

chapter 5

The Age 5–7 Shift

Second grade was my breakout year. At the shining new Kuny Elementary School in Gary, Indiana, Miss Elisha presided over a class of about 25 boys and girls, most of whom would turn 8 by the end of the school year. My memory is that Miss Elisha was what we would categorize today as “totally hot,” and I was in love with her, even though I was not too clear back then on what being “hot” was fundamentally about. My ardor was reinforced by the fact that Miss Elisha gave me outstanding marks on my classwork. It was in second grade that I began to excel in school, and when it became apparent to me that some of my peers did not excel. It was in second grade that I first realized that some people consistently excel at certain things and not others, that people are sorted by how well they perform in particular domains, and that it feels so good to excel, to do well at what you like to do, to strive to do well in those areas in which you seem to have talent or interest, and into which you invest so much personal *value*. My classmates chose me to be representative for the Student Council. I attended meetings and prepared simple reports about the meetings, which I regularly recited to the class. It was in second grade that I first had homework to do. I needed to *schedule* time for the homework. I began to keep a schedule in my head. I began to make simple lists. I began to think of my daily life in terms of the *goals* I needed (and wanted) to achieve: finish Student Council report for tomorrow; save allowance to buy more baseball cards; walk home from school with Donna Scott (because she is the pretty blonde); try to become best student in the class, or close to it, by end of year.

Three years after I finished second grade, Harvard psychologist Sheldon White (1965) wrote a famous article in which he identified a

transition phase in human development that he labeled *the age 5–7 shift*. White (1965; Sameroff & Haith, 1996) argued that children experience a host of cognitive and social changes in middle-childhood that ultimately result in a newfound sense of maturity and rationality. In 16th-century Europe, children were widely assumed to reach an *age of reason* around their seventh birthday, and were therefore given instruction in civility from that point on. Catholic canon law and English common law, and the several religious and legal practices that have arisen from them, expressed the view that children first know right from wrong and are therefore able to make reasonable moral decisions around the age of 7 or 8. In the evangelical Baptist church I attended throughout my childhood, we were taught that children become responsible for their own Christian status—that is, they become able to make a reasonable *decision* to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior—around the age of 8. My Sunday school teachers called this “the age of accountability.” Therefore, if you died at, say, age 9 and had never gotten around to making your choice for Jesus, well . . .

In societies around the world, children are first given responsibilities for such tasks as babysitting for younger siblings, tending animals, performing household chores, and learning some of the rudiments of the economy—basic farming, fishing, hunting—around the age of 6 or 7 years (Rogoff, Sellers, Pirotta, Fox, & White, 1975). Formal schooling typically starts around age 6, and even when it starts earlier (as in the case of preschool and kindergarten), the level of rigor and academic focus tends to rise sharply in the second and third grades. Before then, teachers offer profuse praise and reinforcement for the efforts little children exert to do well in arts and crafts, school projects, playground activities, and the like. After age 7 or 8, effort is still applauded, but teachers (and parents) become much more interested in results. “I tried really hard on that social studies test, Mom!” “Yeah, well, you still got a C.” Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that before age 8, children tend to show almost uniformly high levels of self-esteem (Harter, 2006). In second and third grades, self-esteem begins to plummet for many, and consistent individual differences in positive self-regard begin to appear. The age of accountability is a time for sorting it all out. Who is saved? Who is not? Who is on top? Who is on the bottom? Where do you rank? What’s your score?

What Sheldon White called the age 5–7 shift is a rough marker for a fundamental transformation in the human life course, a psychosocial transition that has profound implications for personality development. Depending on what features you focus on and whose life you are talking

about, the shift may begin before the age of 5 and continue well after the age of 7. Indeed, the ages “5” and “7” are really just proxies for a gradual transformation in psychological functioning that occurs sometime in middle childhood—an age-graded metaphor that I have borrowed from White and others to stand for a group of correlated changes that mark the primary school years. The shift appears to be driven by biological and maturational changes, and by the social conventions of society and schooling. Broad individual differences may be observed in the ways in which this transformation unfolds. And even for those like me who enjoyed their second-grade experience, the developmental move is surely a mixed blessing, for it invariably entails some loss of psychological innocence and spontaneity.

