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The Emergence of Scholarship and Science on Hypo-egoic Phenomena

Kirk Warren Brown and Mark R. Leary

Abstract

To introduce the Handbook and the range of hypo-egoic phenomena that it represents, this chapter describes the psychological roots of egoic and hypo-egoic functioning, drawing on theory and research in philosophy, psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience. Two forms of self-processing—self-as-subject and self-as-object—are first identified and functionally described. The chapter then describes how these self processes offer humans a mental model of ourselves, others, and the world that allows us to represent or simulate reality as we perceive it in the present, the remembered past, and the imagined future. Though a major evolutionary achievement, the conscious self model becomes a liability when people overidentify with its inherently self-centric functioning. The chapter introduces the concept of hypo-egoic functioning, describes its nature as currently understood, and provides a glimpse of the multidisciplinary scholarship that has begun to explore this phenomenon and its various expressions.

Key Words: self-awareness, self-as-subject, self-as-object, I, Me, self model, mental representation, ego involvement, hypo-egoicism

Proud man, dress'd in a little brief author-
ity, most ignorant of what he is most
assur'd, -his glassy essence,

—*Shakespeare, Measure for Measure, 2.2*

Study of the self has been of keen interest to psychologists, psychiatrists, philosophers, religious scholars, sociologists, and more recently, neuroscientists, and this widespread interest reflects the centrality of self-processes to human experience. Every major domain of human functioning—including perception, thought, emotion, interpersonal relations, task performance, and physiology—is influenced to some degree by self-related processes on an ongoing basis. The importance of this observation lies, in part, in the fact that we humans have a rather conflicted, even troubled, relationship

with our selves. Our effective functioning depends to a large degree on our ability to attend to and think about ourselves to decide what plans to make and what actions to take, but we also suffer from self-involved thoughts and emotions, sometimes significantly, when we regret those actions, when our plans go awry, and when we worry about ourselves and those with whom we share our social identities (e.g., family, friends, community, nation). We are elevated when we are judged, or judge ourselves, to be doing well, and downtrodden when we are not. We spend a good deal of time thinking about who we are and what we are like, but we often do not like what we find. And in the interests of surviving and succeeding in the human world, we devote a great deal of mental, emotional, and physical

energy to protect, defend, and enhance our public images and private self-views.

The mixed bag of benefits and costs that comes with the capacity for self-awareness has, for centuries, led many thinkers and teachers to question just what this self actually is, what its adaptive purposes are, and, in light of its drawbacks, whether people should seek ways to loosen its domineering grip on their lives. Across a wide variety of cultures, recorded human history is rife with proposed ways of living that, in the current usage, may be called hypo-egoic in nature. The self has always had the capacity to cause pain and suffering for the "owner" and those with whom it comes into contact. Yet, arguably, the impetus to discover ways of living with our selves and others in ways that are hypo-egoic is as important today as ever, if not more so, in our increasingly crowded, interdependent, threatened, and threatening world.

Despite its historical provenance, the term "hypo-egoic" is a recent invention, and to understand its meaning and implications, we first place it in the context of contemporary understandings of self and the related term "ego," drawing primarily on scholarship in philosophy, psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience. The importance of this brief exposition is heightened by the fact that what scholars call the "self" has no unitary, consensually agreed on meaning. Over the course of their histories, the fields of philosophy and psychology in particular have seen numerous conceptualizations of the terms "self," "ego," and other constructs in the same nomological network (Leary & Tangney, 2012).

