

## CHAPTER 1

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### Introduction: Becoming Someone We Like

Two things seem to matter most in life: finding love and becoming someone we like. Knowing what to say about love has always stumped me, but I do have some thoughts about our becoming someone we like. And that is what I will talk about in this book.

We all have complex images of the kind of person we would like to be, of the ideal kind of character traits we would like to have. Moral prescriptions help us construct parts of that picture. They tell us what we need to do in order to be good people aimed at right action. But alas, there is much more to being someone we like than our just trying to be moral. Indeed, morality aside, some people would also very much like to be charming, perhaps aggressive, maybe even coy, powerful, and humorous. On and on the choices go, and everybody makes them. The fact of the matter is, we all have our own complex character trait images we carry around with us. And they usually take us well beyond the range of mere moral concern. We all line up behind our images in the earnest belief that if we can make them come alive in who we really are with one another, then we truly will be someone we like.

Clearly, though, imagining a character of ideal traits is one thing; actually becoming it is quite another. Life would be eminently wonderful if, with a mere wave of the hand, we could become the ideal likable person we paint in our mind. But there are so many problems. For one thing, we often enough aren't even right about who we think we want to be. From infancy, through childhood, and well into adulthood, many of us go around claiming to be ways that in fact we are not. Self-deception, ambivalence, unconscious interference, and other obstacles make us get it wrong. More times than it is comfortable to admit, we claim to stand for things that in fact we don't; we claim to have a certain kind of character that in fact we don't. Sometimes we are just a little off the mark, sometimes quite a bit. In that regard, life is all about our trying to keep the gap as narrow as possible. It is about getting it right so that we can genuinely own the character we say is us. But while figuring out who we want to be is certainly no picnic, that's not the half of it. Knowing our minds is comparatively easy next to

actually doing something about it. Even if we were perfectly clear about what kind of character would make us happy with ourselves, we would still then have to do what it takes to develop ourselves as our ideal character. The truth is that we all have to expend great amounts of effort to ever even come close to matching our images with who we actually become. And as though that weren't difficult enough, then we have to fight the battles of everyday life that would otherwise erode any of our gotten gains in who we've become. And as though *that* weren't difficult enough, when any of us actually want to change parts of who we've become, we have nothing but a struggle ahead of us. Developing as someone we like just is a difficult proposition.

What I propose to do in this book is look at these issues of developing ourselves. They can be cast in terms of three fundamental questions: What do we have to do to make ourselves selves (we like)? What do we have to do to continue being selves (we like) once we have become them? What do we have to do to change them when we find we prefer some better versions? No small moment, these questions. I shall concern myself in this book with the first two and save the vast terrain of the third for another time.<sup>1</sup> I am going to immerse us in an analysis of what I take to be the central concept in understanding everything about becoming and staying a character self. That would be the concept of *psychological identification*. I will be arguing that to the extent that we actually become who we are as characters, we genuinely *identify with* what would otherwise just be our images of how we want to live our lives. In remaining who we would be, we *maintain* our *identifications*. I know that on the face of things there is nothing that sounds extraordinarily revealing in these claims. They seem to be so commonsensical. I am hoping, though, that I can convince the reader that there is more than just common sense here that we can glean from a careful analysis of psychological identification. In talking about this concept, I am going to provide the conceptual framework for understanding various developmental claims about becoming and remaining selves that are made not only in everyday folk psychology but also in psychoanalytic theory. I am going to peel the conceptual onion, as it were, so that psychological identification and its variants are laid bare and assume their proper place in discussions of self development.

My strategy for this first chapter is twofold: It is to introduce the reader to the literature in philosophy and psychoanalysis that my discussion is a part of and then to sketch the thesis about identification for which I will be arguing. Before I begin with any of this, how-

ever, I want to do what I can in the first section to make us feel totally at home with the choice I've made to connect talk about identification with talk about self development. I want to get us comfortable with the conceptual melding of the ideas of psychological identification and becoming and staying (that is, being) selves. To do this, I want to share with you some descriptions of a few pictures from my life that I think capture the essence of the essential connections. I would like you to see the kinds of mental representations that take hold of me when I think about identification and developing as a self. What this slice of pictorial autobiography will amount to is a set of narrative paradigms for me about certain universal truths which pertain to my life as an identifying self who becomes and persists. But while my personal picturebook does this job for me, everyone, in fact, carries around their own personally distinct autobiographical album that does the same job. We all have memories of events that are our paradigms of identifying and being a self. Be that as it may, I am still going to favor my own mental pictures here and use them as a dramatic device for getting the ball rolling. I am certain that you will trot out your own appropriate pictures as I show you mine.