For the cognitively gifted, eusocial creatures we have all evolved to be, it is an essential part of the developmental script that, sooner or later, we become more or less rational, planful, goal-oriented persons. The very survival of the group calls for it. For most of us, the “sooner or later” seems to be temporally situated in our early primary school years. It is during this time that our parents and teachers expect us to develop goals, plans, and projects to structure our daily routines and give meaning to our envisioned futures. It is during this time that society expects us to incorporate values and beliefs regarding ultimate life concerns—what is good, what is true, what is God—and to begin to take responsibility for the moral choices we make. We begin to take ownership of our daily lives and to make decisions regarding what we value. We begin self-consciously to plan for the future, taking stock of where we are positioned in what we now perceive to be an ordered, hierarchical world.

In its deepest and most abstract meaning, the age 5–7 shift pertains to the full emergence of *motivated agency* in the human life course. To be an “agent” in the fullest sense is to take ownership of personal experience and to organize behavior for the future in the service of valued goals. Before I knew Miss Elisha, I was merely a *social actor*, routinely displaying the temperament traits that defined my nascent social reputation and personality. In second grade, I continued to perform as a social actor. But I became a *motivated agent*, too.

AGENCY AND PERSONALITY

In the theater and in everyday social life, actors have secrets that no observers can see. Actors play their roles on a social stage, but no matter how long audience members watch the performance, they can never know

for sure what is going on in the actors' heads. Whether the actors themselves have full conscious knowledge is the question that Freud famously asked, but everybody agrees to this: *Something* is going on in the actors' heads. Something that the audience can only infer. *What does the actor want?* What is the actor *really* trying to accomplish? One answer is this: The actor is trying to accomplish the role. The actor wants to enact the performance the situation demands. This answer is true enough, as Goffman (1959) and other role theorists have traditionally argued, but it may seem trivial or unsatisfying for many observers, and for the actors themselves. The audience is still left wondering about the motivational secrets that presumably lie somewhere inside the performers on stage, beyond the audience's direct gaze. What is interesting here is not so much that observers cannot directly know the secrets inside but rather that they know they cannot know, that observers always expect that there *must* be something beyond their direct observations, something inside the actors' heads, something *motivational*, something about desire, want, goal, and value. We assume that actors want something within and beyond their social performance. We assume that human beings are motivated, goal-directed *agents*. And even when actors are not acting, even when it seems they are doing nothing at all, we assume that, as motivated agents, they still want something.

To be an agent is to make choices and, as a result of those choices, to move forward in life in a self-determined and goal-directed manner (Martin, Sugarman, & Thompson, 2003). Human agency suggests intention, volition, will, purpose, and some modicum of personal control in life. For over 2,000 years, scholars have debated the extent to which human beings have any agency at all. Are we free to choose our own fates? Or are we pawns in a complex chess game wherein factors external to the self—be they God, material reality, social forces, reinforcement contingencies, genes, or dumb luck—make all the moves? What seems clear, however, is that most human beings much of the time *believe* they do have *some* degree of agency, if not in practice, at least in principle and according to prevailing cultural understandings about what agency is (Haggard & Tsakiris, 2009). A belief in personal agency (even if some philosophers consider it to be a belief in an illusion or myth) seems to be a good thing for most people, most of the time.

Nonetheless, agency feelings and beliefs may be fragile and historically contingent. The heroes of Homer's *Iliad* and the patriarchs of the Old Testament made war, sired offspring, and even sacrificed their own children in response to voices in their heads (and other experiences, e.g., visions), which they attributed to external agents such as Athena, Apollo,

and the God of the Old Testament. With this in mind, philosopher Julian Jaynes (1976) suggested that the tellers of these tales did not originally understand the actors to be agents, perhaps because they—the tellers—did not understand themselves to be agents either. Jaynes provocatively argued that human beings actually *learned* how to think of themselves as motivated agents—invented the idea of free will—sometime during the millennium before Christ.

Even today, a sense of agency may slip away when we feel that our lives are controlled by powerful external sources. When a capricious or punishing environment fails to support or reinforce goal-directed striving, for example, the person may experience a decrement in what psychologist Albert Bandura (1989) calls *self-efficacy*—the person's belief that he or she can execute goal-directed behavior in a successful manner, especially under challenging or stressful circumstances. Over the course of repeated and uncontrollable punishments, a person may even quit trying to accomplish goals altogether, descending into a kind of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975). When agency dies, some people simply give up.