Two Selves

In scholarly writing, the term "self" is used in quite disparate ways (Leary & Tangney, 2012; Neisser, 1988; Olson, 1999), and conceptual clarity about the self is regularly compromised by using a single term to designate diverse phenomena. However, drawing on recent, empirically informed theory, it can be stated in broad outline that the human self is, at its foundation, a cognitive capacity to know—to focus attention on and think about—oneself and one's situated relation to the surrounding world (Damasio, 2010; Leary, 2004; Leary & Tangney, 2003). According to Damasio (2010), selfhood depends both on wakefulness and the presence of a mind, which comprises a capacity to (1) form mental representations of internal

events and objects in the form of feelings, and external objects derived from sensory inputs; and (2) be guided by those representations in enacting behavior. This capacity, which human beings share with several other mammalian species, makes available to the organism details of the conditions both inside and outside the organism that permit more varied and effective responses—that is, enhanced life regulation (Damasio, 2010). The evolved capacity of human beings to know themselves as protagonists of their inner experience and behavior is theorized to mark the arrival of consciousness, "a state of mind with a self process added to it" (Damasio, 2010, p. 157), which in large part is responsible for humans' ability both to adapt to and create a wide variety of living conditions, with both beneficial and harmful consequences.

Yet the self is not a unitary phenomenon, and here we highlight two established aspects of self whose functioning are intimately interrelated but whose uniqueness helps to specify the role of the self in egoic and hypo-egoic functioning. The two aspects of self in question are loosely represented by James's (1890) classic view of the "I" and "Me" selves, a basic division with which a number of scholars and scientists have largely concurred and whose operations have, in recent years, received considerable scholarly and scientific attention. Following others (e.g., Damasio, 2000, 2010; McAdams, 1990), we designate these forms as the *self-as-subject* and the *self-as-object* and, in what follows, briefly characterize several features of their functioning. It is important to state at the outset that neither of these forms of self is an entity or "thing," nor represented by single loci within the human brain; rather each reflects dynamic cognitive processes emerging from different brain structures and neural network-wide functioning.

The Self-as-Subject

James's (James, 1890) notion of the I-self has served as a useful platform for empirically grounded formulations of the self-as-subject, also termed the self-as-knower, the core self (Damasio, 2000, 2010), and the minimal self (Gallagher, 2000), among other descriptors. The I-self is the subject of our experience—the awareness of oneself and the world from a first-person perspective. Some authors (e.g., Block, 2007; Gallagher, 2000; Northoff, Heinzel, & Greck, 2006) consider this self to operate in a

phenomenal or prereflective fashion—that is, as awareness of sensory or mental representations in the here and now (e.g., the felt sensory experience of touching an object or the subjective feeling of a current emotion). This is believed to occur prior to any reflection, conceptual elaboration, or evaluation of the sensory or mental events taking place in the present. As an awareness of present events, this form of self process is theorized to be “unextended in time” (Gallagher, 2000, p. 15), meaning that it mostly concerns immediate perceptions, rather than mental interpretations of those perceptions or mental “time travel” into the remembered past or the imagined future, which necessarily involves conceptual thought. That said, this subjective self provides the basis for thought and its attendant action, as is discussed in what follows.

The “knowing” (Damasio, 2000) afforded by the processes mediating self-as-subject includes not only the awareness of immediate experience but also a recognition that one-self is the locus or center of such experience (Gallagher, 2000; Tagini & Raffone, 2010). This recognition does not imply an idea of owning or possessing a physical body (and a mind housed in it)—this lies in the realm of the self-as-object—but rather an awareness that actions originate from and are directed toward this body (Legrand, 2003). Such awareness is necessary for the sensorimotor coupling between person and environment that guides embodied action (Northoff & Panksepp, 2008; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). The felt sense of the self-as-subject as a center of awareness of sensation, perception, and thought, and from whom our voluntary actions seem to originate, is theorized to support an integration of experience (Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Rigby, 2015) that “entails ongoing activities of extending, assimilating, and bringing meaning and coherence to life experiences” (Ryan & Brown, 2003, p. 71)—activities afforded by conscious reflection on the first-person experience of the self-as-subject. Research in self-determination theory in particular has detailed the psychosocial conditions that support integrative processes and provide a basis for psychological health, vitality, and flourishing (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Hawley, chapter 14, this volume). Yet this fundamental self-organization

can be hindered and compromised by a second aspect of self that is also inherent in human nature, to be discussed next.

