



THE RISE AND FALL OF SOUL AND SELF

An Intellectual History of Personal Identity



RAYMOND MARTIN AND JOHN BARRESI



Columbia University Press *New York*



CONTENTS

| | | |
|------|--|----------|
| | INTRODUCTION | <i>I</i> |
| | I From Myth to Science | 9 |
| II | Individualism and Subjectivity | 29 |
| | III People of the Book | 39 |
| | IV Resurrected Self | 55 |
| | V The Stream Divides | 75 |
| | VI Aristotelian Synthesis | 93 |
| | VII Care of the Soul | 109 |
| VIII | Mechanization of Nature | 123 |
| | IX Naturalizing the Soul | 142 |
| | X Philosophy of Spirit | 171 |
| XI | Science of Human Nature | 201 |
| | XII Before the Fall | 229 |
| | XIII Paradise Lost | 255 |
| XIV | Everything That Happened and What it Means | 290 |
| | NOTES | 307 |
| | REFERENCES | 347 |
| | INDEX OF NAMES | 363 |
| | SUBJECT INDEX | 373 |



INTRODUCTION

In Alfred Hitchcock's Rear Window, a convalescing photojournalist, played by Jimmy Stewart, is confined to his third-floor apartment. To amuse himself, he spies on his neighbors. As he spies, he begins to suspect, and then becomes convinced, that one of his neighbors, a middle-aged man, has killed his invalid wife. The Jimmy Stewart character tries to convince his girlfriend, played by Grace Kelly, to accept his theory. She shrugs it off, facetiously explaining away his evidence. Then, one evening, suddenly realizing that his theory might be right, she comes over to the window next to where he has been sitting, peers out across the courtyard toward the murder suspect's apartment, and asks the Jimmy Stewart character to start from the beginning and tell her everything that happened and what it means.¹

For those parts of the past that interest us, *everything that happened and what it means* is what many of us who are curious about the past really want to know. The word *everything* has to be taken with a grain of salt. In the example above, what the Grace Kelly character really wants to know is not literally “everything that happened” but *everything* that happened that it would be relevant and helpful to know in determining whether the Jimmy Stewart character's murder theory is correct.² Her request for what everything that happened *means* is for an explanation of how the different pieces of the puzzle—the evidence—fit together to yield a coherent picture of unfolding events. Similarly, in the present book, we are not going to try to tell literally *everything* that happened in the evolution of theories of the self and of personal identity. Rather, our goal is to tell *everything that happened that is relevant and helpful* to understanding why theory followed

the course that it did—from its earliest beginnings to the present day. The meaning we are after is what this story can tell us about the enterprise of human self-understanding, including current attempts to understand the self and personal identity. By *theories of the self* we mean explicit theories that tell us what sort of thing the self is, if indeed it even is a thing. By *theories of personal identity*, we mean primarily theories of personal identity *over time*, that is, theories that explain why a person, or self, at one time is or is not the same person or self as someone at some other time.

In the West, views about the nature of the self and of personal identity first surfaced in ancient Greece. But at that time, so far as we know, there was no sustained, continuing discussion of these issues. That is, there is no record of theorists explaining what they did and did not like about earlier proposals and then suggesting new alternatives to better deal with outstanding issues. Rather, different theorists made proposals on a variety of related issues, for the most part without explicitly discussing what their predecessors had to say or why they themselves did or did not take a different view. For instance, in Plato's dialogue *Phaedo*, Socrates discusses self and personal identity in connection with his inquiry into the possibility of survival of bodily death, but when Aristotle made a radically different proposal for how the soul should be understood, he did so without directly discussing Socrates' (or Plato's) view.

A continuous tradition of discussion of self and personal-identity issues began in the second century C.E., during the Patristic Period. This discussion was motivated primarily by the need to make sense of the Christian dogma of the post-mortem resurrection of normal humans. At first, the church fathers, who had been trained in Greek philosophy, drew primarily upon Stoicism. Later, they drew upon Platonism. In the Latin West, Aristotelianism did not enter the discussion in a serious way until the thirteenth century. The other great tradition in classical Greece, materialistic atomism, of which Stoicism was one variety, reentered the discussion in the seventeenth century as the main theoretical underpinning for the rise of modern science. Since then, materialistic atomism, in one form or another, has remained the backdrop for the most influential discussions of the problems of self and personal identity.

As modern science came to the fore, the primarily religious concerns of the Patristic Period began to wane. Nevertheless, resurrection remained a preoccupation of most self and personal-identity theorists throughout the eighteenth century. Ironically, beginning in the 1960s modern equivalents of resurrection burst back onto center stage in the debate over personal identity. However, in our own times resurrection scenarios entered the discussion in the guise of science-fiction examples. The earlier discussion occurred in the context

of developing a religious theology adequate to understanding personal persistence into an afterlife and the latter in that of developing a secular philosophy adequate to understanding the possibility of persistence in this life. In the former discussion, the issue was how to explain what we know to be true, in the latter, whether it is even possible to explain what we ordinarily assume to be true. Yet, as we shall see, in this case as in so many others in the debate over personal identity, the same issues keep recurring in a different guise.

So where to begin? In ancient Greece, of course. One of the earliest indications of interest in the problem of personal identity occurs in a scene from a play written in the fifth century B.C.E. by the comic playwright Epicharmus. In this scene, a lender asks a debtor to pay up. The debtor replies by asking the lender whether he agrees that anything that undergoes change, such as a pile of pebbles to which one pebble has been added or removed, thereby becomes a different thing. The lender says that he agrees with that. “Well, then,” says the debtor, “aren’t people constantly undergoing changes?” “Yes,” replies the lender. “So,” says the debtor, “it follows that I’m not the same person as the one who was indebted to you and, so, I owe you nothing.” The lender then hits the debtor, who protests loudly at being abused. The lender replies that the debtor’s complaint is misdirected since he—the lender—is not the same person as the one who hit him a moment before.³

An interesting—borderline amazing—thing about this scene is that it suggests that even in fifth-century-B.C.E. Greece, the puzzle of what it is about a thing that accounts for its persisting over time and through changes could be appreciated even by *theater audiences*. Another interesting thing about the scene is its more specific content: both debtor and lender have a point. Everyone *is* always changing. So, in a very strict sense of *same person*, every time someone changes, even a little, he or she ceases to exist: the debtor is not the same person as the one who borrowed the money, the lender not the same person as the one who hit the debtor. This very strict sense of *same person* is not an everyday notion but the product of a philosophical theory. It is also not a very useful sense of *same person*—unless you owe someone money!

In everyday life, we want to be able to say such things as, “I saw you at the play last night,” and have what we say be true. If everyone is constantly changing and every change in a person results in his or her ceasing to exist, no such remarks could ever be true. Assuming that such remarks sometimes are true, there must be a sense of *same person* according to which someone can remain the same person *in spite of changing*. Saying what this sense is, or what these senses are, is *the philosophical problem of personal identity*.