The grand theories of personality that were proposed in the 20th century varied widely with respect to the emphasis they placed on human agency. Freud, in his psychodynamic theory, suggested that the prime forces controlling behavior and experience were located in the unforgiving external world (societal norms and laws, physical constraints) and in the unconscious recesses of the human mind. The id and the superego—as opposed to each other as they seemed to be—shared the role of exerting implacable pressure on a beleaguered ego. In the face of the id's sexual and aggressive urges and the moral commands issued by society and the superego, the ego's powers of agency were limited at best. Still, Freud believed some agential control could be exerted, and the ego psychologists who followed in Freud's footsteps (e.g., theorists Anna Freud, Erich Fromm, Erik Erikson, and Robert White) granted the ego greater powers of coping, mastery, and agential control. Early behaviorist views of personality contended that human action, like the movements of rats and pigeons, was nearly 100% controlled by external forces. However, the social-cognitive theories that evolved out of behaviorism, such as theories developed by Albert Bandura (1989) and Walter Mischel (2004), tended to view human beings as potentially rational and deliberative decision makers, endowed with expectancies, values, and social learning strategies.

Throughout the history of personality psychology, those theories that have focused prime attention on the motivational *dynamics* of

behavior—the forces that energize and direct what people do—have had to take a stand on the issue of agency. But many personality theories are not primarily concerned with motivational dynamics. For example, theories of dispositional traits and their temperament precursors focus mainly on individual differences in the *structure* of personality. As we saw in Chapters 2–4 of this book, structural theories of personality dispositions tend to ask questions like these: What are the different types of social actors we encounter in daily life? What are the basic traits that differentiate one person from the next in a social group? If a psychological scientist can show that a person high in extraversion tends to engage in highly sociable behavior and experience positive emotions across a range of situations, the scientist does not really need to know *why* the extravert does (and feels) what the extravert does (and feels), in the sense of knowing what happen to be the extravert's goals, plans, and values. Put more generally, you *do not need to know a person as a motivated agent in order to make a reasonable prediction about what he or she will do as a social actor*. If her social reputation is that she is outgoing, lively, and spontaneous, then the reasonable prediction to make is that she will continue to act in this manner, regardless of her motives and goals in life, across many situations and contexts, more so than somebody low on this trait.

It is not that the dispositional trait perspective in personality psychology rules out human agency, or conceives of persons as nonagents. It is rather that the trait perspective takes no position when it comes to the question of human agency. It says: "I refuse to answer on the grounds it doesn't matter." From the standpoint of the trait perspective, extraverts are extraverts, regardless of whether they want to be or not, regardless of what their goals, plans, projects, and values are for the future. People high in agreeableness show friendly and caring behavior across many situations. People high in neuroticism suffer from chronic negative affect. Do people high in neuroticism *want* to suffer this way? Probably not. Did they sit down one day and *decide* to become high in neuroticism? Surely not. The trait concepts that provide critical, invaluable, and incontestable information as to how social actors will feel and behave across different situations and over time can never fully penetrate the mask the actor wears.

What do the actors want? What are their goals and values? As members of the audience, we cannot even ask these questions until we switch our epistemological frame and view human beings as motivated, goal-oriented, planful agents, as well as social actors. As we saw in Chapter

2, people do not even know they are social actors until about age 2. It takes longer still before they fully understand the nature of their own motivated agency—until second grade, or even later.

A PORTRAIT OF THE AGENT AS A YOUNG CHILD

Like all animals, *Homo sapiens* is designed to pursue goals. We must, in some manner, go out into the environment and identify what we need (to survive and procreate), and we must move our bodies in some manner to get it. Even the newborn human infant behaves in a goal-directed fashion, turning its head toward the nipple to suck, positioning its body in such a way as to achieve the goal of nursing. It is fair to say, then, that human beings, like other animals, exhibit a primitive sense of motivated agency from the very get-go. Moreover, much of what we do on a daily basis is in the service of one kind of goal or another, from brushing our teeth in the morning to searching for the car keys in order to drive to the store. In this obvious sense, social actors are nearly always motivated agents, too. The actor always wants something, which makes the actor an agent.

It is one thing, however, to say that human beings typically behave in a goal-directed manner, even as infants, but it is quite another to say that they *conceive of themselves (and others) as motivated agents who pursue valued goals over time*. Agency in the full sense—encompassing self-conscious striving, will, choice, deliberative planning, and purpose—requires years to develop. Human beings take an important step along the developmental path when, toward the end of the first year of life, they exhibit a marked interest in *intentionality* (Tomasello, 2000; Woodward, 2009). At approximately 9 months of age, infants begin to behave in ways suggesting that they understand what others are *trying* to do. They imitate and improvise on adults' intentional, goal-directed behaviors at much higher rates than random behaviors. They attend to objects and events toward which adults express interest and positive emotions, as if to suggest that they, too, may *want* what others want. They decode others' behaviors to determine the extent to which the actions are intended or wanted. For example, 9-month-olds (but not 6-month-olds) express more impatience (e. g., reaching, looking away) when an adult is unwilling to give them a toy (when the adult refuses to give it) than when the adult is simply unable to give it to them (because she drops or fumbles the toy, according to the script laid out by the experimenter) (Behne,

