

Introduction

The notion of the ego, long thought to express a signature insight of the modern period, has almost as long been a target of strong criticism. Criticism of the notion picked up pace in the second half of the twentieth century, and many now consider the notion of the ego to be a defining myth, not a signature insight, of the modern period. Responding to this reversal of opinion, *Recentering the Self* undertakes a defense of the ego, a defense that is multidisciplinary in perspective and wide in scope. This defense begins with a rethinking of the notion of the ego (part 1) and then proceeds to a corresponding rethinking of ego development, first within the general context of the human lifespan (part 2) and then within the specific context of spiritual life (part 3).

Part 1 rethinks the notion of the ego by examining its historical origins, by reassessing major criticisms of the notion, and then by formulating a revised conception of the ego designed to meet critical challenges. This revised conception of the ego is here referred to as “RCE.”¹ Part 2 rethinks ego development within the general context of the human lifespan by applying RCE to ten well-studied stages of ego development. The purpose of part 2 is to use RCE to highlight basic psychological (cognitive, motivational, behavioral) and philosophical (phenomenological, existential) aspects of the ego’s development during the ten stages considered. Finally, part 3 rethinks ego development within the specific context of spiritual life by applying RCE to four broad stages of spiritual development: spiritual preawakening, spiritual awakening, spiritual growth, and spiritual maturity. The purpose of part 3 is to use RCE to clarify the essential role played by the ego in these four stages and thus to defend the ego against the strongly negative accounts of its role in spiritual life prevalent in spiritual literature.

The rethinking of the notion of the ego in part 1 consists of three main tasks. The first is to explain the principal ideas that have been associated with the “traditional” notion of the ego, by which I mean the notion that emerged at the beginning of the modern period. This task is taken up in chapter 1, which presents a brief exposition of René Descartes’s account of the soul as a “thing that thinks” (*res cogitans*) or, more precisely, a thing the *only* function of which is to think. In saying that the only function of the soul is to think, Descartes was stressing the point that the soul performs only rational functions and not, as had long been believed, also biological (body-animating, body-regulating) functions.

Descartes divided the rational functions of the soul into two basic types, which he referred to as “perception of the intellect” and “operation of the will.”² Perception of the intellect is a passive function by which the soul, as a thing that thinks, experiences (Descartes: perceives) whatever arises within consciousness or presents itself to consciousness through the senses. In contrast, operation of the will is an active function by which the soul operates either on ideas or mental images, thus performing active cognitive functions (functions that operate on things in order to know them), or on impulses, the body, or states of affairs in the world, thus performing active practical functions (functions that operate on things in order to regulate, utilize, or change them). In our terminology, that which performs the functions just outlined is the ego.

Descartes’s account of the soul as a thing the only function of which is to think thus introduced the notion of the ego into Western intellectual history. Stripped to essentials, the notion he introduced is that of the *subject and executive agency of consciousness*. The ego is the subject of consciousness because it is that which experiences whatever arises within consciousness or presents itself to consciousness through the senses. The ego is thus an “experiencer,” a subject that intuits, perceives, observes, senses, and feels. However, the ego is not only a subject or experiencer but also an agency because it performs active, will-initiated—henceforth: “executive”—functions of cognitive and practical sorts. The ego performs cognitive executive functions such as controlling attention, holding things in mind, recalling things to mind, switching between cognitive tasks, and engaging in operational thinking of all types. Additionally, the ego performs practical executive functions such as regulating impulses, moving the body, and undertaking actions in the world. The ego bequeathed to us by Descartes is exclusively passive in its experiencing (Descartes: perceiving) function. The ego is the recipient rather than to any extent the creator of the thoughts, images, impulses, sensations,

and sense impressions it experiences.³ In contrast, the ego bequeathed to us by Descartes is exclusively active in its executive (Descartes: will-initiated or volitional) functions. The ego alone initiates and carries out the cognitive and practical functions it performs.

The notion of the ego, once introduced in the seventeenth century, raised perplexing new philosophical questions, questions that became central to the discussion of the traditional notion of the ego. The following questions are among those that came to the fore: Is the ego something real, or is it only a useful fiction or, perhaps, a persistent illusion? If the ego is real, what kind of thing, if a thing at all, is it? How, if at all, can the ego be known to exist? Is the ego a necessary basis of consciousness? How, as the subject of consciousness, does the ego hold consciousness together as one consciousness? How, as the executive agency of consciousness, can the ego be causally efficacious in performing its executive functions? If the ego is causally efficacious in performing its executive functions, is its efficacy confined within consciousness or does it extend to the body and to bodily actions in the world? Chapter 1 presents Descartes's answers to these and other questions about the ego by identifying eleven ideas that are prominent in or assumed by his account of the soul as a thing the only function of which is to think.