In ancient Greece, the attempt to solve this problem took place in a larger philosophical context in which change and permanence, not just of people but of

everything was an issue. At that time, many thinkers—apparently even many theatergoers—believed that all composite material objects, including human bodies, are constantly changing. They were aware that people often talk about objects that change, including human bodies and the people whose bodies they are, as if these things remain the same over the period in which they change. Finally, they were aware that some ideal objects, such as geometrical squares and triangles, seem not to change at all and also aware that sometimes we can have secure knowledge, such as the Pythagorean theorem, about such ideal objects. On what basis, if at all, they asked, can one talk meaningfully, and perhaps even acquire knowledge, about human bodies and persons that remain the same over time and through changes? This was their question.

Greek thinkers came up with three sorts of answers to this question. One was that there is a changeless realm, like the ideal realm of geometrical objects, which is beyond the ever-changing material world and that one's essential self—one's *psyche* (or, soul)—resides in this changeless realm and thereby ensures one's personal immortality. This answer, due to Plato and subsequently endorsed by Christianity, would inspire countless generations of Western thinkers. Another answer, due to Aristotle, was that there is a changeless dimension *within* every material object, which allows material objects, including human beings, to remain the same in spite of changing but which may not ensure one's *personal* immortality. Finally, the materialistic atomists, a third tradition of Greek thinkers, argued that both change and stability in material objects are the product of changeless, material atoms coming together and pulling apart. These thinkers reasoned that often more or less long-lasting configurations of atoms are named and, hence, become available to be known. People, or at least their material bodies, the atomists reasoned, are temporary configurations of this sort.⁴ The question of which of these three theories best accounts for personal identity, or even for bodily identity, fueled subsequent personal-identity theory.

Today almost all theorists accept modern physical science as the backdrop against which self and personal persistence must be explained. Hence, they assume some version or other of materialist atomism. One difference this makes, as we shall see, is that whereas for Plato, and then subsequently for Platonic Christianity, the soul is something intrinsically unified and therefore available to explain lesser degrees of unity in other things, in our own times the soul's descendent, the self, has become theorized as something that lacks unity and that itself requires an explanation. In other words, whereas what used to do the explanatory work was the perfect unity of an incomposite immaterial soul, what now does it is the imperfect unity of a composite material body. In addition, theories of the self and of personal identity once invariably were parts of larger all-inclusive

worldviews, but today they are so far removed from being connected to the big picture that self-theorists in different disciplines often lack even a common framework in terms of which they can understand and discuss one another's work. In sum, whereas previously theory was integrated and the self one, in our own times, theory has become variegated and the self fragmented. Accompanying this two-fold transition from unity to fragmentation has been a closely related one in which the soul began as unquestionably real and the self ended as arguably a fiction. What all of this means is something to which we shall return.

In telling the story of how thinkers in the West explicitly conceived of selves, or persons, and then tried on that basis to account for personal identity, we have tried to strike a balance between what would be required in order to tell two rather different types of stories. One of these would explain the views of thinkers in their specific historical contexts—on their own terms, so to speak. In this account, the story would be told with little regard to subsequent developments. The other would highlight those aspects of thought that were of more lasting interest or that seem relevant to contemporary concerns. There is tension between these two types of stories. Provided that one strikes a good balance between the two, this tension, we believe, is not destructive but creative. We try to strike a good balance.

We have also had to strike a different sort of balance, having to do with how much discussion to include of interpretational controversy over the views of the theorists we discuss. What we have tried to do, for the most part, is to write in a way that is sensitive to such controversy without actually discussing it explicitly. The alternative was to write a book that is substantially longer than this one. Instead of discussing interpretational controversy, our goal has been to provide a clear, concise account of the most consequential core of each theorist's views: what the theorist said and was taken to have said by his peers and by subsequent thinkers.

Even within these limitations, the story we want to tell is an ambitious one. We could not have told it without relying on the work of an army of scholars whose efforts have greatly aided us in understanding original sources, especially by directing us to the most important passages, providing translations, and suggesting interpretations. Throughout this book we will, in notes, acknowledge our indebtedness to these scholars. However, in the case of some of them just doing that seems insufficient since their works were so helpful. We want then also to acknowledge them here:

- Michael Ayers. *Locke*. 2 vols. (Routledge, 1991).
- Caroline Walker Bynum. *Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (Columbia University Press, 1995).

- Marcia Corlish. *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition, 400–1400* (Yale University Press, 1998)
- James C. M. Crabbe, ed. *From Soul to Self* (Routledge, 1999).
- Edward Craig, ed. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 10 vols. (Routledge, 1998)
- Richard C. Dales. *The Problem of the Rational Soul in the Thirteenth Century* (E. J. Brill, 1995).
- Paul Edwards, ed. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 8 vols. (Macmillan and Free Press, 1967).
- Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, eds. *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth Century Philosophy*. 2 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- C. Fox, R. Porter, and R. Wokler, eds. *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains* (University of California Press, 1995).
- Neil Gillman. *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought* (Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997).
- Paul Oskar Kristeller. *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains* (Harper & Row, 1961); and *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Harper Collins, 1964).
- B. Mijuskovic. *The Achilles of Rationalist Arguments: The Simplicity, Unity, and Identity of Thought and Soul from the Cambridge Platonists to Kant: A Study in the History of an Argument* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).
- Colin Morris. *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050–1200* (Harper & Row, 1972).
- Jean A. Perkins. *The Concept of the Self in the French Enlightenment* (Librairie Droz, 1969).
- Roy Porter, ed. *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (Routledge, 1997); and *Flesh in the Age of Reason: The Modern Foundations of Body and Soul* (W. W. Norton, 2004).
- E. S. Reed. *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology from Erasmus Darwin to William James* (Yale University Press, 1997).
- Timothy J. Reiss. *Mirages of the Self: Patterns of Personhood in Ancient and Early Modern Europe* (Stanford University Press, 2003).
- C. B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler, and Jill Kraye, eds. *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- Roger Smith. *The Norton History of the Human Sciences* (W. W. Norton, 1997).
- Robert Solomon. *Continental Philosophy Since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Richard Sorabji, ed. *Aristotle and After* (Institute of Classical Studies, 1997).

- J. Sutton. *Philosophy and Memory Traces: Descartes to Connectionism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- P.P. Wiener, ed. *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*. 4 vols. (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973–74).
- John P. Wright and Paul Potter, eds. *Psyche and Soma* (Oxford University Press, 2000).
- J. W. Yolton. *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
- Robert M. Young. *Mind, Brain, and Adaptation in the Nineteenth Century: Cerebral Localization and Its Biological Context from Gall to Ferrier* (Oxford University Press, 1990).

In addition to relying on the work of others, we have drawn on material, almost always substantially revised, from our own previously published work. Some of this material we published jointly, including:

- “Hazlitt on the Future of the Self.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995): 463–81.
- “Fission Examples in the Eighteenth- and Early-Nineteenth-Century Personal Identity Debate” (with Alessandro Giovannelli). *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 15 (1998): 323–48.
- *Naturalization of the Soul: Self and Personal Identity in the Eighteenth Century* (Routledge, 2000).
- “Personal Identity and What Matters in Survival: An Historical Overview.” In *Personal Identity*, ed. R. Martin and J. Barresi (Blackwell, 2003).
- “Self-concern from Priestley to Hazlitt.” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 11 (2003): 499–507.