## I

#1: Here is one of me as a small boy. Dirty smiling face, jeans with grass stains on the knees, baseball glove on the left hand, bat leaning on the right shoulder. Those were the days. I identified with Duke Snider then, center fielder for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He was my hero. Power at the plate, grace in the field—the smooth uppercut swing to send a ball into orbit, the relentless climbing of the fences to snare the impossible fly. These were his forte. These and the omnipotence they represented for me were what I wanted for myself. I practiced his swing; I tried my hand at dramatic fence climbing; I walked around submerged in my share of childhood omnipotence fantasies. All of this activity was about my wanting to become a certain kind of person. Although I understood that no one actually could be just like the Duke, I wanted to come close and give it my own twist. Even at that tender age, I was concerned with making myself special, with creating my own niche. I didn't know it at the time, but this was just part of a much wider life project I had of carving out a self with a full set of traits I wanted. My identification with figures like this baseball hero (and my father, my second grade teacher, and any of a number of others) played a crucial role in the whole business.

There was more than just “hero worship with the aim of building a self” on this hidden agenda, however. For one thing, it is clear that there was something of a self already there to build on. I had already been identifying with being popular, smart, attractive, and aggressive. How’s that for a litany of typical childhood arrogancia? Naturally, I wasn’t perfectly successful in my project, but I gave it a try because that was my image of who I was to be. And there were still other parts to me, parts I didn’t identify with. People have told me, for example, that I was also temperamentally shy and inquisitive. I was honest and doggedly loyal as a friend, and I was a difficult person with my sisters, even though I wasn’t aware of these things. And, yes, I was unforgivingly selfish. I am told (thank God for parents and their memories) that I was also energetic, pensive, clever, argumentative, overly sensitive, proud, and bullying. Whether I identified with being these ways or not, they were part of who I was. Clearly I had a complex self long before Duke Snider came on the scene.

There was plenty more identifying to be done after my Duke Snider days. As an adolescent, I would come to identify with my high school, to the point of fighting for its good name. I would come to identify with Robert Redford and the adolescent model of masculine perfection he seemed to embody. But there were other things too, things of more gravity. At a certain point in my adolescence, I began self-consciously wanting to be a person of substance, a person of some moment. I wanted more meaning to my life. While I recognized what had come before as being important qualities of my self—even somewhat meaningful—I now had reached a point where I would engage in such matters with more reflective earnest. And it continues for me now; I continue to develop.

#2: Here is a picture of my wife. See how she has many of what today would be considered politically incorrect identifications. For example, she idolized the glamorous Marilyn Monroe and made herself up in that image. At the same time, she longed for the day when she could begin to rule her own domestic roost in the same homemaker way she was practicing on her dolls. She felt connected with a life of feminine wiles; she thought a girl did best by pursuing her desires through charm. The closer she could come to all these images, the more special she believed she would be.

Of course, she, too, was building all of this onto a self that had long been underway. She, too, had already been identifying with being popular, smart, attractive, and aggressive, realizing these

ideals in varying degrees. And she had many more personality traits—things like temperament, emotional tendencies, and so forth—some of which she identified with and some not. And as an adolescent, she, like me, also began in greater earnest carving out a self of more serious substance.

Neither of us was unusual in having this concern for substance. Most evolving adults like to think of themselves as people of serious substance. At least we like to think that we are aimed in that direction. We identify with being solid. For most of us, this means every day making ourselves responsible members of society—identifying with pursuing a career, choosing a mate, rearing a family, developing strong friendships, pursuing our leisure time with gusto, and so on. That is all very meaningful. But then there are also the more abstract “deep” identifications, such as fine-tuning and standing up for our moral commitments or our intellectual pursuits; such as defending our concepts of democracy, egalitarianism, freedom; such as immersing ourselves in our image of being a rebel, perhaps even being an outlaw. Adult identification is the life project of standing for these sorts of things, of solidly driving them home in our personalities. In short, it is to build our character. Building character—that is what all of this activity from early childhood on is all about. As children, we certainly want to be special selves. We flail about in our primitive attempts to get things started. But most of what we do there is just pre-character-building activity. It is just the prelude to the full symphony to come, that being the ultimate adult project of building a “character self.” Through identifying with people, things, ideas, institutions, and more, we evolve our slate of images of what a perfect self would be like; and we spend a lifetime reworking the slate, all the while trying to faithfully live out its likeness.

#3: Those two pictures are interesting. But when all is said and done they are just still shots of character-growth activity, an abstract sketch of the general plan about *becoming* a self. Here, though, is an action shot that captures relatively fully formed selves *being* themselves. It is of me as a young man with my fiancée. We are dancing, laughing, and talking with abandon, gazing deeply into one another’s eyes. I wonder what we were saying. I wonder what each of us was thinking when the picture was snapped. Although I can’t really remember, something else is very clear from just a glance here. This is a photo of two *established* selves. My fiancée and I have a confidence about our actions that serves mostly in process—that is, people

first *becoming* selves—don't have. In this picture, we are not tentative with one another. We are characters connecting. In being characters with one another—and not merely human animals causally interacting according to various biological and psychological laws—each of us conveys an air of autonomy, as though each of us has chosen to make this contact and could move away from it if that seemed desirable. Each of us is autonomously pleading a case for how we want life to go. And from the looks of this picture, enjoying ourselves as sexual beings was probably what we both had in mind.