The Self-as-Object

The second manifestation of self is echoed in James’s (1890) “Me” self, and contemporaneously termed the self-as-object, the self-as-known, the autobiographical self (Damasio, 2000, 2010), and the narrative self (Christoff, Cosmelli, Legrand, & Thompson, 2011; Dennett, 1991; Gallagher, 2000). Typically operating in communion with self-as-subject processing, from which it may have evolved (Damasio, 2000, 2010; Northoff et al., 2006), the operation of the self-as-object nonetheless differs from that of the self-as-subject in several ways. Fundamental to the self-as-object is its self-referential nature; rather than being the subject of our experience, it is the *object* of our attention turned inward. In this sense, it takes a third-person perspective, akin to looking at ourselves as we look at another person. Related to this, just as we associate the behavior of another person to them (e.g., “He looks happy”), likewise what is “observed” in our own body and mind is linked to Me. When we say, for example, “I am happy” or “I have a toothache,” we identify the perceptual experience given by the self-as-subject as belonging to an entity, namely Me. This is fundamentally different from the direct experiencing of stimuli from a first-person, prereflective perspective that some argue the self-as-subject offers; there is no perceptual basis for regarding events and experiences as being owned or possessed by oneself. Instead, the self-as-object provides reflective or conceptual knowledge of *having* a perspective (Legrand, 2003).

This kind of processing points to another key difference from the self-as-subject: identifying a perspective and the experiences that go with it as “mine” requires that we have mental images or representations of ourselves and of our experiences in working and long-term memory. The self-as-object conceptually represents immediate perceptual experience as visual, auditory, and other sensory images in “my” mind that provide the material on which “my” thought operates, “my” emotions react, and “my” actions are taken. In this mode of operating, people attend to and think about conceptual representations of experience that

are one step removed from perceptual representations (Berkovich-Ohana & Glicksohn, 2014). In essence, two distinct forms of self-relevant processing are regularly occurring: an immediate, first-person experience of internal and external events, and a third-person conceptualization of those experiences.

Self-as-object processing also differs from the self-as-subject in that the former operates not only on present stimuli (as the self-as-subject does) but also on past and future stimuli as mental representations. Drawing on long-term (episodic) memory, the self-as-object is "extended in time" (Gallagher, 2000, p. 15), creating a subjective sense of continuity of experience that links one's past, present, and future and allows thoughts about past and future events. The memory-enabled ability to string together mental representations also permits mental time travel, a movement forward and backward in time that facilitates an understanding of the meaning of remembered past, present, and anticipated future happenings (Berkovich-Ohana & Glicksohn, 2014).

As people claim the extended, continuous experience as "mine," self-as-object functioning creates a subjective sense of having a personal identity with an autobiographical narrative that is reconstructed from the past and projected into the future (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). That is, when we think about, imagine, or talk about our bodies, psychological traits, experiential states, relationships with others, and so on, we are (1) referencing our mental representations of who we are and what we are like—our attributes, beliefs, self-views, self-concepts, and memories of personal experiences and (2) reinforcing these conceptions of who we were, are now, and may be in future over various time spans, from the next few seconds to many years from now. Through the lens of self-related thoughts and accompanying emotions, this self represents the ongoing story of "Me," in which "I" am the central character.

Using self-awareness in this way might be expected to enhance self-knowledge (Morin, 2006), but the empirical evidence does not clearly support this idea. Our self-representations are often unreliable (Damasio, 2010), even biased (e.g., Greenwald, 1980; Leary, 2004). One way in which such biased self-knowledge is formed and maintained is rooted in the self-objectification inherent in

self-as-object operation; by appraising oneself relative to others and relative to the internalized standards formed in interaction with others, self-knowledge is distorted by people's positive and negative judgments of personal attributes, behavior, and self-worth.