The second task in rethinking the notion of the ego is to trace the antecedents and historical emergence of the traditional notion. This task is taken up in chapter 2, which places Descartes's account of the soul in its seventeenth-century context and explains which of its principal ideas were carried over from the premodern past and which broke new ground for the modern future. As we shall see, Descartes's account of the soul emerged from an attempt to satisfy the requirements of both Christian orthodoxy, which held that the soul is incorporeal and immortal, and the new mechanistic paradigm of seventeenth-century science, which held that physical nature, including organic bodies, can be explained exclusively in terms of the motion and contact of physical things. The result of this attempt to satisfy the requirements of both an old religion and a new science was a conception of the soul that in important respects preserved ideas with long histories but that in other respects broke with the past in such a way as to replace the premodern rational-*biological* soul with an exclusively rational-*interior* soul, the subject-agency of which is the ego of the modern period.

The third task in rethinking the notion of the ego is to formulate a revised conception of the ego (RCE) designed to meet critical challenges. This task is taken up in chapters 3 through 5. Chapter 3 sets forth the

core ideas of RCE by responding to criticisms of the notion of the ego that were debated between Descartes's time and the end of the nineteenth century. These core ideas are set forth briefly in this introduction, beginning here with the following general idea: the ego is a side of two fundamental dualities of human experience and would be incomplete or could not function without the other sides of these dualities. We call these dualities the "duality of the interior ego and the worldly self" and the "duality of agency and spontaneity."

First, the ego, as the *subject* of consciousness, exists as the interior side of an interior-exterior duality, the exterior side of which is the worldly self. As we explain in chapter 3, the ego, in the very process of its production as the interior subject of consciousness, is already in the process of appropriating and thus forging for itself an exterior or worldly side, a side consisting of its worldly experiences and what it perceives to be its worldly (bodily, mental, social) attributes. Second, the ego, as the *executive agency* of consciousness, functions as the executive, managing, side of an interior-interior duality, the other side of which is the underlying source or sources from which the internally generated contents of the ego's experience spontaneously arise. As we explain in chapter 3, the ego functions as an agency only by giving focus, engagement, and, therefore, guidance to the spontaneity of consciousness, which produces for the ego the thoughts, images, and impulses with which it performs its executive functions. According to RCE, the dualities of the interior ego and the worldly self and of agency and spontaneity are inherent to the constitution of the ego. The ego, as the subject of consciousness, is incomplete apart from its worldly self; and the ego, as the executive agency of consciousness, cannot function apart from the spontaneity of consciousness.

Chapter 4 adds quite a few ideas to RCE by responding to criticisms of the traditional notion of the ego that were debated in the twentieth century. Specifically, chapter 4 responds to criticisms set forth by the following twentieth-century perspectives: *psychoanalysis*, which argued that the traditional view that the ego has complete control of its executive functions and the traditional view that the ego has primacy over the passions are false; *existential phenomenology*, which argued that the traditional view that the ego resides within the interior of the psyche is false; *depth psychology*, which argued that the traditional view that the ego has complete access to the interior of the psyche is false; *symbolic interactionism* and *relational psychoanalysis*, which argued that the traditional view that the ego always has privileged access to itself is false; *postmodernism*, which argued that the

traditional view that the ego is the author of its identity in the world is false;⁴ *psychoanalytic feminist theory*, which argued that the traditional view that the ego (as conceived in the modern period) is gender-neutral is false; and *physicalism in the philosophy of mind*, which argued that the traditional view that the ego's interior side is something more than physical science can explain is false.

Among the ideas added to RCE in chapter 4, the most general is that the ego, on its interior side, is a bridge that integrates the two fundamental dualities introduced a moment ago. Chapter 4 explains how the ego bridges and integrates the fundamental duality of the interior ego and the worldly self, including, among its specific forms, the duality of interior psychic life and embodied, social life, the duality of self-authorship and social construction of identity, and, generally, the duality of subjectivity (including its phenomenal, intentional, and cultural dimensions) and objectivity (including its physical, functional, and social dimensions). Chapter 4 also explains how the ego bridges and integrates the fundamental duality of agency and spontaneity, including, among its specific forms, the duality of executive and spontaneous (intuitive, creative) cognition and the duality of self-control and the passions.

A major point made in chapter 4 is that the ego's role as bridge and integrator of the dualities just mentioned indicates that neither of the sides of these dualities is inherently dominant over the other. It indicates that, depending on conditions, the sides can be in relatively balanced interaction or can be out of balance (in either direction), with one side exerting dominance across a wide range of possibilities, from slight to extreme, although never complete. Chapter 4, therefore, concludes that the "truth" about the dualities under discussion lies on neither of the sides of these dualities but rather on the middle ground between the sides.