Carpenter, Call, & Tomasello, 2005). In this clever study, 9-month-olds can tell when the adult intends to keep the toy away from them (which they find to be very annoying) and when the adult unintentionally (it seems) screws up. They are more forgiving in the latter scenario, as if to suggest that trying (agency) is what really counts!

Around the same age, infants begin to engage with adults in scenarios of *joint attention*. For example, they visually follow a caregiver's pointing finger to find the object to which the caregiver is calling attention, then turn back to the caregiver to confirm that they are indeed looking at the intended object. They may also hold up or point to an object for an adult to see, thereby attempting to direct the adult's attention to it. In these scenarios, the infant aims to coordinate its own intentions with those of another agent, as if to say: "Let us both agree that we intend to (want to) look at (make sense of) this particular object." The cognitive scientist Michael Tomasello (2000) argues that this kind of communicative exchange forms the basis of all cultural cognition. In effect, the infant and the adult arrive at a common ground of shared representations regarding external reality. Based on a shared intention, they establish an agreement regarding the meaning of something in the external world.

Long before human beings explicitly know they are agents, they are primed to detect agency in the world. In the second year of life, toddlers often attribute intentionality to behaviors they observe in others and, in some cases, to actions that emanate from nonagents (Luo & Baillargeon, 2010). As an example of the latter, they may do things to suggest that they (implicitly) believe a toy or doll has its own point of view on the world and is motivated to enact its own desires.

In the third and fourth years of life, children develop a more explicit theory of mind (Apperly, 2012; Wellman, 1993). "Theory of mind" is the common-sense, folk-psychological conception that you and I and most human beings have about why people do what they do. We generally assume that people do things *because they want to do them* (desire) and in light of *what they understand to be true* (belief). If I observe Amanda searching for cookies in the cabinet, I naturally assume that (1) Amanda wants cookies (she is hungry; she has desire), and (2) Amanda believes the cookies are in the cabinet (otherwise, she would look for them someplace else). Theory of mind is essentially a formal (and very simple) explication of basic motivated agency: Agents move forward in time (pursue goals) in order to satisfy their desires and in accord with what they believe to be true. In their minds, agents have desires and beliefs, and they are therefore motivated to act upon them.

Developmental psychologists have conducted hundreds of studies on theory of mind. A common methodology they use is the *false-belief task*. In one version, children are told a story about Sally and Andrew (Apperly, 2012). Sally is playing with her toy, then puts it away in the cupboard before going outside. While she is outside, Andrew moves the toy from the cupboard to a chest of drawers. Sally then returns inside to resume play with her toy. Now, the experimenter asks the child: *Where will Sally look for her toy?* If you were the participant (and if you are paying attention to my example), I hope you would say: “In the cupboard.” (After all, that is where she left it.) But if you were 3 years old, you might say: “In the chest of drawers.” Why would you say such a dumb thing? Because you are not taking Sally’s *mind* into consideration. You are imposing your own privileged perspective (you saw Andrew move the toy) on to Sally. But Sally did not see Andrew do it; therefore, she must *believe* the toy is still where she left it. Children ages 2 and 3 years typically flunk this kind of explicit false-belief test. By age 5 or 6, they nearly always pass (Wellman, Cross, & Watson, 2001).

Still, there are broad individual differences in theory of mind development. Research suggests that children develop theory of mind more quickly if they also (1) show high levels of EC and executive function (abilities to suppress impulses and focus on the future; Pelicano, 2007); (2) have parents who engage them in conversations that make repeated reference to mental and emotional states (Astington & Jenkins, 1995); (3) have older siblings with whom they have presumably gained experience in figuring out other minds (Perner, Ruffman, & Leekham, 1994); (4) have more experience with children’s storybooks, through which they learn about characters’ minds (Mar, Tackett, & Moore, 2010); and (5) are rated by their preschool teachers as more sociable and less aggressive than other children (Astington, 2003). Theory of mind is intimately tied to cognitive development and to the workings of childhood temperament, and these relations may express themselves in different ways in different cultures (Lane et al., 2013).

