense of personal existence and knowledge emerge from the interaction of human bodies and souls with a material and social world. While not denying the Gods, Aristotle gave much greater force to our everyday, worldly involvement as the primary source of our knowledge and experience.

Further, because the soul consists of both rational and emotional parts, the virtuous person must learn to align the emotions with reason in order to determine what is right with respect to conduct. Through practice and habit, it is possible to feel emotions appropriately, so that virtue consists in experiencing the right emotion to the right degree in any given situation. The interesting fact about Aristotle's virtue ethics is that appropriate conduct is not a matter of searching self-reflection but of habituation that requires no modern psychological self in constant observance of one's conduct from behind the scenes.

It was Aristotle's student, Alexander the Great, whose quest for a universal empire spread Greek thought throughout the world. Alexander's death initiated a period of intense and disturbing social change that stretched to Octavian's (the future Emperor Augustus') final conquest of Egypt in 30 B.C. E. and marked the initiation of the *pax Romana*. This was a time during which the peoples of the Mediterranean sought to escape disturbance by separating themselves from the world and attending to those immediate matters that seemed more within their control, including the tending of their own souls (Nussbaum, 1994). Epicurus (341–270 B.C.E.) advocated a withdrawal from the world to a life of friendship and philosophical reflection. Epicureans sought the simple life, devoid of strong passions, and attempted to limit their dependence on others and institutions beyond their immediate circle. The Stoics like Epictetus (50–130) went several steps further, joining their counsel of abstinence and acceptance to a doctrine of foreordained destiny, in which the only control available to human beings was a mental one. "Do not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do happen" (Epictetus, c.92/1983, p. 13). The Stoics calmly endured the inconveniences and pains of the world because of their belief in a living, divine universe in the process of working through an ultimately rational and good plan.

In many ways, with their emphases on everyday life and personal devotion, the Epicureans and Stoics paved the way for early Christian thought. Eventually, Christianity began to attract more and more followers during the time of the Roman Empire and gradually replaced older pagan religions as well as competitor religions from the New East. With respect to personal existence, an intriguing problem that confronted early Christians was how to come to terms with classical philosophy. It is in this context that the writings and teachings of St. Augustine take on particular importance. Augustine (354–430) can be understood as one of the last classical philosophers and one of the first Christian, early Medieval scholars.

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, incorporated many Platonic ideas, sometimes through the ascetic and mystical interpretations of the neoplatonist, Plotinus, into Christian doctrine. Augustine equated mind with soul in a living person and believed in the immortality of the soul when it leaves the body at death. His arguments in support of his position foreshadow similar arguments of Descartes and are just one indication of his influence. According to Augustine, it is the mind's ability to