More precisely, chapter 4 concludes that the truth lies on a *wide and shifting* middle ground because whether the sides of the dualities are in or out of balance depends on empirical factors, which can vary from one person to another and can change over time for a single person. With this conclusion, chapter 4 challenges both the traditional notion of the ego and its primary antitraditional critics. It challenges the former by rejecting the view that forms of human subjectivity and agency in principle have dominance over their corresponding forms of objectivity and spontaneity; and it challenges the latter by rejecting the view that in principle the dominance goes the other way around. Neither side of these dualities has an inherent primacy over the other. Chapter 4 argues that the truth is determined by empirical factors, not a priori arguments, and that empirical factors indicate

that the truth cannot be fixed and is subject to change, lying on a wide and shifting middle ground between the sides of the dualities in question.

Chapter 5 adds two final ideas to RCE by adopting, revising, and integrating the ideas of the *self-system* and the *lifeworld*, the former borrowed from the interpersonal psychoanalysis of Harry Stack Sullivan, and the latter borrowed from existential phenomenology. These two ideas further develop the notion of the exterior, worldly side of the ego, the idea of the self-system explaining what the ego is as an exterior or worldly self and the idea of the lifeworld explaining what kind of world the ego lives in as such a self. The ideas of the self-system and lifeworld play central roles in our account of ego development in parts 2 and 3. The two ideas are set forth more clearly later in this introduction.

The basic ideas of RCE are borrowed from historical sources. One of these sources is Buddhism; the others are major figures or schools in modern European philosophy and psychology, where the modern European period is here understood to extend from the early seventeenth century to the end of the first half of the twentieth century. Primary among the modern European sources are Descartes, Kant, (William) James, classical psychoanalysis, Jungian psychology, and existential phenomenology. Although the ideas borrowed from these sources are part of the historical record, belonging more to the past than to the present, they all still retain their original value. Furthermore, I hope to show that the value of these ideas can be more fully realized if, first, they are revised so that they can withstand criticisms that, like those considered in chapter 4, have emerged in more recent times and if, second, they are adapted to each other so that they work together as cohering ideas of a single theoretical framework, such as RCE.

Regrettably, newly emerging theoretical approaches often supplant rather than supplement older ones, which are then treated as if they have *only* historical significance. This book moves in the opposite direction. Committed to the view that the notion of the ego was a signature insight rather than a defining myth of the modern period, this book is a project of retrieval and rethinking. It reevaluates and, when appropriate, reemploys ideas that played important roles in shaping the traditional notion of the ego. It reevaluates these ideas to determine which among them have withstood the test of criticism. It then reemploys those that have withstood this test, first by revising them so that they fit together in mutually strengthening and clarifying ways, second by grounding them in recent research, and third by demonstrating how, once thus revised and grounded, they can provide both historical perspective and new insights to current debate.

Buddhism, Kant, and James provide RCE with its most prominent ideas. These ideas are set forth in chapter 3 and further developed in chapter 4. From Buddhism RCE adopts two key ideas. The first is that there is a “space of spontaneity” within the psyche, what earlier was described as the underlying psychic source or sources from which arise the thoughts, images, and impulses with which the ego performs its executive functions. According to Buddhism, the more deeply a meditator examines consciousness, the more evident it becomes that consciousness is an open space in which thoughts, images, and impulses arise unpredictably and of their own accord. Meditative awareness of this space reveals that the thoughts, images, and impulses that arise within it are countless in number and that they appear and disappear in a seemingly uninterrupted process of creative production. Buddhists have referred to this space of spontaneity as a “fertile void” or “creative emptiness.”

The second key idea adopted from Buddhism is that to experience the space of spontaneity within us is to experience the absence of an ego in that space. According to Buddhism, meditation shows that at the center of consciousness, where a unified, executive ego is supposed to be, there is instead *only* an open space of spontaneity. In our view, the thoughts, images, and impulses that arise within the space of spontaneity are produced spontaneously *for* the ego, which appropriates them and thus relates to them as its own thoughts, images, and impulses when, guided and motivated by them, it performs its executive functions. Buddhism argues otherwise, holding that there is no ego for which these thoughts, images, and impulses are produced or by which they are appropriated for executive purposes. According to Buddhism, the *presumption* that there is such an ego is unmasked as a false belief or persistent illusion once the space of spontaneity is brought meditatively into view. To be aware of the space of spontaneity is to be aware only of thoughts, images, and impulses that arise without having been premeditated by an ego and that come and go without being appropriated or put to functional use by an ego.

According to RCE, awareness of the space of spontaneity does *not* unmask the ego as a false belief or illusion. Rather, it hides the ego, just as awareness of the ego’s executive activity hides the spontaneity of consciousness. Sitting silently in Buddhist meditation, it certainly seems as if there is nothing more to consciousness than a space in which thoughts, images, and impulses spontaneously arise, just as, actively engaged in operational thinking or goal-directed action, it certainly seems as if there is nothing more to consciousness than an executive ego thinking its own thoughts

and pursuing its own aims. RCE argues that these appearances, although indisputable, are misleading because they hide the fact that the ego and the spontaneity of consciousness work together as opposite, coessential interior sides of consciousness, together making up what earlier was referred to as the duality of agency and spontaneity.