It is hard to imagine what life would be like for our eusocial species if human beings did not develop theory of mind. If we did not understand ourselves as mindful agents who strive to put our desires and beliefs into action, how would we be able to cooperate on joint ventures, establish alliances, develop commitments to others and to groups, and predict the future? Yet it is just this kind of deficit that may be partly responsible for the odd behaviors and social difficulties shown by some autistic children (Baron-Cohen, 1995; Losh & Capps, 2006). Research has shown

that autistic children often perform poorly on theory-of-mind tasks. Case studies of autism, moreover, sometimes suggest a remarkable lack of personal agency, which can border on depersonalization. Behavior may follow performance scripts, but it seems to lack an internally generated purpose, as if it is being performed by a robot. In extreme cases, not only does the autistic child fail to articulate personal goals and desires, but he or she may find it difficult even to take personal ownership of subjective experience. For example, the neurologist and writer Oliver Sacks (1995) tells the story of Stephen Wiltshire, a prodigy with autism, who, despite his extraordinary artistic talents, never seems to develop a sense of personal agency:

I had the feeling that the whole visible world flowed through Stephen, like a river, without making sense, without being appropriated, without becoming part of him in the least. That though he might, in a sense, retain everything he saw, it was retained as something external, unintegrated, and never built on, connected, revised, never influencing or influenced by anything else. (p. 56)

For most children, however, an early appreciation of intentionality has blossomed, by age 5 or 6, into a full understanding that human beings are fundamentally intentional, purposeful, goal-directed agents. In fact, many children seem to overdo their newfound understanding of agency, imputing purposeful design in most anything they see (Kelemen, 2004). They project agential qualities onto inanimate and even imaginary objects, such as favorite toys and imaginary companions. They conclude that artifacts in the environment are the result of the agential activities of others—all things that exist were made by purposeful agents who self-consciously set forth to make them.

The idea of an ultimate maker makes good sense to a mind primed to detect agency (Bering, 2006). Religious accounts of the creation of the world hold special appeal for children of this age, an appeal that often endures for the remainder of the lifespan if the belief is reinforced by cultural factors. In the words of one developmental psychologist, young children endowed with theory of mind are “intuitive theists” who express a “promiscuous teleology” (Kelemen, 2004, p. 295). God is imagined as a purposeful agent whose own desires, goals, and beliefs are translated into motivated action. Motivated agents perceive the world as populated with and determined by other motivated agents, and all can be traced back to an ultimate Agent, whose own desires, goals, and beliefs set everything into motion.

BECOMING GOOD: COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN GRADE SCHOOL

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle posed a question that was as important in ancient Athens as it is today: How do we live a good life? Happiness (in Greek, *eudaimonia*) is the ultimate aim of human action, Aristotle wrote, the natural consequence of a life well lived. For Aristotle, life itself was like playing a musical instrument. Like the finest musician who achieves an exalted level of musical *virtuosity*, the happiest man or woman ideally attains a kind of excellence (in Greek, *arête*) in living. But whereas the musician endeavors to create a beautiful sound, the person who lives an excellent and happy life strives to express *virtue*, for human happiness depends on contributing to the common good in some way. Two thousand years before Darwin, Aristotle sensed that ours is a profoundly eusocial species, meaning that the good for the individual has to be tied, though sometimes in complex and nonobvious ways, to the good of the group. At some deep level, we human beings know this, which is why we devote so much time and energy to socializing our young in the arts of virtue. According to Aristotle, socialization and education for virtue require extensive practice, as would be the case for playing a musical instrument or learning a craft. We learn by doing, Aristotle contended. Young children, therefore, must be taught how to behave in ways that are consistent with the virtues that society holds dear, such as courage, temperance, justice, and friendship, even before they are able to comprehend the meanings of these abstract terms:

The virtues we do acquire by first exercising them, just as happens in the arts. Anything that we have to learn to do we learn by the actual doing of it: people become builders by building and instrumentalists by playing instruments. Similarly, we become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones. . . . In a word then, like activities produce like dispositions. Hence, we must give our activities a certain quality because it is their characteristics that determine the resulting dispositions. So it is a matter of no small importance what sorts of habits we form from the earliest age—it makes a vast difference, or rather all the difference in the world. (Aristotle, 2004, p. 32)