We have also drawn from Raymond Martin, *Self-Concern: An Experiential Approach to What Matters in Survival* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), and from his “Locke’s Psychology of Personal Identity,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38 (2000): 41–61.

For their support of research that contributed to the writing of this book, we thank the Research Development Fund of Dalhousie University, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the General Research Board of the University of Maryland, and the Humanities Development Fund of Union College.

Finally, Ray Martin wishes to thank Dorothy Wang, who throughout the time he worked on this book was not only a continuous source of cultural stimulation and intellectual insight but his best friend. And John Barresi wishes to thank his wife, Jolien, for her boundless patience and sympathy while we were working on this project and for the many years of love and support she has provided him.



FROM MYTH TO SCIENCE

Pre-philosophical Greek attitudes toward the soul and the prospects for surviving bodily death found expression in Homer and subsequently in the mystery cults of Dionysus (Bacchus) and Orpheus. The earliest attempts to grapple with such issues philosophically occurred hundreds of years later, in the sixth century B.C.E., primarily in the philosophies of Pythagoras and Heraclitus.

In Homer, people had psyches, which survived their bodily deaths. But the survival of a psyche was not the survival of a person. Before bodily death, peoples' psyches, or life principles, were associated with their breath (*pneuma*) and movement. Other faculties, most of them associated with bodily organs or bodily activities other than breath and movement, were responsible for specific mental and emotional tasks. *Nous*, for instance, was associated with seeing and was responsible for reasoning; *thymos* was associated with the organism's immediate mental and physical response to an external threat and was responsible for courage; *phrenes* was associated with the midriff and responsible for strength; *kardia* was associated with the heart and responsible for passion, including fear.¹

In the case of ordinary people, each of these mental faculties ceased at bodily death, at which time their psyches, in the form of breath, left their bodies to go to Hades, where they existed as shades or shadows. To ninth-century-B.C.E. Greeks, it seems to have been little consolation to know that one's psyche would survive one's bodily death as a shade. The life of a shade was not a life worth living. Heroes, on the other hand, survived bodily death in a more robust way, by becoming like gods. But the survival of heroes, it seems, was more for the community of living Greeks than for the heroes themselves. No one was encouraged to become

a hero simply in order to survive. Honor, rather, was the objective. Whatever value mere survival may have had for the heroes themselves, Homer portrayed their godlike survival as a reward to the community for having produced heroes. Postmortem heroes provided the community with moral exemplars.

In later Greek literary works, such as in the poems of Pindar and the plays of Sophocles, there is a gradual movement away from Homer's merely imaginative conception of psyches in Hades, where the souls of everyone are treated more or less the same, to more moral conceptions, in which departed souls are more closely affected by how well they had lived. In Homer, living people are rarely if at all concerned with the fates of their psyches. The people portrayed in later literary works, whose accounts of postmortem existence tend to be more nuanced, show more concern.

In the early fifth century B.C.E., progressive Greek thinkers began to replace all such myths with science. So far as the self is concerned, their interest centered on the word *psyche*, which meant different things to different thinkers. Sometimes it meant *person* or *life*, sometimes personality, sometimes that part of one that could experience. In each case, *psyche* tended to be understood as a bodily function that has emotion and appetite.² But under the influence of Orphism and perhaps also Greek shamanism, later thinkers began to think of the *psyche* in more spiritual terms.

Pythagoras (fl. 530 B.C.E.) and Empedocles (fl. 450 B.C.E.), two of the earliest philosophers to have been concerned with the self, may have been shamans. Both of them combined what today we would call *science* with an Orphic-style mysticism. Pythagoras inspired legends but wrote nothing, so it is hard to speak with confidence about his views. Originally from Samos, he was an astronomer and mathematician who was said to have originated the doctrine of the tripartite soul, which resurfaced in the philosophy of Plato. Pythagoras also espoused rebirth, or transmigration, and was said to have been able to remember what happened in many of his previous incarnations. Empedocles, on the other hand, was preoccupied with medicine rather than mathematics. Admired widely as a miracle worker, he was said to have cured illness by the power of music. He was also said to have restored the dead to life.

According to the Orphism with which Pythagoras and Empedocles may both have been associated, when a human dies his or her soul (or *psyche*) persists. Those persisting souls that were pure remained permanently with the gods. Those that were impure remained in the company of the gods while they awaited incarnation again as humans, animals, or worse (Empedocles apparently believed that he had once been incarnated as a bush). The process of incarnation "soils" souls, augmenting their impurity. Their subsequent fates depend on the behavior

of their new hosts, especially upon whether the hosts, if human, observe certain dietary restrictions and religious rituals. Pythagoras, for instance, prohibited his disciples from sacrificing animals and from consuming flesh or beans and encouraged them to participate in rituals that celebrated the superiority of the intellect over the senses. Orphism taught that ultimately all souls reunite with the universal deity. In sum, what Pythagoras and Empedocles seem to have shared, and what they encouraged in thinkers who would come later, was belief in a soul, or self, that existed prior to the body, that could be induced to leave the body even while the body remained alive, and that would outlast the body.³

These ideas were extremely consequential. Directly or indirectly, they seem to have powerfully influenced Plato and, through Plato, various church fathers, including Augustine and, through Augustine, Christian theology and, through Christianity, the entire mindset of Western civilization, secular as well as religious. It is ironic, perhaps, that ideas that eventually acquired such an impressive rational pedigree may have originated in the dark heart of shamanism, with its commitment to magic and the occult.

Subsequent to Pythagoras and Empedocles, Heraclitus (535?–475? B.C.E.), of whom more is known, had a scientific interest in the nature of the soul and a sagelike interest in its well-being. Impressed by what he took to be the extent to which people live divided from one another and themselves, he thought he saw the way toward unification (or *re*-unification).⁴ Impressed with Pythagoras' method of "scientific inquiry," which he wrote was "beyond that of all other men," he was less impressed with Pythagoras himself, who he said was "dilettantish and misguided." Heraclitus would be more systematic: everything, including earth, air, and water, is made of fire.

In Heraclitus's view, humans have souls, which arise from water. Living properly causes one's soul to dry out. The dryer one's soul becomes, the more alive and noble one becomes. Desire, and its ally passion, keep the soul in ignorance, hence, moist. One whose soul is moist, like a drunk or a sleepwalker, is unaware of where he is. Such a person lives in a world of his own, with an "understanding peculiar to oneself." Wisdom comes from self-understanding. It is the same for everyone, and it involves awakening, as if from a dream. Those who "are awake have one world in common." In this world, the soul reveals its boundless nature: "You could not in your going find the ends of the soul, though you traveled the whole way: so deep is its Law (*Logos*)."⁵ At bodily death, the soul separates from the body, at least temporarily. The souls of the foolish, which are moist, return to water. The souls of the wise, which are dry, join the cosmic fire.