Allow me some poetic license in developing this idea. A person's character is more believable as something essential to who he is when, as in this picture, that person moves about with others in ways that express intention. There is more of a life breathed into the self when we move our bodies through the world on the waves of intention and when we capture one another's concern with our eyes, our touch, our words, our power. We constantly fill each other with our expressions of who we are, of how from one moment to the next we choose to "do" our lives, of the kind of soul we want to take responsibility for in the world of human affairs. We constantly fill one another with expressions of how a given something in life is important to us, expressions of the slant on things we feel life deserves just then. All this expression further legitimizes and consequently more firmly secures the self we have been fashioning. Switching metaphors, we can say we show ourselves to the world as established beacons sending out steady beams of character. We are constantly pulsating with our particular kind of light, unrelentingly filling every pair of eyes in our path with the light of who we are (whether that light is received accurately or not).

In all that we do in the world of character selves, we can't help but be spinners of yarns, tellers of tales, purveyors of meaning, constantly providing the world with the character fodder about which it measures our substance and affirms us as solid identities. So we wash the dishes, take care of our children, and write books, all these activities showing everyone around us what we think the living of life is about. All this intentional action bespeaks the self that is already in place. In being in the world with others, we present one another with solid tablets of meaning—*tabula plena*, as it were. We push against one another with these tablets and know that we are really in the world with other selves who are distinct from us. In part, for example, I know my own calm ways by bouncing off my friend's jangly nerves. I can't avoid his meaning either. Indeed, however meaning-

less our own self might on occasion feel to us, we can't help but feel the motion of busy meaning swirling about us, sometimes softly touching us, sometimes rolling through us, sometimes becoming an occupying force. There is some, albeit a typically dim, part of consciousness where we persons really can't help but notice, through every expression of the intentional beings who cross our path, the continual supply of meanings flooding the psychological plain. Characters are everywhere. When we interact with them, we take them seriously as fixed meaningful selves to be dealt with through our own character. We are no longer mainly becoming selves here. We are mainly selves of settled structure, of settled *being*. The activity of being ourselves involves our expressing our picture of life to the world.

#4: Although it will not be my focus in this book, I at least want us to take a quick glance at an image of identification *change* in the self. Here is a picture of me as a young man. While I still am significantly the same here as I was in childhood, I can't deny that I have changed some. The stained jeans and bat and glove are gone. But so are parts of my character, having been replaced by some new structures and by some new content to old structures still being articulated. In either case, I don't identify with all the same things anymore. Clearly, this sort of condition is everyone's fate. It is rare to find someone who is absolutely settled in who she is. Some people are more open to change than others, of course. But all of us do some of it over the span of our lifetime. Some even invite it. We try to strike a new pose through various means—sometimes through sheer will, sometimes through new environments, sometimes through psychotherapy, and so on. But whether we so self-consciously invite character change like this or not, what is true about all of us is that at various points in life we face new character images and try them out. Identifications change. We discard some and keep others—always fine-tuning them, always looking for that very special way of presenting them to let others know our unique slant on things. As we find those images that work well for us, though, we are loath to let them go. Change is indeed a part of life, but it does have its boundaries. We are loath to change a self that is in place. Once we identify with being a certain way, we do everything possible to defend it because that identification is part of our self—our most prized possession.

That's enough. I won't show you any more pictures. These make the essential points about identification that I am concerned with our

having fixed in our minds. When identifying starts to unfold in the early part of a person's life, the activity of self development begins in earnest. One starts to become a character. When we are character selves in full swing, we are concerned with consolidation and self-maintenance of identifications. And from time to time, we have to deal with the forces of change that would challenge that self-maintenance. In any case, now we have some pictures of these ideas. They and what I've said about them are both the motivation for and general vision of what I think about our becoming and being (and sometimes changing) the person we would hope to be. In the chapters to follow, I am going to flesh out this vision; I am going to clarify the universal truths about identification and becoming and being a self that I think these pictures suggest. Now, however, it's time to lay down some groundwork, to provide some context. I want to introduce you to the literature that my vision of identification fits into. It turns out that there are some important debates about the self going on in both philosophy and psychoanalysis which circle the very issues that interest me. I would like to review them at least briefly here and begin to offer some critical perspective that will be filled in later.

## II

I begin with the philosophers. Over the past fifteen years, a new moral-psychology literature concerned with psychological development has sprung up among analytic philosophers. The brightest lights have been Daniel Dennett, Gerald Dworkin, Owen Flanagan, Harry Frankfurt, Jonathan Glover, Thomas Nagel, Amelie Rorty, Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor, Bernard Williams, and David Wong.<sup>2</sup> All of these thinkers want to find a proper analysis for the psychological activity behind a person's becoming and being an adult character self. Taylor claims that the activity we are looking for is moral evaluation, what he calls "strong evaluation." Williams talks about non-moral valuation. Dworkin speaks of autonomy; Glover, of self-creation. Amelie Rorty and David Wong discuss identification. Frankfurt focuses on reflective evaluation. So much to consider.