Virtue begins when social actors habitually perform good behaviors, Aristotle believed. For social actors, habits lead to dispositional traits. But habits get you only half the way there. According to Aristotle, habits paved the way for the eventual development of *character* (in Greek, *ethos*). To express a virtuous character, a person must engage

in rational and deliberative choice, and then act upon the choice: “Acts that are incidentally virtuous [should be] distinguished from those that are done knowingly, of choice, and by a virtuous disposition” (Aristotle, 2004, p. 37). Aristotle used the example of courage to illustrate the distinction: “The quasi-courage that is due to spirit seems to be the most natural, and if it includes deliberative choice and purpose it is considered to be courage” (p. 72). Translating Aristotle’s insight into contemporary terms, a courageous temperament (say, positive emotionality, as described in Chapter 2 of this book) may spur the *social actor* to behave boldly and with great confidence, even fearlessness, which may function as a kind of behavioral or emotional precursor to courage; courage in the fullest sense, however, is manifest only when the *motivated agent* rationally considers various contingencies, then purposively makes a choice. Reality—dictated by nature and society—presents us with the contingencies. Within these constraints, we must deliberate and ultimately exercise our human agency:

Choice involves deliberation. . . . What we deliberate about is practical measures that lie within our power; this is the class of things that actually remains for the accepted types of cause are nature, necessity, and chance, and also mind and human agency of all kinds. . . . The effects about which we deliberate are those which are produced by our agency. . . . (p. 57)

As we have already seen, research findings trace the development of motivated agency from the infant’s early appreciation for intentionality to the emergence of theory of mind. By age 5, most children understand that mindful human agents, themselves included, strive to achieve desires in accord with belief. But if agents are to be successful in achieving the goals they formulate in their minds, they have to proceed in a deliberative and rational manner, as Aristotle knew. As we saw in Chapter 3, temperament can help out. Young children who show high levels of EC are better able (than their more impulsive counterparts) to resist impulses and weigh options. EC and the development of empathy in the preschool years contribute to the development of a conscience (Kochanska & Aksan, 2006). It is fair to say that, by age 5, most children have developed a rudimentary conscience, or what Freud called a “superego.” But the kind of rationality required for the exercise of Aristotelian virtue, and thereby the full expression of a good life, may require still more cognitive development and more socialization. What seems still to be

needed is exactly what White (1965) argued is ideally achieved in the age 5–7 shift.

With respect to cognitive development, Jean Piaget (1970) proposed that around the age of 7, children become remarkably more rational, systematic, and logical in their thinking about the objective world. In what Piaget considered to be *the* developmental watershed in human ontogeny, children begin to exhibit *concrete operations* in their daily thinking. Piaget's stage of concrete operations marks the ability to think about the concrete world as a logically organized, rule-governed reality. From the perspective of concrete operations, children begin to understand the deep logic of the material world—how the nature of things may remain the same even when surface appearances are changed; how the natural world follows lawful regularities that can be formalized in verbal or mathematical terms; how reality can be quantified, classified, and systematically organized. Although subsequent research has suggested that Piaget may have gotten some of the details wrong about concrete operations and may have underestimated the rational abilities of younger children, the overall developmental shift he observed is widely recognized.

I think that concrete operations erupted in full force during my second-grade year. I suddenly perceived that the concrete world could be known in terms of its logical and systematic properties. This became a huge asset in schoolwork, as much for its motivational power as my newfound skills in cognition. From the standpoint of midlife, however, my clearest recollections regarding the impact of concrete operations pertain to Halloween and baseball. At ages 4 and 5, my immediate aim after finishing trick or treat was to eat the candy I had collected. By second grade, I had discovered an elaborate, concrete operational ritual: Pour all the candy out onto the living room floor and *sort it* into categories; organize the candy by size, chocolate content, perceived value, or whatever; develop rational *plans* to eat the candy over the course of the next week in such a way as to maximize enjoyment; formulate rational schemes to cheat my younger brother out of his best candy (the poor fool—he had not yet attained concrete operations) through devious (but deeply rational) trades, like this one: Jeff, I will give you *two* bubble gums (worth a penny each) for that *one* chunky bar (worth at least 10 cents). Because two is more than one, my brother complied.