As noted earlier, the self-as-object's self-referential processing not only impacts mental operations on current and past experiences but also supports the cognitive processing of various representations of those experiences to create novel scenarios of what may occur in the future (Tagini & Raffone, 2010). This self-referential processing also draws attention to and retains images of incoming stimuli according to the strength of their relevance to the conceptual self-views that are sustained by self-as-object processing, rather than in accord with the intrinsic attributes of those stimuli (Kircher & David, 2003; Tagini & Raffone, 2010). As a result, self-representations are maintained and enhanced, helping to solidify people's self-views and identity. One indicator of the importance of these self-views and accompanying self-evaluations is their influence on mental and physical health, behavior regulation efforts, interpersonal behavior, and other major domains of psychosocial functioning in which people's views of themselves influence how they think, feel, and act (Leary, 2004).

As indicated at the beginning of this section, the self-as-subject and self-as-object reflect distinct psychological processes, but they are intimately linked in several ways, and each is related to hypo-egoic phenomena. First, self-awareness is central to both sets of processes, as each depends on the capacity for self-directed attention to the internal environment, and the conceptual, self-as-object processes depend on the capacity to reflectively consider one's behavior, values, and desires (fueling integrated functioning) and to think about one's attributes, identities, public images, life trajectory, and so on.

A second linkage between these two selves is in their frequent, dynamic interaction. Consciousness fluidly and often rapidly shifts from the minimal, present-oriented scope of the self-as-subject to a broad, narrative scope of the self-as-object, and vice versa (Damasio, 2010). A simple example of this occurs when a person visually recognizes him- or herself in a mirror. This seemingly simple act involves both an experiential recognition of oneself at the

moment of looking (self-as-subject) and often, thoughts and emotions about one's appearance that draw on stored memories and, perhaps, future-projected imaginings (self-as-object). Under normal circumstances, these processes co-occur—the self in its full expression involves the sense of being an experiencing self and also having self-relevant thoughts, though of course people are typically not conscious of the operation of these distinct processes.

A third linkage between the two forms of self is the immersive nature in which they operate. This has long been recognized in self-as-subject processing, which cannot be directly perceived (e.g., Husserl, 1980; Kant, 1781/1998), but at best is only reflected on in hindsight, after a moment of perception has passed (Ryan & Rigby, 2015). The immersive nature of self-as-object processing is manifest in the fact that we typically do not regard our thoughts as just thoughts, as simply occurrences in consciousness. Rather, we implicitly or explicitly take this mental activity to reflect reality more or less accurately. For example, a person thinking about his or her weight may say, "I am too fat"—and not "There is an evaluative thought here about this body being too large and heavy." The former statement makes a truth claim about Me; the latter rests on a meta-cognitive, phenomenal awareness (an awareness of the mind's operation) that the thought of being fat is (just) a thought. Said differently, people generally consider their own perspectives on themselves, others, and the world to be true and therefore take those thoughts quite seriously. Whether thoughts are taken as veridical or not has enormous consequences for psychological well-being, interpersonal behavior, and other domains of functioning. Indeed, many contemporary forms of psychotherapy—including cognitive behavioral therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, and dialectical behavior therapy—are designed to lead people to question the veracity of their thoughts about themselves, other people, and the world.

Yet more fundamentally, the harnessing of self-as-subject processing to the service of creating and maintaining immersive, vivid representations of self-as-object-relevant stimuli helps to maintain the perception that this Me is a real entity. To most people, its existence seems perfectly apparent and is constantly reinforced by our socialization (Edelman & Tononi,

2000) and ongoing social interactions, including our use of language. The ways in which people verbally communicate help to solidify the sense of being a distinct entity with ongoing life experiences that belong to the same person over time (e.g., Metzinger, 2009). Talking to ourselves (inner speech or self-talk) also helps to maintain such a perception (e.g., Dennett, 1991). Our sense of self *feels* so unquestionably real that people rarely stop to wonder who is being spoken to when we talk to ourselves, who or what is generating their thoughts, or whether those thoughts actually reflect reality.