The ego is the side of this duality that experiences what arises within or is presented to consciousness and that performs executive functions of cognitive and practical sorts. In contrast, the spontaneity of consciousness is the side that produces the internally generated content of experience, specifically the thoughts with which the ego thinks, the images with which the ego imagines, and the impulses on which the ego acts. Although, as opposites, the ego in its agency and the spontaneity of consciousness hide and frequently conflict with each other, they more fundamentally, according to RCE, require and complete each other. According to RCE, the ego and the spontaneity of consciousness have coevolved to work together as complementary opposites, each providing for the other what the other cannot provide for itself.

Chapters 3 and 4 explain in some detail how the ego and the spontaneity of consciousness interact, explaining that the spontaneity of consciousness provides the ego with the internally generated content of its experience and that the ego, *when strongly organized, selectively focused, and functionally engaged*, provides the spontaneity of consciousness with guidance in what content to produce. The spontaneity of consciousness does not cease being spontaneous and, therefore, unpredictable in the *specific* thoughts, images, and impulses it produces when under the ego's strong guiding influence. Nevertheless, when under such influence, it does tend to produce thoughts, images, and impulses of *types* that are relevantly responsive to the ego's engaged concerns. Whereas a weak, unfocused, and disengaged ego is witness to the free play of the spontaneity of consciousness, as occurs during reverie and dreams, a strong, focused, and engaged ego "harnesses" the spontaneity of consciousness in such a way that for the most part it produces thoughts, images, and impulses that facilitate the ego's executive functions and thus allow the ego to act effectively in the world. In this account of the interaction between the ego and the spontaneity of consciousness, it becomes clear that the ego bridges and integrates the duality of agency and spontaneity—including the dualities of executive and spontaneous cognition and of self-control and the passions—rather than standing only on the side of agency.

RCE also adopts two ideas from Kant. The first is that the ego is a formal unity of apperception, which means that the ego is (1) an experienc-

ing subject that cannot experience itself directly because, as an experiencing subject, it is empty of intuitable content (a *formal* unity of apperception); (2) an experiencing subject that, because it is itself temporally unified (self-identical over time⁵), unifies its experiences by binding them together under its unified point of view (a formal *unity* of apperception); and (3) an experiencing subject that is aware of itself as that to which its experiences belong, as that which not only unifies its experiences but also appropriates them, thus assuming ownership of them and relating to them as “its” experiences (a formal unity *of apperception*). Kant’s idea that the ego is a formal unity of apperception is complex and subtle. However, I hope to show that it is an idea that, if properly unpacked, can be shown to ascribe to the ego no more than we can experience for ourselves as egos.

The second idea adopted from Kant, this one a hypothesis rather than an idea conveying what we can experience for ourselves, is that the ego, as a formal unity of apperception, is the organized form of an activity, not a thing. In adopting this idea, RCE does not accept Kant’s account of the activity of which the ego is the organized form. Whereas Kant held that this activity works beyond consciousness to produce both the ego and consciousness, RCE holds that it works within consciousness to produce only the ego. Specifically, whereas Kant held that the activity that produces the ego is a synthesizing process of a “transcendental” (supraempirical) sort, RCE holds that this activity is a synthesizing process of a *neuropsychological* sort, a synthesizing process that works at once within the neurological bases and the subjective interior of consciousness.⁶

Although RCE does not adopt Kant’s account of the activity that produces the ego, it does accept his view that this activity produces the ego in a twofold way, as both the unifying subject and the appropriating owner of consciousness. It produces the ego as the unifying subject of consciousness by creating a temporally unified experiencing point of view under which succeeding experiences are held together and thus unified within one consciousness. Simultaneously, it produces the ego as the appropriating owner of consciousness by attaching the experiences that the ego unifies to the ego in such a way that they belong to it as parts of what it is, thus transforming these experiences from unowned, impersonal experiences into *the ego’s* experiences. Because the activity of which the ego is the organized form produces the ego as both the unifying subject and appropriating owner of consciousness, RCE calls it the “unifying-appropriating function.”

Taking this Kantian line of thought one step further, RCE holds that the ego, as the organized form of the unifying-appropriating function, can

be understood to be not only active in its inherent nature but also active *as an agency*, specifically as an agency that performs executive functions of cognitive and practical sorts. According to RCE, the unifying-appropriating function constitutes the ego as a subject that performs two root functions, an *experiencing* function, which the ego performs as the unifying subject of consciousness, and a *proprietary* function, which the ego performs as the appropriating owner of consciousness. RCE explains in general terms how these two root functions underlie and make possible the ego's executive functions, the experiencing function underlying and making possible the ego's cognitive functions and the proprietary function underlying and making possible the ego's practical functions.