On baseball, I had zero interest and knew absolutely nothing about how the game was played, until the spring of 1962 (toward the end of second grade), when I suddenly began collecting baseball cards, to the point of an obsession. I became fascinated with the rules of baseball, the

structure of the Major Leagues, the standings, the records, the deep logic of it all. I began to play baseball, too, and my father took me to my first Major League baseball game (Cardinals 15, Cubs 3; I sulked all the way home). I memorized the information provided on the backs of baseball cards (batting averages, home runs, runs batted in [RBIs], earned run averages, win–loss ratios, final team standings), which all pertained to the previous (1961) season. And what a season that was, even though I never saw it directly. The Yankees beat the Reds in the World Series. Maris hit 61 home runs to break Ruth’s record, but Mantle might have hit as many had he not sustained an injury in September. Whitey Ford went 25–4 during the regular season. Norm Cash hit .361 to lead the American League (with 41 home runs and 132 RBIs—an extraordinary performance; he should have been Most Valuable Player [MVP]). Vada Pinson was Rookie of the Year in the National League. The Cubs finished seventh (out of eight). To this day, I have retained an astounding amount of useless information about the 1961 season! Ask me anything.

The implications of concrete operations go beyond schoolwork and baseball, and this gets us back to Aristotle. Once a person understands that laws and logic govern the material world, he or she begins to appreciate how the same may also hold true, more or less, for society. Very young children know that there are social rules and conventions, but they do not truly understand why. They do not typically have a broad conception of a social world out there; a world beyond the immediate family or play group; a world made up of school, neighborhoods, organizations, cities, states, and so on—not unlike teams organized into leagues in baseball. But after they make the 5–7 shift, they get it. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, James Joyce (1916/1964, pp. 15–16) describes how Irish schoolboy Stephen Dedalus, upon considering his geography lesson, thinks about his own place in a hierarchically ordered social reality:

He opened the geography to study the lesson; but he could not learn the names of places in America. Still they were all different places that had those different names. They were all in different countries and the countries were in continents and the continents were in the world and the world was in the universe.

He turned to the flyleaf of the geography and read what he had written there: himself, his name, and where he was.

Stephen Dedalus
Class of Elements
Clongowes Wood College
Sallins

County Kildare
Ireland
Europe
The World
The Universe

It should come as no surprise that Stephen's mind moves next to the topic of God. He wonders: What is the ultimate source of this hierarchical order? And what governs social relations in the world? Whether they think about God in this regard or not, children endowed with concrete operations are now able to consider the laws and norms that pertain to broader social collectives, to society, and even to a moral universe writ large.

In Lawrence Kohlberg's (1969) classic theory of moral development, the emergence of concrete operations helps to catalyze the transition from the *preconventional* to the *conventional* stages of moral reasoning. At preconventional stages, Kohlberg argued, children (and some adults) determine what is good or bad exclusively in terms of the effects of an action upon the self. Moral reasoning is essentially hedonistic and self-centered. At conventional stages, by contrast, older children (and many adults) rely on a broader consideration of interpersonal and societal standards (conventions) to determine what a moral person should do. From the conventional perspective, the child understands the social world as a more or less ordered and rule-governed reality and realizes, at some level, that such a structure *needs to be true* and real, or else there would be chaos. From the standpoint of conventional moral reasoning, it is in the very nature of society that people must play within the bounds of conventional rules. Not to do so would be like disregarding the umpire's call at first base, or refusing to return to the dugout after striking out at the plate. The game would fall apart. Even when 10-year-olds decide to break the rules (as they often do), they typically know that they are violating some kind of social convention. They may not care about the conventions, but they understand why they exist. Going back to my Baptist Sunday school example, older children blessed with concrete operations have reached something like an age of moral accountability. In Aristotle's terms, they are now fully capable of virtue—and vice.

As children become more capable of concrete operational thought, they make parallel advances in the realm of social perspective taking. Developmental psychologist Robert Selman (1980) traced the growth of perspective taking from the relatively egocentric understanding of very young children to the complex societal perspectives exhibited in early

adolescence. According to Selman, most children around the age of 5 understand that different people have different perspectives on the world. But they assume these differences are mainly due to the different information each person has. By age 7 or 8, however, children recognize that even when different people have the same information, they may still see the world in different and conflicting ways. Children learn to coordinate their own perspective with those of others and eventually to adopt the objective perspective of a disinterested third party. In early adolescence, they are readily able to assume the broad perspective of society in general. Virtuous, prosocial behavior tends to track advances in perspective taking and role playing. Research has consistently revealed positive associations between prosocial behaviors and highly developed abilities to assume and understand the perspectives of other people (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006). Advances in social perspective taking are part of the reason that prosocial behavior itself tends to increase across the years of middle childhood.

In most societies today, the broad institutional context wherein the cognitive and social developments of middle childhood are most clearly expressed and refined is *elementary school*. Educational systems vary widely from one culture to the next, but certain core features of schooling can readily be observed. First, children typically *leave home* to attend school. As a result, their social worlds expand dramatically to encompass teachers, school workers, and a larger set of peers. In the classroom and on the playground, children meet new and more complex challenges in negotiating interpersonal relationships.