Heraclitus was impressed with impermanence. He gets credit for the famous saying that you cannot step into the same river twice. What he meant by this

saying is disputed. Probably he meant that because all material objects are always changing none of them is the same for more than an instant, hence none lasts for more than an instant. This is how Plato interpreted him. Cratylus, who became a follower of Heraclitus, is said by Plato and Aristotle to have carried Heraclitus's intriguing idea one step further, maintaining that since everything is constantly changing, not only does nothing persist but it is not even possible to speak truly. To dramatize this point, Cratylus pronounced, rather colorfully, that you cannot step into the "same" river even once.⁶

Whatever Heraclitus's actual view, he was the first thinker whose writings have survived who was concerned with explaining the conditions that would have to obtain for persons, or anything else, to persist. The introduction of this issue was the origin in Western thought of the philosophical problem of the identity over time of objects that change—that is, of how something that changes can nevertheless remain the same. Heraclitus's view was that nothing that changes can remain the same. Whether or not this view is true, it is not practical.

Once the issue of explaining persistence through change was introduced, it immediately struck a cord in Greek intellectual and artistic culture. By the beginning of the fifth century B.C.E., many Greek thinkers, probably including Epicharmus, believed that since everything is in constant flux, humans too are in constant flux. Whether a thing in flux could nevertheless continue to remain the same is, of course, a separate question.

In Plato's *Symposium*, which is thought to be one of his earlier dialogues, Diotima explains to Socrates, rather matter-of-factly:

[Overtime,] each living creature is said to be alive and to be the same individual—as for example someone is said to be the same person from when he is a child until he comes to be an old man. And yet, if he's called the same, that's despite the fact that he's never made up from the same things, but is always being renewed, and losing what he had before, whether it's hair, or flesh, or bones, or blood, in fact the whole body. And don't suppose that this is just true in the case of the body; in the case of the soul, too, its traits, habits, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears—none of these things is ever the same in any individual, but some are coming into existence, others passing away.

A few lines later, Diotima remarks that unlike in the case of divine things, everything mortal is preserved not by "being absolutely the same" but by replacement of something similar: "what is departing and decaying with age leaves behind in us something else new, of the same sort that it was."⁷

Diotima's view presented here—that the identity over time of every “mortal” thing is to be understood in terms of a relationship among its ever changing parts—is called a *relational view of the identity of objects over time*. It is the view to which virtually all current personal-identity theorists subscribe. Before it could gain ascendancy, the Platonic view had to be vanquished.

In the *Symposium*, Plato contrasts identity through change with unchanging, divine immortality. He goes on to suggest that to the extent that humans grasp the eternal forms—in particular, beauty—they also, if only in the moment, participate in immortality. But, as we shall see, in the *Phaedo*, which may have been written at about the same time as the *Symposium*, Plato focused not on our mortal nature but on the immortality of the soul—the only part of our nature that he thought persists after bodily death. Consistent with the *Symposium*, he also pointed out that there is a difference between the souls of ordinary people, which persist eternally but constantly change their nature due to their attention to earthly things, and the souls of philosophers, or lovers of wisdom (*philosophia*), like Socrates, who by seeking to know the eternal become one with it. Only such souls—Plato's heroes—achieve “real,” that is, unchanging, immortality. Ordinary people, on the other hand, reincarnate, forgetting themselves in the process (*metempsychosis*).

Platonism

In the surviving literature in the West that predates the fifth century B.C.E., theories of the self were rarely articulated for their own sakes (Heraclitus's views are an exception) and even more rarely subjected to rational tests. Rather, they tended to be implied by views that were expressed about other things, such as social relationships or what happens to humans after bodily death. With the arrival of Socrates (470?–399), this situation changed dramatically. Socrates is depicted by Plato as someone who taught by deed as well as by word. In the mid-twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi is said to have responded to a request for the essence of his teaching by replying, “My life is my teaching.” Socrates, as depicted by Plato, could have truthfully answered the same question with the same reply. He claimed that life's most important project is care of one's own soul. And he tried not only to discover the truth but to live it. However, he cared for his soul largely by trying rationally to figure out the nature of things, including moral and aesthetic things. In this rational quest, he was a philosopher in the modern sense of the word, arguably the first of his kind in the West.

Socrates appeared on the scene in Greece just as the new scientific intellectualism that had been ushered in by Pythagoras, Heraclitus, and others had begun

seriously to challenge traditional mythology. It was a time in Greek culture that in some ways is analogous to two later times in Europe when science challenged traditional Christian beliefs: in the thirteenth century, when translations of Aristotle, together with advances in Islamic science, were introduced to European thinkers; and in the seventeenth century, when mechanistic physical science began to displace Aristotelianism.

In fifth-century Greece, Socrates helped to pave the way for the eventual triumph of secular reason. If this were all that he did, it would have been enough to earn him a place of renown in Western intellectual history. But he did one other thing that was even more consequential. He inspired Plato (429?–348? B.C.E.). And unlike Socrates, who wrote nothing, Plato wrote a great deal. Plato, of course, wrote in the form of dialogues—philosophical plays—in which a character named *Socrates* was the spokesperson for Plato’s own views. For a long time, people simply assumed that this character faithfully captured the historical Socrates. As depicted by Plato, Socrates was a vehicle for reason’s triumph over tradition. As a consequence, what people took to be the historical Socrates became a cultural icon—the first *secular* saint. To most students of philosophy, he still has that status.

In the *Phaedo*, Plato recounts the jail-cell conversation that took place on the day that Socrates was put to death by the Athenian authorities. In this conversation, Socrates argued for the immortality of each person’s soul, which he took to be “immaterial” and akin to the divine. His view was then subjected by Simmias and Cebes, his students, to intense rational criticism, to which Socrates replied with counterarguments. The view of Simmias and Cebes was that the soul’s relation to the body is like that of harmony to a stringed instrument. Hence, they claimed, when the body decomposes the soul ceases. To a modern secular audience, it may seem that Simmias and Cebes have the stronger case, but in the dialogue they eventually succumb to Socrates’ arguments. Nevertheless, their arguments are the first in the West that we know about to explicitly question the immortality of the soul.

In most modern, and perhaps even in many ancient contexts, Simmias and Cebes’ sort of “deathbed behavior” would be ungracious in the extreme: they tried to convince Socrates, hours before he was to die, that bodily death is the end! Plato had a different view of the propriety of their behavior. In the dialogue, as Plato portrays it, Simmias and Cebes’ display of independent thinking showed Socrates, as he was about to die, that they had gotten one of the main things that he had tried to teach them. That main thing was the importance of not believing anything dogmatically or unreflectively but instead subjecting every potential belief to intense rational criticism and being always prepared to

follow an argument wherever it may lead. As if to reinforce this point, after Socrates ostensibly won the argument by proving that the soul is immortal, he immediately admonished Simmias and Cebes to go over his arguments after he was dead to check for subtle flaws which the group may have missed.

So far as the nature of the soul is concerned, the *Phaedo* begins with Socrates trying to figure out the sources of generation and corruption, that is, how things come to be and pass away. In his view, the generation of a thing is caused by the parts out of which it is initially composed coming together; its corruption is caused by the parts out of which it is finally composed coming apart. Apparently the bearing of this on the discussion of immortality in the dialogue is to suggest that each person has (or is) a “simple” soul, that is, something that is not composed of parts.