The hypothesis that the ego is the organized form of the unifying-appropriating function is the leading hypothesis of RCE. In chapter 3, we argue that this hypothesis is warranted because it helps to explain important facts and assumptions about the ego that would otherwise go unexplained. We have just proposed that it helps to explain the ego's structure as a formal unity of apperception and the ego's cognitive and practical agency. In chapters 3 and 4, we propose that the hypothesis also helps to explain several other basic, essential features of the ego.

RCE also adopts two ideas from James. These ideas are already implied by the hypothesis that the ego is the organized form of the unifying-appropriating function. Nevertheless, they are ideas that first came to prominence in James's work. The first of these ideas is that everything in the "stream of consciousness" is in ceaseless motion, *including* the ego as interior subject and executive agency of consciousness. The second idea is that the ego has two, interior and exterior, subjective and worldly, sides, which we have referred to as the fundamental duality of the interior ego and the worldly self. James expressed this second idea by saying that the ego is both an interior subject or "I" and an exterior object or "Me." As an interior subject or I, the ego is a temporally unified conscious point of view that has experiences and that performs executive functions; and as an exterior object or Me, the ego is an embodied self defined by the experiences it has and by the worldly attributes with which it identifies.⁷

In adopting these ideas from James, RCE uses the Kantian ideas we have introduced to explain them. RCE explains that the ego on its interior side is in ceaseless motion because it is the organized form of an activity, the unifying-appropriating function. Additionally, RCE explains that the ego has not only an interior but also an exterior side because, as an interior ego with a proprietary function, it appropriates its experiences and what it

perceives to be its bodily, mental, and social attributes, thus forging for itself an exterior side by making itself an object or Me in the world. In this way, the ego, in the very process of being constituted on its interior side is already in the process of forging for itself a worldly self. In sum, according to RCE, the interior ego, as subject or I, is an ever-in-motion, ever-reconstituting unifying-appropriating function; and the exterior ego, as object or Me, is the set of worldly experiences and attributes that have been appropriated by the interior side of the ego in the exercise of its proprietary function.

To flesh out the idea of the ego's exterior side, RCE adopts and revises three key ideas from psychoanalysis. One of these ideas, mentioned earlier, is that of the self-system, which is borrowed from Harry Stack Sullivan. The other two ideas are those of the ego ideal and the superego. RCE revises Sullivan's idea of the self-system so that it focuses on self-knowledge and self-motivation rather than, as it does for Sullivan, on self-esteem. Thus revised, the self-system consists of the following four components: (1) the ego on its interior side, as subject and executive agency of consciousness (the self of the self-system); (2) the self-representation (the ego's primary instrument of self-knowledge); (3) the ego ideal (one of the ego's two primary instruments of self-motivation); and (4) the superego (the other of the ego's two primary instruments of self-motivation).⁸

RCE adopts the idea of the self-representation without needing to revise it. According to the general understanding, the self-representation is the mental record on which the ego keeps track of what it believes itself to be as a human being in a material, social world. In adopting this understanding of the self-representation, RCE interprets it in terms of the Kantian and Jamesian ideas just introduced. For RCE, therefore, the self-representation is the mental record on which, in Kantian terms, the ego keeps track of the experiences and attributes that, by exercising its proprietary function, it has appropriated and thus relates to as parts of what it is. In Jamesian terms, the self-representation is the mental record on which the ego, as interior subject or I, keeps track of the experiences and attributes that make up its worldly side, as exterior object or Me.

Whereas RCE adopts the idea of the self-representation without needing to revise it, it adopts the ideas of the ego ideal and the superego only with significant revisions. Specifically, it revises them to clarify their relations to the two chief motivating forces of life, desire (ego ideal) and fear (superego). As defined by RCE, the ego ideal is the ego's desire-elicited, "pulling," or, in Aristotelian terminology, *telic* instrument of self-motivation. Specifically, the function of the ego ideal is to manage the ego's pursuit of

desire by encouraging the ego to pursue desires that facilitate or at least do not conflict with its ideal goals. In turn, as defined by RCE, the superego is the ego's fear-driven, "pushing," or, in Aristotelian terminology, *efficient* instrument of self-motivation. Specifically, the function of the superego is to manage the ego's avoidance of fear by pressuring the ego to act in ways that minimize unwanted consequences. Redefined in these ways, it becomes clear that the ego ideal and superego work together in opposite but complementary ways, as telic and efficient motivators of the ego's actions. The ideas of the ego ideal and the superego are among the most important insights of psychoanalysis. The importance of these ideas becomes more evident, I believe, when they are revised, as they are by RCE, in ways that clarify their relations to desire and fear and their opposite but complementary roles as instruments of the ego's self-motivation.