The Self as a Model

People's sense of self is remarkably persistent in the face of the many changes that a person's body, personality, knowledge, views, values, and station in life go through in a lifetime. Despite whatever changes, however dramatic, may have occurred in our pasts, we generally see ourselves as the same person (Minsky, 1986). People can undergo major changes in personality or lifestyle, change their beliefs and attitudes in fundamental ways, act in ways that run contrary to their self-image, or even lose parts of their bodies to injury or illness and still consider themselves to be Me. In fact, when asked, people commonly report that even if they lost their entire bodies and their minds (or brains) were transplanted into another body, they would still somehow be the same person (Urban, 2015).

People can even report temporarily losing their sense of self, through peak experiences, drug use, or contemplative practices and yet claim this loss of self as "my" experience!

Yet scholars in a variety of disciplines have long challenged this persistently real or "naïve" sense of self (Varela et al., 1991), and contemporary naturalist philosophers of mind and, increasingly, cognitive scientists and neuroscientists offer a different understanding of the self-as-subject and self-as-object than the one that our thought, language, and subjective experience lead us to adopt. One predominant view is that these two forms of self are a property of the human brain's dynamic, biological self-organization (e.g., Hofstadter, 2008; Metzinger, 2009), a psychological product that projects a *model* or *representation* of the world, of oneself, and of oneself in the world.

As already noted, our consciousness *represents* our sensory experience, meaning that

it creates a sketch or simulation of what we encounter. However convincing it is, this simulated reality is more apparently real than truly accurate; also, as noted earlier, our consciousness is highly selective in representing what comes through our senses and what aspects of experience are consciously attended to. What we experience as reality is but a fraction of what is occurring or has occurred at any given moment (e.g., Simons & Chabris, 1999). As a result, our conscious model of reality "is a low dimensional projection of [an] inconceivably richer physical reality" (Metzinger, 2009, p. 6) that may have evolved due to survival pressures that did not depend on perfect representational accuracy. In addition, the mind's moment-to-moment conscious content is constructed on the fly, which derives from both the selectivity of our sensory input and the influence of thought, memory, and emotion in shaping that input into recognizable and meaningful patterns. Such patterns influence our interpretations of what we experience.

What makes the self so apparently real is that we do not recognize that our perception of ourselves and the world is a model, partly because we are unaware of the processes through which information reaches our conscious awareness. We do not see neurons firing but only what the organized action of the brain produces experientially. As a result, we look through the model directly onto the world. In this way, the conscious experience of being a self in the world emerges because the model itself is "transparent" or invisible to us (Metzinger, 2009). Furthermore, in joining the capacities to be both subject (I) and object (Me), the self can represent the process of representation itself (metarepresentation)—that is, to attend to and think about the mind's contents. The significance of this is difficult to overstate. As self-equipped beings modeling reality, we can "catch ourselves in the act of knowing. . . . This ability turned us into thinkers of thoughts and readers of minds, and allowed biological evolution to explode into cultural evolution" (Metzinger, 2009, p. 5).

Egoicism and Identification with the Self Model

As valuable as the self model has been to human affairs, both individually and collectively, it can become problematic when

people do not recognize that their perceptions and beliefs about themselves in the world is a model—a schematic or working hypothesis about reality rather than reality itself. Then, believing that their mental representations of themselves are, in fact, them, people naturally identify strongly with those representations and foster, protect, and defend those self-images as if they were more than a product of perception and thought. This identification with the self, and particularly the self-as-object, is one contemporary conceptualization of the term "ego" (Leary, 2004; Varela et al., 1991).¹ In contemporary parlance, a person who becomes ego-involved is overly identified with a mental construction.