In Plato’s view, the soul is what a person essentially is. Its simplicity ensures both personal survival of bodily death and each person’s “preexistence” prior to incarnation into a body. In the *Meno*, Plato claimed that this preexistence explains one’s ability to acquire knowledge, as in mathematics, that is not derived from sense experience. One’s seemingly discovering such knowledge is actually a form of remembering what one saw intellectually prior to birth. The soul’s simplicity and its being what a person essentially is also ensure personal survival of changes undergone while one is alive and embodied. Since cessation is due only to decomposition, whatever is ultimately simple *has to* persist through changes—forever! Because the soul is simple, it must be immortal.

In ancient times (and still today) almost everyone assumed that if people survive their bodily deaths, then there must be a vehicle (or medium) for their survivals. However, even before anyone had thought of the idea of an immaterial soul, there was a ready vehicle available: fine matter. When Socrates was alive, many Greeks thought that the soul leaves the body when the person who dies expels his last breath. Probably they also thought that at that moment, the soul simply *is* that last breath. As we have seen, Plato, at least in the *Phaedo*, claimed implicitly, through Socrates, that the soul is immaterial and simple, that is, without parts. That in itself is enough to distinguish the soul from breath, which presumably has parts.

As Bishop Butler was to point out in the eighteenth century, Plato’s having thought that the soul is without parts is compatible with his having thought that the soul is material. In the physics of Butler’s time, an atom was regarded as a simple, material object. There is nothing in Plato to suggest that he actually thought that the soul is a simple material atom, but neither is there anything that decisively rules out this possibility. So, the most one can say about Plato’s speculative derring-do is that it was his genius (or perversity) to have *suggested* a radical

alternative to the view that the soul is material, including an alternative to its being a simple material thing. Whether Plato himself subscribed to this radical choice is unclear.

Nevertheless, a fairly straightforward way of interpreting what Plato wrote in the *Phaedo* is that the soul is immaterial not only in being without parts but in being *unextended*. This is how Plato was interpreted in the second century C.E. by leading Neoplatonists. It is also the view of the soul to which René Descartes would subscribe toward the beginning of the seventeenth century. If, in fact, Plato intended to suggest that the vehicle for survival is not any sort of physical object, not even breath but, rather, an unextended thing, then this thought was original to him (or to Socrates). Previously, when others had talked of immaterial souls, they usually meant invisible matter. Plato, in the *Phaedo*, does not always distinguish sharply between something's being immaterial and its being invisible. But, then, sometimes he does seem to distinguish between these two, at least to the extent of insisting that the soul is not only invisible but simple and akin to the gods. As we shall see, in the third century C.E., Plotinus, a pagan Neoplatonist, developed Plato's idea that essentially each of us is (or has) an immaterial, unextended soul. It was this version of Plato's view that turned out to be most influential.

Assuming, for the sake of argument, that Plato did arrive at the idea of an immaterial, unextended soul, how might he have arrived at this idea? Although one can only speculate, there is a natural line of reasoning that would have brought him to this conclusion. He may have reasoned, as the good student of geometry that he was, that any extended thing, merely by virtue of its being extended, is potentially divisible and, hence, potentially corruptible. So, if the self is immortal not only by accident but necessarily, then it has to be unextended. But why did Plato suppose that the self is immortal? While Plato's arguments for immortality in the *Phaedo* are obscure, the central idea behind the most important of them seems to be his conviction that the soul is *essentially* alive. He reasoned that since the soul is essentially alive it could not die. To Plato, this meant that at the approach of death, rather than perishing, the soul would simply withdraw. In any case, it was not Plato's *arguments* for immortality but rather his *conception* of the soul as immaterial, simple, and thereby naturally immortal that turned out to be so enormously influential.

The *Phaedo*, whether or not it faithfully reports Socrates' views, seems to represent an early stage in Plato's thinking about soul and self. Yet even in that early stage, although the soul is said to be wholly immaterial, a unity, without parts, and immune to change (like the transcendent Forms), it is described also as a natural vehicle for psychological continuity, complete with all the complexity

and change that go with cognition, desire, decision making, pains, and pleasures. In this light, the part of the soul that would survive bodily death is portrayed as imprisoned for an earthly lifetime in a physical body that is an impediment to its true happiness and interests, which lie in a bodiless, immaterial existence elsewhere. Yet the soul is also portrayed as a life principle, whose essential function is to animate the physical.

As we have seen, it is tempting to suppose, as some commentators have, that Plato's notion of an immaterial soul that can leave its body has its roots in shamanism, particularly as this influence was preserved in the Pythagorean movement. In this interpretation, what Plato did, in effect, was to reinterpret traditional Greek magico-religious ideas within the framework of a newly emerging rationalism. So far as the soul is concerned, he did this by casting the occult self of shamanism into the role of the rational soul. The shaman, through a magical power that gets expressed in trance, detaches the occult self from the body; the philosopher, through the power of reason, which gets expressed in mental concentration, frees the rational soul from bodily contamination. In shamanism, the soul, detached from the body, remembers past lives and acquires occult knowledge; in Plato's view, the soul, detached from the body, remembers past lives and the knowledge of necessary truths, or the Forms, that it acquired when released from bodily contamination. Reincarnation finds a place in both views.⁸

In the *Republic*, Socrates claims that souls are divided into rational, spirited, and appetitive parts. It is the interaction among these parts that explains how people behave. In earlier writings, Plato had stressed that only the rational part of the soul is immortal, the other two parts perishing with the body. As he matured, he struggled to integrate this rather austere a priori *philosophy* of the self as an "immaterial" thing with a more complicated empirical *psychology* of human mentality. Even so, in the *Republic* his discussion of divisions *within* the soul was not primarily meant to propose an empirical psychology but to make the normative point that it is in each person's self-interest that his or her soul be harmonious. In Plato's view, harmony of the soul requires that reason, rather than spirit or appetite, rules. Yet while he thought that it is in one's *self-interest* for reason to rule, reason dictates that a person act not selfishly but in ways that promote the welfare of others. Thus, in Plato's view, the self-regarding impetus of self-interest coincides with the other-regarding concerns of morality.

The details of Plato's normative theories of self-interest and morality need not concern us. For present purposes, it is more important that in explaining these normative theories, Plato launched an empirical psychology, the first of its kind in the West. Others, prior to Plato, tended to make proposals about what

sort of matter the soul is made of—air, earth, fire, or water. No one had proposed a theory about how the different parts of a human personality work together to produce human behavior. This sort of thing is what today is called a *faculty* psychology. It is called this because it posits separate mechanisms—or faculties—in the mind (or body) whose function it is to control different aspects of human mentality. Faculty psychologies are contrasted with *functional* psychologies, which explain different aspects of human mentality not by assigning them to different mechanisms in the mind or brain but rather to different ways in which a single organ of mentality functions. Aristotle, and then various thirteenth- and fourteenth-century thinkers, wavered between these two views. Recently, with the advent in cognitive psychology of modular theories of human mentality, a modern descendant of Plato's faculty psychology has come back into fashion.