The idea of the self-system just set forth fills out the idea of the ego's exterior side by explaining how the ego not only thinks of itself as a self with worldly experiences and attributes (self-representation) but also motivates itself to act as a self with worldly desires (ego ideal) and fears (superego). The self-representation is a record on which the ego logs everything it has appropriated and thus made part of itself, as worldly object or Me. In turn, the ego ideal and the superego are auxiliary agencies by which the ego motivates itself to act in pursuit of worldly interests, whether by satisfying worldly desires or avoiding worldly fears. Together, the self-representation on the one hand and the ego ideal and the superego on the other provide the ego with both self-knowledge and self-motivation as a self that belongs to and acts in the world.

The idea of the self-system as defined by RCE implies a closely associated key idea, that of the shadow. The idea of the shadow was introduced by Carl Jung. Because Jung wrote on such topics as archetypes, synchronicity, and mysticism, many hold his contributions to psychology in suspicion. However, there is nothing occult about the idea of the shadow, which is simply the idea that there are parts of the ego's life that the ego does not acknowledge because they are highly threatening to it. Whereas the self-representation is a mental record of those parts of the ego's life that the ego has appropriated and thus understands belong to it as parts of what it is, the shadow consists of those parts of the ego's life that the ego has disowned and hidden from view. Whereas the self-representation is the record of the experiences and attributes that the ego relates to as Me, the shadow is an unconscious subsystem underlying the self-system to which the ego has banished the experiences and attributes that it relates to as not-Me.

This brief account of the shadow reveals that the shadow is the negative counterpart of the self-representation: the shadow consists of all those parts of the ego's life, if any, that are excluded from the self-representation. The "if any" qualification was inserted because the fact that a person has a self-representation does not by itself imply that that person has a shadow. As we shall see in chapters 9 and 10, the self-representation emerges before the shadow is formed, the former emerging in the second half of the second year, and the latter emerging, along with the ego ideal and the superego, in the transition from early to middle childhood. Additionally, as we shall see in chapter 17, the shadow is sometimes awakened in adults in a way that leads to its integration within consciousness. Thus integrated, the shadow ceases to exist and what was the shadow becomes part of a more inclusive self-representation.

This point made, the more important point here is that the shadow, once formed in the transition from early to middle childhood, consists of those parts of the ego's life that the ego has excluded from consciousness because they are highly threatening to it. Because the shadow is excluded from consciousness, it is not part of the self-system. Indeed, the shadow is in certain respects the antithesis of the self-system. Nevertheless, because the shadow is the negative counterpart of the self-representation, it is inherently tied to the self-system, as an underlying unconscious subsystem. Tied to the self-system in this way, the shadow, once formed, develops in concert with the self-system, stage by stage over the course of life.

Unfortunately, the idea of the shadow has been a frequent target of criticism. The primary issue is that it is difficult to explain how the ego can hide unwanted parts of itself, thus removing these parts from consciousness and forming the shadow. From the beginning, the explanation has been that the ego accomplishes this feat by so inhibiting the expression of unwanted parts of itself that these parts are expelled from consciousness. This explanation, that the shadow is *the product of repression*, has come under criticism because the idea of repression, especially in its original Freudian formulation, has been called into question, for reasons discussed in chapter 10. To adopt the idea of the shadow, therefore, the idea of repression needs to be reconceived in such a way that it can explain the formation of the shadow without relying on assumptions that have called it into question.

In chapter 10, I propose what I call the "energy-reduction" conception of repression, which, I believe, meets these stipulations. After setting forth this conception of repression, I incorporate it within RCE to explain how the ego creates the shadow—as part of the same process by which it creates

the ego ideal and the superego—in the transition from early to middle childhood. Then, in chapter 12, I use the energy-reduction conception of repression to explain how the ego reconstitutes the shadow, as an adult shadow, in early adulthood. Finally, in chapters 11, 13, 16, and 17, I use the energy-reduction conception to explain why shadow awakening is more likely to occur during some developmental stages (adolescence, midlife transition, spiritual preawakening, and spiritual awakening) than during others.

Further to flesh out the idea of the ego's exterior side, RCE adopts two ideas from existential phenomenology, the idea of the existential priority of the world over subjectivity and the idea of the lifeworld. According to the first of these ideas, we live originally and primarily in the world and withdraw into subjectivity only as a "secondary abode." RCE, in adopting this idea from phenomenology, reformulates it to say that the exterior, object or Me, side of the ego has existential priority over the interior, subject or I, side. The exterior side has this priority because the ego, from birth forward, spends most of its time as a bodily self engaged in the material, social world. The ego at the beginning of life is not yet aware of subjectivity as an interior space distinct from the physical, intersubjective, and communal spaces it shares with others. Moreover, after discovering this interior space, the ego withdraws into it only as a secondary abode, as a place for sleep, reverie, introspection, prayer, or meditation.