It is generally agreed by these people that human selves are essentially different from other animal selves in virtue of their agency. Human selves can take charge of their lives. How so? For starters, humans, as well as other animal species, have desires and other motives. Both Dworkin and Frankfurt see the essence of our autonomous agency in our having reflective desires about these



desires and other motives. We have, that is, second-order reflective desires about first-order (presumably causally explainable) psychological states. What is unique about the human self is that many of our decisions about how to act are based on such reflectiveness. Dworkin and Frankfurt diverge from one another at this point. Dworkin defends the idea that second-order reflections about first-order states are precisely a person's identifications,<sup>3</sup> a person's identity or character. Moreover, he argues that identifying with states is the mark of autonomy in us. And although he doesn't go on explicitly to draw this inference, one can't help but conclude from what he says that the essence of the human self is its autonomy and that that autonomy gets expressed through a person's ability reflectively to make decisions about first-order conscious states. Dworkin's focus here is on tying together the ideas of identity (self) and autonomy. Frankfurt takes a different turn in his interest in reflective consciousness. In addition to focusing on autonomy, he is also interested in talking about the evaluational nature of our reflective states and making that the essence of self. He points out that only human selves reflectively evaluate first-order desires. Some of those desires are judged desirable and some undesirable. The ability to do this evaluating is what is unique about the human agent.<sup>4</sup>

Taylor agrees with Frankfurt. He says that "what is distinctly human is the power to evaluate our desires, to regard some as desirable and others as [sic] undesirable" "Our identity is...defined by certain evaluations which are inseparable from ourselves as agents."<sup>6</sup> But Taylor goes on to offer some new distinctions. He points out that there are different kinds of evaluation that people engage in. One is what he calls "strong evaluation." Unfortunately, Taylor's full notion of this concept has been difficult to pin down. Parts of it certainly have changed over the years since he first introduced the idea. As it should be, philosophical exchange about his views has required him to make modifications.<sup>7</sup> However, I don't think we need to trace this evolution. Taylor's final version will suffice, especially since I believe it is the core idea that has been in his writings all along. That idea is that the human agency self as strong evaluator is a being who makes *moral value* choices between first-order desires (and between other first-order states as well—emotions, beliefs, and so on), where these choices are independent of our first-order inclinations and, rather, are based on certain standards of moral judgment. In considering her first-order desires, the human self decides between those which she sees as being right or wrong, based on some standard of right and

wrong she is reflecting upon. She morally evaluates the options for how she will live her life from moment to moment and over the long haul.

Taylor distinguishes “strong evaluation” as a kind of reflection on first-order desires from “weak evaluation” of them. The latter idea is that people sometimes evaluate first-order desires as a mere weighing of preferences based on no external standards, that is, a mere weighing of preferences based on relative internal convenience, satisfaction, attractiveness, and so on.<sup>8</sup> Presumably, Frankfurt ran the two kinds of evaluation together; at least, Taylor supposes this. Taylor sees the distinction between strong and weak evaluation as an improvement on Frankfurt’s position. I think that, in the final analysis, the distinction certainly can be made, although people like Flanagan have shown that it can’t be made so simply. But even giving Taylor this much, the question that must be answered is, What legitimizes Taylor’s jumping from the introduction of the idea that there are two kinds of evaluation to the conclusion that strong evaluation is at the heart of what is distinctively human—that it counts and weak evaluation doesn’t? We have just seen that he has agreed with Frankfurt that the general “power to evaluate our desires, to regard some as desirable and others as undesirable,” in whatever sense of “desirable” or “undesirable” (i.e., “strong” or “weak” evaluation) one is talking about, is “what is distinctively human.” For Taylor to go on to make a distinction between two different sorts of reflective evaluation may be interesting, but it doesn’t warrant his conclusion that we are to treat *only* “strong evaluation” as what is distinctively human or at least what is at the heart of being a human agency self. Short of further argument to the contrary, Frankfurt’s more general position remains the best candidate for what the evaluational analysis of the human self is.<sup>9</sup> But I will have more to say about all of this in chapter 7.

Let me raise a caution here. While I think that Frankfurt’s views are closer to the truth in the debate, I don’t think finally that he is on the mark either. In fact, I don’t believe that evaluation of any kind (either Frankfurt’s notion or Taylor’s notion) is the crucial element for understanding the essential acts of human self-making (chapter 7). There is an open-question argument underlying my view. If you will allow me the view here at this preliminary juncture—a view I will argue for in the ensuing chapters—that “identifying with a state” has something to do with “choosing to accept that state as being part of who one is,” just as we can ask about a person with any first-order

state, Does she really *identify with* that state?, so, too, can we ask about a person with any particular reflective evaluation of such a state, Does she really *identify with* that evaluation or not? She might reflectively evaluate, but it is always an open question whether or not she identifies with that reflective evaluation. It is always an open question whether or not that evaluation is part of who she is. If she does identify with such an evaluation, then, and only then, is the evaluation at all involved as an essential part of her self. Even here, though, her evaluation is essential for self making not because it is an evaluation but rather because it is one more identification.