In the *Timaeus*, which was written after the *Republic*, Plato returned to the question of how to integrate the soul. However, this time he approached the question through a curious creation myth, which for all its speculative flair reveals a newfound physiological dimension to his empirical psychology. In this myth, he began by noting that in creating order out of disorder, "God created in each thing in relation to itself, and in all things in relation to each other, all the measures and harmonies which they could possibly receive." Prior to this divine act, any order or proportion that occurred was an accident. Subsequently, order was part of the scheme of things in which the universe is portrayed as "a single animal comprehending in itself all other animals, mortal and immortal." God's offspring, the demigods, were responsible for completing the design of mortal creatures:

And they, imitating him, received from him the immortal principle of the soul; and around this they proceeded to fashion a mortal body, and made it to be the vehicle of the soul and constructed within the body a soul of another nature which was mortal, subject to terrible and irresistible affections—first of all, pleasure, the greatest incitement to evil; then, pain, which deters from good; also rashness and fear, two foolish counsellors, anger hard to be appeased, and hope easily led astray—these they mingled with irrational sense and with all-daring love according to necessary laws, and so framed man.

Fearing to pollute the divine in humankind any more than was necessary, the demigods physically situated the immortal part of humans above the neck and the mortal part below, placing the neck between them "to keep them apart."

And in the breast, and in what is termed the thorax, they encased the mortal soul; and as the one part of this was superior and the other inferior they divided the cavity of the thorax into two parts, as the women's and men's apartments are divided in houses, and placed the midriff to be a wall of partition between them.

The part of "the inferior soul which is endowed with courage and passion and loves contention" they located "nearer the head, midway between the midriff and the neck, in order that it might more easily join with reason in controlling and restraining desire."⁹

In this curious passage, Plato seems to portray humans as having, in effect, two souls, one independent of the body and wholly rational, the other bodily and passionate but capable to some extent of joining with reason. The passage suggests that Plato had seen that in having previously made the soul so otherworldly in order to insure its immortality, he had deprived himself of the ability to appeal to it to explain human behavior. So he postulated another, this-worldly soul to take up the slack. That move must have made some—Aristotle?—wonder whether there had been any need to postulate an immaterial soul in the first place. Perhaps, though, the immaterial soul is needed to explain either how one comes to have knowledge of the Forms or to explain what is often assumed to be each person's unity of consciousness. How, say, could a material soul—a composite thing—explain unity? That question would haunt philosophers of personal identity into the modern era.

Whatever Plato's motives in the passage just quoted, such empirical, physiological theorizing was startlingly original (though it may have had its basis in Hippocrates [circa 400 B.C.E.]). Yet, as we have seen, by supposing that one's essence—reason—is immaterial, and the rest of one's mentality material, the problem arose of explaining the relationship of this essence—one's true self—to the body. A similar problem plagues Plato's view of reality more generally. His dualism seems to have been motivated by the conviction that only what is immaterial and either itself rational or capable of being grasped rationally is fully real, everything else deriving whatever reality it has from its "participation" in the fully real.¹⁰

Even so, as we shall see, the view that the soul is an immaterial substance would prove to be remarkably persistent, mainly because it would be endorsed by Christianity. But another reason for its persistence is that it has seemed to many thinkers 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, personal-identity thinkers en masse finally did embrace materialism, the question of how

unified we are mentally and how whatever mental unity we have might be explained has come to the fore.

Returning to Plato, his division of the soul, together with his suggestion that its lower functions are bodily and beastlike, may be the ultimate theoretical origin of the idea of the unconscious. In Augustine, the view became one of true and false selves. In the twelfth century, through the medium of Augustine, it spawned the notion of self-deception. Subsequently, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the view that the soul is divided and in conflict with itself resurfaced in an army of thinkers, including Montaigne, Shaftesbury, and Rousseau, until in the nineteenth century, first in Schopenhauer, then in Nietzsche, and then finally in Freud, the lower parts of the soul were relegated to “the unconscious.”¹¹

In the *Phaedrus*, which is one of Plato’s relatively late dialogues, and in the *Laws*, which is usually thought to be the latest, Plato introduced what seems to be an entirely different conception of soul. In these dialogues, he defines the soul as a self-moving thing and says that it is this attribute that makes it immortal: “All soul is immortal, for that which is ever in motion is immortal.” Things that impart motion to other things but are themselves “moved by something else,” he continued, are soulless; they “can cease to be in motion, and therefore can cease to live.” Something self-moving, and only something self-moving, cannot “abandon its own nature.” Hence, only self-movers are immortal. So, we should “feel no scruple in affirming that precisely that [that is, being self-moving] is the essence and definition of soul.”¹²

In these dialogues, the soul is said to be co-eternal with the gods. There is an obvious connection between these reflections and Plato’s earlier thoughts in the *Phaedo*, in which he stressed that the soul is essentially alive, as well as a connection with Aristotle’s views. Yet Plato’s emphasis here on the importance of self-motion raises questions about corporeal souls in humans, animals, and plants. Did he think that these corporeal souls, because they are not “self-moving,” are not really souls at all but merely aspects of biological mechanisms, or did he think that even these corporeal souls are immortal?

Whatever Plato’s ultimate view, in the surviving literature from the West in which views of the self are expressed, nothing even remotely like Plato’s intellectual sensitivity and sophistication, not to mention his imaginative and literary flair, had appeared previously. He represents a new beginning. The view of the self that he expressed in the *Phaedo* was in the West destined to become one of the most influential theories of the self of all time. Even so, it was not the only influential theory of the self spawned by Greek culture. Within 150 years of Socrates’ death two other rival theories of the self were expressed, each of which ultimately would become as influential as Plato’s. One of these came

from Aristotle, the other from several Greek materialists, who became known collectively as the *atomists*.

Aristotelianism

According to Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) the soul has parts, which account for its various functions. Early in his career, Aristotle seems to have followed Plato in assuming that the part of the soul that accounts for its ability to think rationally, which he called *nous*, is immortal.¹³ Later, in *De anima* (On the life-force, or On the soul) and elsewhere, his statements about the persistence of *nous* are enigmatic. Nevertheless, it is surely true that unlike Plato in the *Phaedo*, Aristotle's main theoretical concern with the soul had little to do with survival of bodily death. Neither did he follow Plato in developing a normative theory of morality based on self-interest. Rather, so far as the soul is concerned, Aristotle was preoccupied with two other problems: the place of humans in the larger scheme of things and the soul's relationship to the body.

As we have seen, in Plato's view there was one main division in reality, that between the material and visible, on the one hand, and the "immaterial" and invisible, on the other. The former became real by "participating" in the latter. The more it participated, the more real it was. Plato's dualism is often called a *two-worlds view*. According to Aristotle, though with some exceptions—such as "the Unmoved Mover," which is responsible for moving the planets—there is only one world, every item of which is a union of matter and form, and therefore, material. Even so, in his view, not all material objects are equally real. There is a gradation of being, at the lowest end of which is inorganic matter and at the highest the Unmoved Mover. Vegetable life is above inorganic matter; nonreasoning animals are above vegetable life; and humans are above nonreasoning animals. Aristotle thought of the Unmoved Mover as pure form. Later generations of Christian theologians cast it in the role of God.