In following existential phenomenology by assigning the world an existential priority over subjectivity, RCE does not follow existential phenomenology by also assigning the world an ontological priority over subjectivity. According to existential phenomenology, subjectivity, as an interior space set off from the world, is derivative in nature, emerging only in acts of withdrawing from engaged participation in the world. Thus conceived, subjectivity is an emerging and disappearing epiphenomenon, an interior space that is created only in the act of entering it, collapsing and thus vanishing upon return to worldly engagement.

RCE does not accept this view. RCE holds that subjectivity—rooted in and arising from the neurological bases of consciousness—is the place within which the ego is originally formed. This view follows from RCE's idea that the ego is the organized form of the unifying-appropriating function, which, again, works at once within the neurological bases and the subjective interior of consciousness. According to RCE, therefore, the ego is formed within a domain, subjectivity, in which originally and primarily it does not live. However, although subjectivity is not the place in which the ego originally and primarily lives, it is the place in which the ego is

formed and, therefore, in which it comes most intimately in touch with itself, as interior subject or I.

In this view, the ego, in the very process of being constituted as the subject and executive agency of consciousness, is already projecting itself outwardly. It is already employing its proprietary function to appropriate its experiences and what it perceives to be its worldly attributes, thus constituting for itself an exterior side. The ego, that is, is already living in the world and establishing itself as a self belonging to the world in the very process of being constituted as an interior subject and agency. RCE thus holds that the ego's interior and exterior sides are both basic, although in different ways. The ego's interior side is basic ontologically, so far as its original constitution as subject or I is concerned; and the ego's exterior side is basic existentially, so far as its lived experience as worldly object or Me is concerned.

As for the second idea that RCE adopts from existential phenomenology, that of the lifeworld, RCE agrees with existential phenomenology that the world in which we originally and primarily live is the world as it is experienced prereflectively by an engaged subject, not the world as it is described by science or as it might exist apart from human experience. RCE incorporates this idea of the lifeworld by redefining it as the world as it is prereflectively experienced by the ego *through the lens of its self-system*. Thus defined, the lifeworld is the world as it is invested with personal meanings by the ego's self-representation and as it is charged with positive and negative values by the ego's ego ideal and superego, respectively. With this conception of the lifeworld, it becomes clear that the lifeworld, like the shadow, is inherently tied to the self-system and, therefore, develops in concert with it.

Using RCE as a guide, part 2 of *Recentering the Self* provides an account of ego development that highlights both the interior and exterior sides of the ego as we have thus far described them. It tracks how the ego develops both as an interior subject and executive agency and as an embodied self with a self-system living originally and primarily in a lifeworld. A primary contribution made by this approach to ego development is that it brings together psychological (psychoanalytic, Jungian, developmental, clinical, neuropsychological) studies and philosophical (Buddhist, Kantian, Jamesian, phenomenological, existential) perspectives, using the former to give scientific grounding to the latter and using the latter to give more human meaning to the former. The result is a whole-life account of how the ego and its executive functions, self-system, shadow, and lifeworld develop in concert stage by stage over the course of life.

Inescapably, the account of ego development in part 2 reflects the author's perspective as a white male who has lived comfortably in the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Understanding this fact, I have tried hard to overcome biases and blind spots so that the account of ego development in part 2, although not suited for everyone, might have existential significance for most people. I am hopeful that the account of ego development focusing on the ego's interior side will have such significance because it explains how the ego bridges and integrates opposite sides of inherent dualities of human experience, dualities with which everyone is intimately familiar. It explains how the ego, as an interior subject, forges, monitors, and maintains its outer, worldly self and how the ego, as an interior agency, engages and guides the spontaneity of consciousness.

I am even more hopeful that the account of ego development focusing on the ego's exterior side will have existential significance for most people. It tracks the ego's self-systems and corresponding lifeworlds as they change from stage to stage and thus presents both a "biography" of the ego and a "travelogue" of its journey through the world. I understand that this account of the ego's life and journey, in stressing how we are alike rather than how we differ, goes against the grain of current discussion. I also understand that, despite having tried to make the account as inclusive as possible, unconscious biases and blind spots have inevitably worked against my aim. Nevertheless, I hope that readers will find something of value in the book to the extent that it succeeds in being inclusive, even if they are dismayed to the extent that it does not.