Identifying with one's model of Me has several implications that lie at the heart of egoic functioning. Perhaps the primary implication is that the model acts as a lens or filter through which many psychological functions operate. Indeed, it influences what we pay attention to (attention), what we think about (cognition), what matters to us (motivation), what influences our feeling states (emotion), and of course, how we behave (action) (Dambrun & Ricard, 2011). Peoples' self-views affect their attention, cognition, motivation, emotion, and behavior somewhat idiosyncratically, but the inherent nature of self-as-object processing creates four general features of egoic functioning—self-preoccupation, in which people's attention and thoughts are dominated by their own lives and outcomes; egocentrism, in which people interpret events primarily from their own perspective; egoism, wherein people place precedence on their own outcomes over those of others; and finally heteronomy, in which peoples' behavior tends to be controlled by their fixed images of or expectations for themselves and by real or perceived pressures to be or act in accord with others' views or expectations (Leary & Diebels, 2013; Leary & Terry, 2012; Ryan & Rigby, 2015). These features of egoic functioning are inherent to human psychology, but few would doubt that people are generally far more self-preoccupied, egocentric, egoistic, and more susceptible to heteronomous self-regulation—that is, more egoic—than is optimal both for their own well-being and for the well-being of those with whom they interact.

Although identification with the self-as-object model naturally leads people to be egoic, evidence suggests that support for, if not glorification of, self-centered worldviews has increased notably in the United States within the past 30 years (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985; Kesebir & Kesebir, 2012; Myers, 2001; Putnam, 2000; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Indeed, it has been argued that egoicism is rampant; commercial television, popular books, song lyrics, and even mobile software applications² promote self-preoccupation and self-interest. Both narcissism, an excessively positive, inflated sense of self, and depression, which typically has excessive self-denigration as a core element (Moore, Christian, Boren, & Tangney, chapter 7, this volume), appear to have increased dramatically (Hidaka, 2012; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Both share an excessively egoic focus on oneself and one's outcomes, albeit in different ways.

At the same time, there is some popular recognition of the negative consequences of excessive ego-involvement. One manifestation of this can be seen in the Urban Dictionary (www.urbandictionary.com), which lists over 300 terms, most invented (and many humorous), designating various forms of contemporary ego-driven behavior. But such recognition is not new. A long history of psychological research has shown how markedly ego-involved

mental functioning can be. People are incontrovertibly egocentric (Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000), self-relevant information is preferentially processed and remembered, and people strive to protect their self-views (whether good or bad) to the point that they selectively seek confirmatory evidence and otherwise distort reality in ways that led Greenwald (1980) to liken egoic functioning to that of a totalitarian regime (see Trautwein, Naranjo, & Schmidt, 2014, for review).

More recently, psychological scientists and mental health practitioners have echoed the views espoused by philosophers, spiritual teachers, and even occasional political leaders for millennia, who have pointed out that excessive self-preoccupation is a primary source—if not *the* source—of personal distress and interpersonal strife (see Waldron, 2003; Wayment & Bauer, 2008). The psychological processes that create these problems can be construed in a number of ways, but they come down

to identifying so strongly with one's mental representations of oneself and the world (i.e., self-as-object processing) that people (1) think excessively about themselves even when such thoughts are not needed to function effectively and (2) treat the fortunes of their mental self-images as if they are real. These two tendencies can create unnecessary personal distress and foster behaviors that can be detrimental to the person and to those with whom he or she interacts (Leary, 2004; Wayment & Bauer, 2008).

People undertake particular strategies to deal with the consequences of excessive egoicism, often implicitly. For example, efforts may be made to anesthetize, or escape the mental activity that is causing distress—through alcohol, drugs, or other more beneficial states of consciousness such as meditation (Baumeister, 1991). In addition, many moral and religious traditions have focused on regulating the expression of egoic behavior to ameliorate the interpersonal and societal excesses of self-centeredness, egotism, and other problematic products of self-identification (Leary, 2004; Waldron, 2003). These have involved various efforts to police egoic functioning through laws, moral codes, and social norms that deter egoic actions that are harmful to oneself, to other people, and to social order, such as drug abuse, violence, misappropriation of property, and deceit.