In Aristotle's view, except for inorganic matter, everything has a psyche, or soul, which is its vital principle—that is, what it is about it that accounts for its being alive. Most of the soul is inseparable from the body that it informs. Apparently the soul's rational part—*nous*—is separable, although some scholars dispute whether Aristotle really held this view. On the assumption that Aristotle 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 or whether *nous* is one entity, which is on loan to all individual humans while they are engaged in rational thinking and hence not something that belongs specifically to any individual

human. Aristotle didn't explicitly answer this question, perhaps because he wasn't interested in it or, perhaps, because he was uncertain how to answer it. 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.

As for the rest of Aristotle's view of psyche, at the bottom of the scale of souls is the nutritive or vegetative soul, which accounts for assimilation and reproduction. It is found only in plants. Next is the sensitive soul, which includes all of the powers of the vegetative soul plus the additional powers of sensation, which gives rise to imagination, memory, desire, and local motion. Aristotle thought that of the senses, touch and taste are the most important, for just as nutrition is necessary for the preservation of any sort of life, so touch and taste are necessary for the preservation of animal life. Other senses, such as sight, while not strictly necessary to the preservation of animal life, nevertheless contribute to its well-being. The sensitive soul is found only in nonhuman animals. Finally, higher than all of the other souls is the rational soul, which possesses all of the powers of the lower souls but also possesses *nous*, which is reason or intellect. *Nous* is responsible for scientific thought, which has as its object truth for its own sake. It is also responsible for deliberation, which has as its object truth for the sake of some practical or prudential objective.

In Aristotle's view, with the possible exception of *nous*, the psyche and all of its parts come into being (potentially) at the same time as their associated body and are inseparable from it. Hence, with the possible exception of *nous*, the psyche perishes when the body perishes. Throughout most of *De anima*, the psyche is considered to be the form of the body, the two constituting a single living substance. Aristotle defined psyche, or soul, as the first "perfection" of a natural organic body having the potentiality for life. This, his most general definition of soul implies that the soul perishes at bodily death. This is how Alexander of Aphrodisias, one of Aristotle's most important early commentators, later understood him. However, Aristotle muddied this picture.

In *De anima*, Aristotle wrote that the intellect "seems to be a substance that comes about in a thing and is not corrupted." He added:

Therefore, it is necessary that in [the soul] there be an intellect capable of becoming all things, and an intellect capable of making itself understand all things. And the intellect which is capable of understanding all things is . . . separated, not mixed or passible

[i.e., perishable], and, in its substance, is action. . . . And in its separated state, it is just what it is, and this alone is always immortal. And there is no memory, because [this agent intellect] is not passible, and the passible intellect is corruptible, and without it [i.e., the agent intellect] nothing is understood.¹⁴

In another work, in the context of discussing conception and fetal development, Aristotle noted that the vegetative soul, having existed potentially in semen, comes into being actually when it provides the vital heat to matter supplied by the mother.¹⁵ He there wrote that the sensitive soul, having existed potentially in the vegetative soul, comes into being actually in a similar way. He ended by noting that the intellective or rational soul cannot have been generated internally. “It remains,” he said, “that the intellect alone should come from without, and that it alone be divine.” In the rational soul, he claimed, there is a power of acting and a power of being acted upon, the former of which—the agent or active intellect—is ungenerated and incorruptible.

Thus, in many interpretations of Aristotle, the agent-intellect, or *nous*, preexists its associated body and is immortal.¹⁶ Yet, even if *nous* is immortal, it is not a good vehicle for personal immortality. This is because, in Aristotle’s view, matter is what distinguishes one thing from another of the same kind. Thus, although the rational part of every individual human soul may be immortal, individual humans may not thereby themselves be immortal, and not just because their bodies die but because there is only one *nous*, which all humans share. Hence, in Aristotle’s view, it may be that only what we have in common, and not what distinguishes us from one another, survives the grave. In his words, “All things which are many in number have matter; for many individuals have one and the same intelligible structure, for example, man, whereas Socrates is one.”¹⁷ Once the *material* human being is gone, along with his or her memories, only the form, which is the same for all human beings, remains.

In a passage in *On Generation and Corruption* that would become especially important in the thirteenth century when medieval philosophers were trying to rework Christian theology through the lens of Aristotelian metaphysics, Aristotle seems to deny the possibility of personal survival of bodily death. He began by asking why “men and animals do not ‘return upon themselves’ so that the same individual comes-to-be a second time?” He answered by distinguishing between those things whose substance is imperishable and those whose substance is perishable. In the case of things whose substance is perishable, which he thought to include humans and animals, although *the same kind of thing* can recur, *the very same thing* cannot recur. As we shall see, the failure of Saint Paul and the earliest

church fathers to be clear on this point is the basis for a doubt about whether some of them even believed in personal survival of bodily death, in the sense in which we would understand personal survival today.¹⁸

In addition to the question of whether people survive bodily death, there are the further questions: first, of whether it matters whether they survive it and, second, if it does matter, why it matters. In general, Plato had an easier time explaining why it matters whether people survive their bodily deaths. Apparently he thought that people would be helped in discovering eternal truths if they could get away from bodily distractions. In addition, he tells us that Socrates, in one of his last thoughts, mused about the joys of conversing with the dead. Apparently, then, Plato (or Socrates) thought that since people in the afterlife can converse about earthly events, their souls retain their premortem memories and other mental dispositions. If Plato looked forward to conversing with the dead, he must have thought that people are entitled to anticipate having the experiences of their postmortem selves. It is not clear what Aristotle's views were on any of these topics. In general, Plato had a more unified way than Aristotle of insuring the immortality of each individual's soul, but Aristotle had a more unified way of explaining the soul's relationship to the body.

After Aristotle died, many commentators on his work arose. One of the most important historically was Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. 200 c.e.), who became head of the Lyceum at Athens. In antiquity, he became famous for writing commentaries on Aristotle that were intended to reestablish Aristotle's views in their pure form. In the Middle Ages, he also became well known for his original writings, including *On the Soul*, in which he argued that human mentality is a mixture of "mortal" and "active" intellects. Only the active intellect, he claimed, which is the same in all humans and in God, survives bodily death. Needless to add, its surviving bodily death is not a way to insure any particular human person's individual personal survival.

Materialistic Atomism

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 a perhaps equally influential tradition of materialistic atomism. Thinkers in this tradition included the atomists Leucippus (fl. 440 b.c.e.) and Democritus (460?–370? b.c.e.), who were responsible for the original formulation of the idea that the world is composed of material atoms but who had nothing to say, so far as we know, about the self and personal identity. That task was left

especially to the Epicureans and the Stoics, whose schools would become especially influential during the Hellenistic period, when the political center of Europe shifted from Greece to Rome.