“Identification” is the primitive concept we need to understand if we want to get at the nature of agency in the character self. Interestingly, I believe that this concept fits nicely into Frankfurt’s general ideas about first- and second-order psychological states. I think that Frankfurt’s general insight that *some kind of reflective consciousness* of our first-order states is a key to understanding the uniqueness of human selves is correct; but I think that “identification” rather than “evaluation” is the ticket for understanding what really goes on in this kind of reflective consciousness. I will argue in chapter 7 that what I call “identificatory valuation” is the reflective state we need to understand. We will see that people make daily character-rooted life decisions reflectively based upon identificatory valuations of first-order states and more.

My general line of argument is quite compatible with a point of view Frankfurt has taken in his later writings. He says,

A person who cares about something is, as it were, invested in it. He identifies himself with what he cares about in the sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced.<sup>10</sup>

All of this, it seems to me, is right on target. It certainly rings true with how I read Heidegger’s notion of “care” as an ontological structure of being.<sup>11</sup> It also is the same kind of notion that Williams has in mind when he talks about how our identity is wrapped up in the central “life projects” we identify with.<sup>12</sup> It is the same kind of notion that Flanagan has in mind when he observes that identity is linked “to the strength of one’s identifications—to absorption in some end or ends, whatever that end or those ends might be,” moral or otherwise.<sup>13</sup> It is the same kind of notion that Dennett has in mind when he talks

about the self as the “center of one’s narrative gravity,” where by this he means those motives in life that we care about most.<sup>14</sup> I agree with these people that a crucial element of a human self is the caring she does about the things that matter most to her. Indeed, I discuss my slant on this idea in chapter 8, where I focus on what it is for a person to take responsibility for being the person she is.

There is one more idea found in the philosophical literature that I think is crucial to understanding the importance of identification for being a self. It has to do with something that Richard Rorty talks about.

Philosophers of self divide into essentialists and nonessentialists. Taylor thinks moral evaluation is an essential feature of selfhood. Dworkin favors autonomy. Nonessentialists believe the self is wholly contingent. In playing his Nietzschean card, Richard Rorty spells out such a story.<sup>15</sup> All there is to a self is what we create by ourselves, what we choose to be. We make our choices according to the linguistic descriptions we have chosen to have characterize us. We create new metaphors—what Rorty calls a “final vocabulary”—to talk about ourselves as meaningful.<sup>16</sup> Some people are, in Rorty’s terms, “ironists” in their understanding of their self. They have “radical and continuing doubts” about their final vocabularies. The core language they use to describe their deepest selves (e.g., that they are democratic, egalitarian, decent, etc.) are always open for revision. Moreover, they know that no one person’s vocabulary is better than any other’s at describing some objective reality. Even those who are not ironists about themselves, but rather are more commonsensical and thus believe that their words describe the hard truths of the world, have final vocabularies that ultimately are only contingent. The difference between the two types is that the ironists are aware of this human condition while the rest are not. Ironists realize that “the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, [and are] always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves.”<sup>17</sup> Everyone else has a self that is just as contingent, but not everyone else is aware of that fact.

We should understand that the contingency Rorty is talking about is what we might call a “content contingency.” He doesn’t believe that we have a human nature of special contents, such as our being essentially moral, competitive, democratic, and so on. However, it is still possible that there are quite noncontingent *processes* that all persons universally use to nail down their different content selves. The reflective consciousness view is certainly a candidate. So

is the view that connects caring about first-order states to selfhood. There is nothing that Rorty says to rule out some noncontingent process idea. In fact, he volunteers a candidate. Along with Glover, he is partial to the process of Nietzschean self-creation. The self is each person's reflexive creation. We choose the traits and actions we would commit our days to. Then we solidify that unfolding self by taking responsibility for it, even though its contents are always open for reformulation—that is, new choices, new responsibilities. These are the essential processes of self making. Such a view, I believe, is quite compatible with talk about identification. The content of two different selves may look radically different—that is, they may have radically different final vocabularies—but those selves come by their particular final vocabularies by identifying with one form of life (as characterized by a given vocabulary) rather than another. And I believe that important components of the identificatory process are, in the broadest terms, right out of the Nietzschean existential mold. I will explore this idea in chapters 5–8. There I will map out the self-creation and responsibility-taking activities involved in identifying our selves into existence.