The Hypo-egoic Turn

Scholars, spiritual leaders, and social activists have long advocated a hypo-egoic way of being, an approach to life that is characterized by less of the self-identification or ego-involvement described here. As we conceptualize it, hypo-egoicism reflects a low degree of identification with the self-as-object model described earlier and, thus, with lower self-preoccupation, egocentrism, egoism, and heteronomy. In simple terms, when people are being hypo-egoic, they do not become immersed in their own self-referential psychological states or behavior as easily as human beings usually do. When thinking, feeling, or acting in this way, a person's ego-involved processing can be said to be "quiet" (Wayment & Bauer, 2008), or at least "quieter" than it usually is. Importantly, while some people may generally behave less egoically than others as a result of genetic factors; familial, educational, or cultural influences;

personal experiences; or special training, the degree to which a person is hypo-egoic at any particular time is also influenced by features of the immediate situation and the person's current psychological state. Like many psychological processes, hypo-egoic functioning has both trait- and state-like expressions (Dambrun & Ricard, 2011).

Of course, people who are behaving hypo-egoically probably do not explicitly think of the self as a "model" in the way that we have described it. But they may see it as a kind of construction or story that the mind creates and maintains (Dennett, 1991; Packer, 2002) rather than being who they "really are." Alternatively, through introspection, instruction, or training, they may perceive the self as a dynamic subjective experience or process rather than a stable, independent entity (Dambrun & Ricard, 2011; James, 1890). Whatever the case may be—and how hypo-egoic people perceive the self is an underdeveloped area of research—hypo-egoic functioning does not eliminate people's sense of "Me" (or "I"), and they do not become "selfless" in this sense. Instead, there is indication these two forms of processing (the I-self and the Me-self) can be de-fused, so that self-relevant functions of planning, decision-making, self-regulation, and other activities can be channeled more flexibly, autonomously, and constructively toward, for example, an engagement of reflectively considered values, goals, and activities that support integrative self-regulation, personal well-being, and social welfare (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Brown, Ryan, Creswell, & Niemiec, 2008).

In recent years, active investigations of hypo-egoic functioning have been taken up by philosophers, cognitive scientists, neuroscientists, and researchers in developmental, social, evolutionary, clinical, and counseling psychology (although they do not necessarily use that term). The processes involved in hypo-egoic functioning are now receiving attention at multiple levels of analysis, including investigations of overt behavior (such as compassion, forgiveness, and other prosocial responses), self-relevant beliefs (such as humility and allo-inclusive identity), subjective experiences (such as equanimity, awe, and mystical states), dispositional characteristics that mediate these responses (such as attachment style and an array of values), and neurological processes that

occur when people are less self-preoccupied, egocentric, and egoistic than usual. In addition, research has examined clinical and psychoeducational interventions that promote hypo-egoic ways of thinking and behaving.

To provide an umbrella construct for these scattered areas of work, we use the label "hypo-egoic" to reflect the fact that the disparate cognitions, emotions, motivations, behaviors, and physiological processes being studied all involve a lower-than-usual level of egoic processing (Leary & Terry, 2012). However, we believe it is important to frame hypo-egoic and related terms, such as "quiet ego" in a broad, conceptual sense, rather than using them to denote a specific, operationally specified construct (cf. Bauer & Wayment, 2008; Kesebir & Kesebir, 2012). Psychological phenomena that occur when people are being hypo-egoic share some common features and sometimes co-occur, but hypo-egoicism is a syndrome of features that involve a less egoic style of thinking, feeling, and behaving rather than a unitary, monolithic construct.

This volume brings together chapters that present state-of-the-science knowledge about phenomena under the umbrella of hypo-egoicism. Its goal is to survey what is known about hypo-egoic phenomena in an integrative fashion that will foster connections among the various areas of investigation, which have until now been conducted mostly independently of each other. To the extent that these phenomena

share common psychological underpinnings, the insights emerging from each area of investigation can help to inform the others. By providing a compendium of work on these topics, we hope to stimulate future attention to these specific topics as well as hypo-egoic processes more generally.