Part 3 of *Recentering the Self* applies RCE to stages of spiritual development with the aim of defending the ego against the widespread view that it plays primarily a negative role in spiritual life. This negative view of the ego is found in Asian traditions such as Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism, which challenge the notion of an abiding individual self (or ego), either because, properly understood, our true self is nothing other than ultimate reality itself (Ātman is Brahman: Advaita Vedanta) or because meditation reveals only ever-changing constituents of consciousness, not an abiding individual self that is the subject and owner of consciousness (*anattā*, meaning no-self in Pali; Buddhism). Either way, these views hold that attachment to the idea of an abiding individual self stands in the way of liberation or enlightenment. A negative view of the ego is also found in Taoism and Zen, which, skeptical of the ego generally, are harshly critical of executive functions associated with the ego. They argue that (operational) thinking interferes with the original fullness of experience and that (intentional)

action interferes with the spontaneity of life. That the ego plays primarily a negative role in spiritual life is also frequently advocated within relational traditions, such as the Abrahamic faiths, which hold that the ego in its free will is susceptible to unwholesome urges, tendencies, or social influences or, as main lines of Christianity maintain, is hereditarily predisposed to sin. Finally, the view maintaining the ego's negative role is also widely espoused among transpersonal theorists, many of whom write from one or more of the Asian perspectives just mentioned.

Part 3 begins by dividing spiritual development into the following four broad stages: spiritual preawakening, spiritual awakening, spiritual growth, and spiritual maturity. It then tracks changes in the ego's status, role, self-system, and lifeworld as spiritual development unfolds through these stages. This account of the ego's spiritual development leads to the following four general conclusions: (1) that the ego, as the organized form of the unifying-appropriating function (a self-conscious subject and agency), is real and, therefore, is not something to unmask as a false belief or persistent illusion; (2) that the ego is present in all known spiritual states, even those in which it seems to be absent; (3) that the ego has necessary, positive roles to play in all stages of spiritual development; and (4) that the ego is as essential to the "spirit" of spiritual life as this spirit is to the ego, since it is through the ego's conscious perspective that spirit perceives the world and with the aid of the ego's executive functions that spirit expresses itself in the world. Generally, the position defended in part 3 is that successful spiritual development requires a strong and resilient ego, not an ego that has been dispelled, dissolved, or suppressed, let alone mortified. Successful spiritual development requires that the ego be strong enough to withstand and resilient enough to adapt to awakened spiritual life so that, eventually, it can become a mature vehicle for spiritual life.

In putting the ego at center stage, the account of spiritual development set forth in part 3 opens itself to three main criticisms: that it might represent men's experience better than women's, that it might represent relational spiritual traditions better than nondual traditions, and that it might have little or no relevance for indigenous spiritual traditions. I address these criticisms in chapter 16, where I acknowledge their importance and attempt to respond to them. First, I explain that the account of spiritual development set forth in part 3 can be understood to apply to both women and men once it is understood how marked differences in women's and men's ego development in patriarchal societies help explain corresponding differences in their spiritual development. Second, I propose that the account of spiritual

development set forth in part 3 applies to nondual spiritual traditions by presenting a challenge to them, specifically, the challenge of acknowledging the ego's presence and essential role in spiritual life, even in expressions, states, and stages in which it seems to be absent from or resistant to spiritual life. Finally, I acknowledge that the account of ego development set forth in part 3 applies to indigenous traditions only abstractly and uncertainly, if at all. With these responses, I explain the qualifications that must be placed on and the merit that remains for an account of spiritual development that, like the one set forth in part 3, puts the ego at center stage.

I should add a note on scholarship. Part 1 is scholarly in aim. Chapters 1 and 2, which focus on the notion of the ego in historical perspective, are primarily scholarly endeavors. They cite a wide range of sources that help explain how the premodern notion of the soul was transformed into the modern notion of the ego. Chapters 3 through 5, which set forth RCE, are more theoretical than scholarly in aim but nonetheless require frequent references to historical sources and empirical findings, which are cited in the endnotes. Part 2, which sets forth an account of ego development based on RCE, presupposes and thus rests on many more psychological and other scientific studies than could possibly be cited. Part 2 is very wide in scope, seeking to show how RCE can be applied to major stages of the human lifespan. Given this scope, it was necessary in part 2 to be highly selective in referring to supporting literatures. Nevertheless, I have tried in part 2 to cite behavioral, clinical, neuroscientific, and other studies whenever points are made that might raise questions for the reader. Finally, part 3, which applies RCE to four stages of spiritual development, is intended as a proposal rather than as a scholarly exposition or theoretical demonstration. As explained in chapter 16, the account of spiritual development set forth in part 3 is hypothetical only. Moreover, based on RCE, it is an account that to a significant extent is the author's own invention. Scholarly citations are for these reasons provided in part 3 only as required in making explicit references to sources.

A note is also needed on terminology used in part 2 in discussing ego development in childhood and old age. "It" is used when referring to a (single) child instead of alternating between "he" and "she" or using "they." Additionally, "old" is used when referring to people in the last stage of life instead of using words such as "older" or "elderly." These choices were made without intending any disrespect for children (including my younger self) or old people (including my current self).