### III

Important psychoanalytic Self theorists have their debates too. For example, some thinkers argue about the timetable for and the quality of the development of the self. So we see “the French School”—including people like Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, and Wallon<sup>18</sup>—claiming that the self doesn't take so long to come on the scene. They believe that a person has a self quite early on and that the solidity of its existence is immediately and forevermore jeopardized by the hard knocks of everyday life. Life, that is, immediately tends to alienate us from our selves. In this view, most of human psychological development is about responding to this alienation. These theorists don't see the life of the self as a many-splendored thing a person works to perfect. Rather, life is a complex activity of, on the one hand, dealing with the self's relative impotence in getting what it wants and, on the other, of dealing with the invasions it feels from other selves. These thinkers believe that in identifying with life projects, the adult does in fact *attempt* to build what we call a “strong healthy self.” However, this attempt finally is really nothing more than a papering over of an inconsolable loss of our original state of grace—our original solid self. Indeed, Lacan sees this activity as a sign of our essentially disturbed selves.

In this regard, a person's life is about her responding to an open psychological wound by putting on bandages that are always too small.

On the same general question of timetables, some other theorists argue that we don't gain a self early on (only to then lose it) but, rather, we are born with a self. Some people even claim that we are selves at conception. For both of these kinds of theorists, childhood development isn't the creation of a self but, rather, the learning of how to deal with the losing of the full self that goes on at birth. But the lost self here is different from the alienated self that we just talked about. For these theorists, the trauma of separating from our comfortable symbiosis with the maternal object (mother's body) is dealt with by one's trying to fight off the consequent sense of emptiness and frustrated satisfaction by developing a separate self that undertakes projects such as work, family life, ideologies, and so on. All of these projects are seen as busywork to get us to forget the ultimately solid self—the self of symbiosis—that we are missing out on. In this view, what we come to understand as the individuated autonomous self of later life is really what we learn to settle for. Morris Berman, for example, makes a case for this view.<sup>19</sup>

We won't really get to engage in a careful critique of any of these theorists; I just wanted to point to their existence. My main concern is in moving our attention to a place where I think the most interesting action is going on regarding the self. I'm talking about some discussions that are going on in two of the more mainstream psychoanalytic schools of thought—specifically, in Object Relations Theory and Narcissism Theory. The bright lights in these discussions are too numerous to mention here, but names like Jacobson, Mahler, Meissner, Winnicott, Kohut, and Kernberg<sup>20</sup> are certainly representative. These people are all concerned with drawing a developmental map of the self. Generally speaking, they are interested in understanding the journey we take toward selfhood in the taming of our irrational narcissistic impulses. They want to talk about the self as an ego that tries to bring irrational libidinal impulses under rational control. And they want to talk about when all of this goes on. For these theorists, identification plays a key role in the discussion. It's the final step in the march toward rational ego status. It's the process that unfolds only after the individual has successfully fought the psychologically more primitive wars of being a causally defined object relator and narcissistic satisfaction seeker. With these ideas in mind, what I would like to do now is convey the big picture of the Self issues that the two schools of psychoanalytic thought are interested in.

There's a small language problem both schools have, though, that I want to lay bare first. We can make some allowances for it and then move on. The basic problem is that in describing the developmental phases the infant and child go through in working toward becoming a self, the theorists talk about the infant *self* and child *self* going through those phases. And if we took these references to infant and child *selves* literally, we would be stuck with a circularity that would seem to undercut the very project that motivated all their developmental study in the first place. Theorists need some other term for the infant and child *being*, a term other than "self." It's a difficult point, though, for we are all drawn to making this same mistake. Nevertheless, if these theorists want to make their case, they really should have another locution.

Related to this problem, there is the problem of importing the notion of agency—a notion certainly appropriate when talking about full-fledged (adult) selves—into their talk about the infant or child self. What I mean is this: In talking about where a human being starts her developmental journey toward becoming a full-fledged self, the theorists must have a referent to talk about. Clearly the infant is the thing. And it becomes easy to slide into talk of the "infant self" as though there is already a version of an *agency* in place here, albeit a primitive one. We hear things said among these theorists like, "The infant doesn't let her mother stray too far," "The narcissistic infant or child always insists on satisfying her own desires before anyone else," "As an object relator, that infant introjects the blanket as a security symbol." It sounds as though the infant acts as an intentional agent on her world. And that's just not so. When all is said and done, this is simply a mistake of adultomorphism. In other words, if we see the world through adult eyes as a place that houses adult agency selves, then where it houses infants it's easy to slide into talking about them as primitive versions of the same general kind of thing we adults are—viz., agencies. The world houses them as "little agency selves," "little people" who eventually grow into more complex adult agencies. In fact, though, what happens on the occasion of a person's becoming a self is that she goes through certain psychological processes that make her something totally different in *kind* from what she's been up until then. She starts out as an infantile non-agent being and eventually ends up as an adult agency self. The model of what goes on in this developmental change is not that of, say, puppies putting on weight and complexity in becoming old dogs. It is more like caterpillars becoming butterflies. Metamorphosis is the

order of the day: Agency self status is a whole new world. Even so, the theorists still insist on speaking “puppy talk.” We will make allowances, though. We will understand this as loose talk, stand-in language for something like “the locus of mental activity of the body we know of as that *infant* over there”—a mind/body, yes; an agency, no.