The contributors to the book reflect the growing number of investigators engaged in theory development and research on topics that involve hypo-egoic functioning. The chapter authors have, first and foremost, conducted high-quality scholarship and empirical research, and have thought deeply and written authoritatively about topics that we believe are related to hypo-egoicism. Part 1 of the book presents theoretical perspectives on hypo-egoicism, drawing first from philosophy, both Buddhist (Flanagan & Ivanhoe, chapter 2) and phenomenological (Vincini & Gallagher,

chapter 3) perspectives, both of which have devoted considerable scholarly attention to egoic functioning, its limits, and its alternatives. Perspectives drawn from major domains of psychology follow, including social and personality (Leary, Diebels, Jongman-Sereno, & Hawkins, chapter 4), evolutionary (Martin et al., chapter 5), developmental (Harter, chapter 6), and clinical (Moore et al., chapter 7) subdisciplines. Together, these chapters provide a comprehensive theoretical network of ideas designed to inform our understanding of the nature of hypo-egoicism and its expressions in various domains of human functioning, and to encourage discourse on the topic both across and within disciplines.

Part 2 of the Handbook offers scientific perspectives on intrapersonal and interpersonal manifestations of hypo-egoic functioning and their consequences for well-being, emotion regulation, adaptive decision-making, positive social relations, and other key indicators of human flourishing. Chapters in this section discuss neural signatures of egoic and hypo-egoic processing (Farb, Desormeau, & Dinh-Williams, chapter 8), flow (Nakamura & Roberts, chapter 9), mindfulness (Brown, Berry, & Quaglia, chapter 10), empathy and altruism (Batson, chapter 11), morality (Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, chapter 12), compassion for self and others (Neff & Seppälä, chapter 13), benevolence (Ryan & Hawley, chapter 14), attachment security (Shaver, Mikulincer, & Sahdra, chapter 15), humility (Hill & Laney, chapter 16), forgiveness (Exline, chapter 17), ecocentric motivational orientations (Crocker & Canevello, chapter 18), and mystical experiences (Hood, chapter 19). In a final chapter (chapter 20) we present a view of the hypo-egoic person in an effort to "put a face" on this way of being. In each of the chapters, the authors discuss the limitations of current research in their area of work and point toward promising avenues for future investigation.

As a whole, this Handbook is designed to offer thoughtful analyses of hypo-egoicism, seeking to advance the scholarship and science on this topic by providing a reasonably comprehensive picture of the diversity of extant research. We also hope to bridge gaps between these various lines of work and to foster the advancement and integration of theory, research, and applications pertaining to hypo-egoic functioning.

This line of inquiry is still quite new, and our hope in curating this volume is to encourage dialogue about, and further inquiry into, this way of being that appears to have widespread implications for personal, interpersonal, and societal well-being.

Notes

1. Just as with the word "self," the term "ego" has accrued a variety of meanings over the centuries. Latin for "I" or "myself" to denote the first-person singular, the word first appeared in known written form in the late 18th century (though its spoken usage may be much older). In S. Freud's popular usage of the word in the late 19th century and early 20th century, translated from the German, *Ich*, it was part of his psychodynamic structural model of the psyche, in which the ego serves self-regulatory, and particularly mental conflict-resolution functions, including reality testing, impulse control, moral judgment-making, and self-synthesis or self-concordance. A number of 20th-century, post-Freudian psychodynamic theorists (e.g., A. Freud, H. Hartmann, D. Rapaport) extended the conception of the ego as a healthy mental process that could function autonomously, not simply in response to mental conflict. Since the latter half of the 20th century, the term has taken on divergent meanings within philosophy and various psychological theories, and its connotations may be described neutrally (e.g., to refer to I or self), positively (e.g., ego strength, healthy ego), or negatively (e.g., egocentricity, ego-involvement).
2. One mobile application in this vein is called Ego: You're important. "Ego gives you one central . . . location to check web statistics that matter to you. You can quickly view the number of visits to your website (including daily, hourly and monthly numbers), feed subscription totals and changes, how many people are following you on Twitter and more" (<http://ego-app.com>). Arguably, "Ego" is an honest name for what many forms of social media support.

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