Epicurus (341–270 B.C.E.) not only espoused an atomist metaphysics but integrated it into a philosophy of life according to which pleasure is the only good, pain the only evil, and fear of death a needless source of human distress. “God presents no fears,” he wrote, and “death no worries. And while good is readily attainable, evil is readily endurable.”¹⁹ The problem, he claimed, is not death but the fear of death. And the way to conquer that fear is to accept death for exactly what it is, the physical coming apart of the complex of atoms that is one’s soul, resulting in the cessation of any subject that could experience pleasure or pain. “The correct understanding that death is nothing to us,” he wrote, “makes our mortality enjoyable, not by adding infinite time, but by taking away the yearning for immortality.”²⁰ Unlike other atomists who went before him, Epicurus denied determinism in order to allow free will. He was not only intellectually but also socially radical. In the community that he founded, men, women, children, slaves, and even prostitutes participated on equal terms.

Stoicism was founded by Zeno of Citium (335–263 B.C.E.). According to his view, the world as a whole, which is divinely planned and permeated by reason (*logos*), is the best possible organization of matter. His most celebrated disciple, Chrysippus (280–206 B.C.E.), is credited with developing this philosophy into a comprehensive system. A cardinal tenet of this system is that the world is an ideally good organism, the behavior of which is completely determined and whose rational soul governs it for the best. Ultimately, the world is composed of earth, water, air, and fire, the latter two of which constitute a pervasive life force, called *pneuma* (or “breath”). This life force constitutes the souls of all living things. The world as a whole is evolving inexorably toward a great, all-consuming fire, after which the entire sequence of world events repeats itself in every detail, over and over, without end. Individual humans are thus fated to do everything they do. Nevertheless, they are responsible for their actions. What allows them to be responsible is that the causal determination of their actions works through their agency.

Stoics also thought about the psychological construction of the self, that is, about how conscious beings, especially humans, originally arrive at the view that “I am this self.” Their interest in this issue can perhaps be traced to an extension by them of the idea of property ownership to that of a human individual’s relationship to him- or herself.²¹ And this extension may in turn have been related to their rejection of the commonly held Greek idea of natural slavery. That is, since the Stoics regarded all human beings as equal, regardless of

race, class, or gender, it was a short step to the view that each person owns him- or herself. All humans share equally in the world-governing reason. Thus, all share equally in the responsibilities of membership in the universal human community, especially in the responsibility of attuning one's life and character to the *logos*, serenely indifferent to the vagaries of external events. The idea of self-possession is thus linked to that of responsibility for oneself, which is linked to responsibility to the human community, all of which are based on the individual's psychological relationship to him- or herself.

Chrysippus, in what is thought to be the first use *ever* of the word *consciousness*, wrote that every animal appropriates (*oikeiosis*) not only "its own constitution," but "its consciousness" of its own constitution. In making animals, he wrote, nature ensures that each one "appropriates" itself "to itself" so that it will behave in self-interested ways, that is, will reject things that hurt it and pursue things that help it.²² Later, Roman Stoics elaborated this view. Seneca (4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.), for instance, wrote that every animal instinctively appropriates its own body: "Nature cares for its own products, and because the safest protection is the closest, each product of nature has been entrusted to itself";²³ and Hierocles (fl. 100 C.E.) wrote that "as soon as an animal is born, it perceives itself" so that henceforth it can "be pleased with itself," for "an animal, having got its first conception of itself is at once appropriated to itself and its own constitution."²⁴ Hierocles then went on to suggest that "each one of us is, as it were, entirely encompassed by many circles, some smaller, others larger." In the "first and closest" of these circles, "the individual has drawn as though around a center, his own mind." This first circle also "encloses the body and anything taken for the sake of the body; for it is a circle of virtually minimal radius, and almost touches the center itself." The second circle, "further removed from the center, but enclosing the first circle" includes "parents, siblings, wife, and children." The "outermost and largest circle" encompasses "the whole human race."²⁵

Explicitly accounting for the psychological construction of the self was not a central, high-visibility concern during the classical period, or even during the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, it would emerge again, at the end of the seventeenth century, as one of John Locke's most important preoccupations, and again toward the end of the nineteenth century, in the thought of William James. Chrysippus, it should be noted, anticipated an idea that would be central to Locke's view, namely that humans are both "lumps of matter" and also "persons" and that their identities as lumps of matter may be determined on a different basis than their identities as persons.

In Chrysippus's view, whereas any change may make one a different lump of matter, it does not thereby make one a different person. Instead, he held the

view, common among Stoics, that each individual had some unique property, or essence, that remained unchanged throughout the life of the individual, and by which, despite other radical changes, the individual could be identified.²⁶ Such ideas, which might have led to what we think of as a modern, relational view of personal identity, were overshadowed in the Roman period by the ascendancy of Neoplatonism, which through the influence primarily of Augustine provided the framework for Christian theology from the fourth to the thirteenth centuries.

Related to these earlier Greek materialistic atomistic philosophies, but with a more practical focus, were the medical materialists. The earliest Greek physicians, whose medical works were collectively attributed to Hippocrates, worked under the assumption that both mental (*psyche*) and physical (*soma*) illnesses had their basis in the physical constitution of humans (*physis*). For instance, Hippocrates' *On the Sacred Disease* begins: "It [epilepsy] appears to me to be nowise more divine nor more sacred than other diseases, but has a natural cause from which it originates like other affections." He goes on to describe the similarity of this "sacred" disease with other maladies involving insanity, after which he explains why some forms of mental illness are said to be sacred: "They who first referred this malady to the gods appear to me to have been just such persons as the conjurors, purificators, mountebanks, and charlatans now are, who give themselves out for being excessively religious, and as knowing more than other people." These people, he continued, use "divinity as a pretext and screen" for their own ignorance. Hippocrates' own view was that "the brain," which is "the primary seat of sense and of the spirits" and "perceives whatever occurs in the body," is "the cause of [these] afflictions." Some of these disturbances affect the brain itself and lead to mental illness. Thus, in his view, the way to treat this illness is to treat the brain.²⁷

Subsequently anatomical investigations by Herophilus and Erasistratus (c. 330–250 B.C.E.) established the role that nerves play in connecting the brain to the rest of the body. This discovery, apparently, had a great impact on Epicurean and Stoic philosophers of the time, including physicians, since it provided a clear means of explaining in a physical way how mind and body might interact. If the brain were the seat of the mind and could communicate through the nerves to the rest of the body, the activities of the body could be known. The body, then, would not require an immaterial mind that operates, in some unknowable fashion, on all parts of the body. Instead, the mind itself could be some kind of "spiritual matter" (*pneuma*) of a thin and rapidly moving sort. It could have the brain as its center but through the nerves grow tendrils to the rest of the body and in this way both feel and control distant parts of the body.²⁸

Such ideas originated early in the views of Greek medical research and are important in providing the beginnings of a naturalistic account of mental phenomena. However, they lost ground in late antiquity as increasingly the dualistic theory of Plato gained favor not only among religiously oriented thinkers but even among physicians.²⁹

Finally, at about the same time, other schools of philosophy, especially the Cyreniacs (c. 400–c. 200 B.C.E.) and the Skeptics (c. 360–c. 225 B.C.E.) raised questions about the limits of human knowledge of the external world and of other minds.³⁰ In the seventeenth century, this sort of skeptical thinking would join forces with a materialist conception of an external world composed of corpuscular mechanisms and become the vehicle for the rise of modern science. It would also, through Descartes's influence, become the vehicle for the development of a new form of mind/body dualism.³¹