Setting these language problems aside, what are these theorists saying? Most seem to agree that the primordial infant (i.e., “the locus of mental activity of the body we know of as *that infant* over there”) is more noticeable for the kind of *relations* it is engaged in than for any *being* it might have as an individuated entity with identifiable self properties. Supposedly, it is involved in a *symbiotic* relationship with the primary caretaker. No infant self qua agency, just a locus of mental activity around the central unifying theme of symbiosis. In the infant “mind,” there is no self and no parental object. There is a oneness of sorts, a field of mental and bodily activity not distinguishing infant and parent minds and bodies. This symbiosis remains in force so long as the maternal pole (the primary caretaker) of this relationship can do what it takes to keep the infant pole’s wants and needs satisfied. Eventually, the maternal pole’s work is not satisfying enough. The picture of being alive gets blurred. Still no agency self, the infant begins to do things (in a causal, nonagency fashion) in order to get clarity back. (Certainly it would be easy to slip into infant *self* and *agency* talk here; we’ll fight the urge though.) There are parallel tracks of activity that commence, one of them infantile narcissistic, the other infantile object relating.

The very earliest infant narcissistic activity is a project of futility. It involves the infant’s “trying” (in a nonagency sense) to hold onto the all-absorbing narcissism she has enjoyed to that point. We will see in chapter 3 that there is a procession of fantasies about the infant’s own omnipotence and her mother’s place in confirming this power—a power that is placed in the service of trying to keep intact the symbiotic relationship and the all-important satisfaction of the infant’s desires. We will see the detail of the central narcissistic activities and of their ultimate abandonment during a later narcissistic phase in favor of the new emerging project of *reflexively creating* the self, an agency aimed at satisfying one’s own desires.

Many of the views of Object Relations theorists dovetail nicely with the assumptions of the Narcissism theorists. They too see the infant’s primordial situation as anchored in relationship. Supposedly, the infant is related to objects that feed his narcissism and his



symbiotic craving. Of course, most literally, he relates to his mother in order to survive (e.g., to get his nourishment, physical comfort, emotional sustenance, and so on). But there are also other interesting objects to talk about. The infant gets his needs met by them well after mother's considerable attention has abated. These are objects that stand in for mother. This is normally all an unconscious affair for the infant. (How would we ever know anyway?) Milk bottle nipples not only provide a way to ingest milk; they also provide a medium for continuing sensual oral gratification with a mother substitute. Stand-in symbiotic satisfactions, qua *symbiosis*, continue on an unconscious level. We will see in chapter 2 the important roles that unconscious psychological mechanisms such as incorporation, introjection, and projection play in maintaining the infant's relationship with the primary object, mother. We will also see how the mechanism of identification is our instrument for overcoming these primitive mechanisms as we mature into agency selves.

Object relating is not only about insuring continuance of narcissistic satisfactions through mother substitutes; it is also about the infant making sense of his world. Some theorists claim that the infant first makes sense of things through the mother medium. When she leaves, the infant gets distressed, not only because his pleasure agent has been lost, but also because his basis for comprehending the world is gone. The substitutes the infant eventually forms in the unconscious are sometimes about these cognitive matters.<sup>21</sup> Whether pleasure-based or cognitive, though, the infant is intent on maintaining substitute psychological object relations at the center of (un)consciousness. In this theory, the infant actually *is* nothing more than these relations. As such, there is necessarily something lacking in the infant being. For it admits to the absence of the desired item, the real symbiotic relation with mother. This is where identification comes into the picture. Both the Narcissism theorist and Object Relations theorist see the infant slowly giving up the ghost and developing his own powers for getting life's goods. (Again we fight the urge to import agency into our meaning here.) He will never get another symbiosis that will work; he will never get his mother back, directly or indirectly, in quite that way. But eventually he can develop his own agency self to get the jobs done that mother and her substitutes had been getting done. He can have a healthy, meaningful, unalienated self that isn't always spinning its wheels because it is insoluble over the loss of symbiosis. The self I am talking about *simply* accepts these facts of loss and goes on to create something that gets

the job done in a different way—viz., a being (a self) with its own agency.

In a transitional movement in this direction, the infant first imitates others who appear to have these kinds of desirable agency powers already. But the infant soon learns that mere imitation doesn't do the trick. He wants to take or borrow qualities of other agents in order to become something *like* them. So, as in the Duke Snider scenario, he now begins to identify with them, the result being an empowered self with some properties similar to those of the admired agents. But here is where the discussion ends for these psychoanalytic theorists. They don't have much more to say about the details of identification. And these details are where the most worthwhile action is.<sup>22</sup> As matters stand now for the analysts, merely to say that identification occurs so that infants eventually become selves is really nothing more than waving a linguistic wand and then producing a "something from nothing," producing an unexplained self in full regalia. Butterflies do come from caterpillars, but we can account for the transition. And that is what we must do about selves that are basically identified into existence. Toward that end, in Part I we will recapitulate the detail of the psychoanalytic perspectives we have just outlined. Then in Part II, we will look at the detail of identification, showing how that discussion fully complements the psychoanalytic perspectives.

#### IV

That concludes our first pass at the relevant literature. I would like to turn our attention in this section to clearing up more vocabulary matters that could present problems for us if we aren't careful.

For one thing, when philosophers look at something like the photos we looked at earlier, they rightly end up talking about concepts like the "core self," "who a person really is," "what it is about the self that makes life meaningful," "identification," "character," "identity crisis," "the deep issues of the self," and more. Certainly the philosophers I cited in the second section do this. All too often, however, they end up discussing these concepts with the vocabulary of ethics. And that doesn't always serve the cause of conceptual clarification well. I believe that, once in a while, some of these philosophers are unhelpfully saddled with a philosophical tradition that insists that if a person is going to talk about such softheaded notions (and better he doesn't), ethics is the pigeonhole that is closest to appropriately

housing them. In fact, though, these concepts really don't appear as an organized body of concepts in any entrenched academic area of philosophy. There is no traditional academic vocabulary that works for them. Rather, they fall between the epistemic cracks. Accordingly, our job will be to peer into the cracks and see what bits of ideas we can find that are useful at all for understanding these notions. Beyond that, what we will do in places is actually construct some of our own vocabulary in order to look at these concepts on their own terms.

Let me move to another point about our vocabulary. Of the concepts listed above, I am considering some as more central than others. You have seen from my pictures that I am most interested in identification as the key process in forming the self, character. "Identification," "self," and "character"—those are operative terms. They are going to saturate the discussion in this book. We would do well, then, at the outset to have some idea of what expressions will be associated with these terms and what expressions won't.

Take "self" for example. What I am interested in with this term is the self of "who I am" connotation—that is, "my real self," "my way of being," "my basic personality," "what I really am like when you get under the surface," "the true me," "what makes me tick," "what makes me unique," "the me I feel at home with," "the everyday me I bring to the world," "the basic me that I carry along through life and that changes only very slowly, if at all." Unhappily, I already have been a bit slippery in this chapter with my talk about this complex sense of self. At different times I have referred to "character self," "ego self," "agency self," "identificatory self," "identity," and "Self," as well as just plain "self," "character," and "ego." Most of these are terribly formal ways of talking about who a person is. So let me do some appropriate linguistic legislating. Since "ego" and "ego self" have both a technical psychoanalytic use and a technical Buddhist meaning, and since both of these have a different focus from the "who I am" sense we are interested in, I will try to steer clear of using them.<sup>23</sup>

We will also have to watch ourselves with "Self." That usually refers to a historical philosophical concept we aren't really so concerned with. From time immemorial, philosophers have asked the question, *What* are persons?, where this has meant something like, What objective features do all people share which make them different from other kinds of beings? The usual answers are that they have minds or souls or moral essence, or that they are uniquely imperceptible material and mental substances, or perhaps that they are but a logical category of the mind.<sup>24</sup> Any of these Selves are selves from a

decidedly impersonal perspective. We aren't going to pursue these views except to say that we aren't really interested in the impersonal "what" self, although surely there are better and worse versions of this. We are more concerned with the personal "who" of people. "Who" is clearly different from "what," but how? Again, there is obviously a sense in which there is something profoundly more personal about it. We know, for example, about the individual's psychological history, as in "who I am is someone living at this address, born on such and such a date, parenting this child, loving that kind of music," and so forth. These sorts of things are all unique, unrepeatable, and unanalyzable autobiography. Such information is no doubt important when we want to know who a person is. But it is still not the heart of matters for us. What we really want to know about is "who-ness." What we want to know are the broad categories of questions that a detailed psychological history or autobiography is an answer to. So we want to know things like What kind of person is she?, and What makes that person unique, at least in her own eyes?, and What ideals make that particular person's life meaningful to her? (i.e., What things are most important to her in life?), and What are the particular life choices that person has made?, and What are the sorts of commitments that person takes responsibility for?<sup>25</sup> These and more are the kind of who-ness questions we are interested in looking at. They are not, however, the sort of impersonal thing that philosophers traditionally have had in mind when they ask what the Self is. Accordingly, to the extent that it's possible (and it won't be, completely), we will be staying away from that traditional philosophical concept of the Self and staying close to who-ness.

"Character," "character self," "identity," and even "identificatory self" will finally be my preferred terminology. Add to those the "causal self" and you have the whole family of self terms I will be working with, although we will see that "causal self" plays a very qualified role in the discussion. As for "character" and "character self," I intend no important difference between them. Which one I use will be more a matter of aesthetic taste and literary choice than anything else.<sup>26</sup> Whichever I use, though, it (as well as "identity" and "identificatory self") will be to designate the "who-ness" idea I am interested in.

Quite generally, when we talk about a person's character, we'll mean who a person is in terms of the deeply entrenched traits that in various ways he has voluntarily etched into his personality repertoire over a long period of time. We will see that those traits are the result