Second, schooling blends academic concerns with issues of character development. In the United States, public and private elementary schools focus largely on individual knowledge and skills acquisition. Children develop the basic tools of learning as teachers strive to foster verbal and analytic problem solving. Instruction centers on rules, descriptions, and abstract concepts. Children are exposed to issues and problems in a range of academic areas, from social studies to mathematics. At the same time, however, schools aim to inculcate certain values, such as honesty, cooperation, respect for authority, and citizenship. Ideally children learn to *do well* in their academic studies, but they also learn to *be good*. Different societies prioritize different skills and different character virtues, but all societies want their children to master these skills and virtues; all societies aim to produce good children.

How can I be good? Good at what? Good at reading, writing, and arithmetic—and good at sports, video games, music, art, and making

stuff. Good at friendship. And, perhaps most importantly (in the minds of many parents and friends) just plain *good*—as in being a good person. The psychosocial environment of elementary school is organized around the question of goodness, the most consequential result of the age 5–7 shift. As motivated agents, children set for themselves goals about doing well and being good. Equipped now with concrete operational skills, children systematically compare themselves to each other on a range of dimensions and qualities, sorting it all out as I used to sort my candy on Halloween night. Alex is good at sports, but not math. Courtney exhibits unsurpassed talent in the visual arts, but she is an average student otherwise. Nicole’s marks on the fourth-grade standardized tests put her at the 85th percentile—pretty good, indeed! Sam is the most popular kid in the class; everybody likes him. Jeffrey is a bully. In the minds of his classmates, he is *not* good. In his own mind, he is better than they are.

The question of goodness lies at the heart of Erik Erikson’s (1963) characterization of the grade school years. According to Erikson’s famous model of psychosocial development, middle childhood comprises the fourth of eight stages in the life cycle, the stage that pits *industry* against *inferiority*. To exhibit “industry” is to work hard in order to master the academic and interpersonal tasks that middle childhood sets forth. To experience “inferiority” is to fall behind, to finish low down in the standings. As Erikson saw it, schooling teaches children how to use the *tools* and assume the *roles* that society deems to be central for becoming a productive member of the adult world. The tools may be not only pencils, protractors, and art supplies; or computers and iPads; but also baseball gloves, hockey sticks, musical instruments, and even hunting rifles. The roles are the structured scenarios for social relations that will prove to be as important as anything else for getting along and getting ahead in the group—how to be a good friend, for example, a good daughter, a trusted team player. Children are challenged to do well and to be good when it comes to mastery of skills, tools, and roles. In one domain after another, some do well, and others do poorly. And everybody is keeping track.

SELF-ESTEEM

The development of motivated agency reaches a critical threshold for personality when children begin to formulate and systematically pursue long-term goals in school, social relationships, and family life. It is

difficult to identify a discrete moment when this psychological phenomenon breaks through, but it is rare before the age of 5 and increasingly common after age 7. At any given moment, preschool children may have goals; but they do not commonly wake up in the morning with an agenda in their conscious minds about what they will achieve today, this week, and this year, and how they will systematically go about trying to achieve it, what obstacles they will need to overcome, whom they will need to influence, how they will need to use their skills, and so on. They don't typically have a plan. As they move through elementary school, however, children become increasingly purposeful, strategic, and future-oriented. As they become self-conscious and planful motivated agents, *a second layer of personality begins to form*, layered over the dispositional traits that continue to develop and to shape their performance as social actors. For motivated agents, *personality is more about goals and values than it is about traits*. If an observer, therefore, wishes to characterize the personality of an older child (say, a 10-year-old), the observer must consider more than the 10-year-old's dispositional personality traits. To understand an older child's unique adjustment to the world, one must inquire into his or her motivational agenda. What does the older child want and value? What goals does the older child recurrently pursue? What plans does the older child have for the future? And how well is the older child doing, compared to others and in the older child's own mind, regarding progress toward achieving valued goals?

Research in developmental psychology suggests that older children and preadolescents strive for many different kinds of social goals. Among the most important goals for social adjustment in school and interpersonal relationships are those that can be grouped into the two superordinate categories of *affiliation* and *power* (Ojanen, Grönroos, & Salmivalli, 2005). These two categories roughly parallel the evolutionary challenges of getting along and getting ahead in human groups. Thus, affiliation goals involve being liked by and feeling close to peers, and power goals are about social dominance and status. Interestingly, preschool children do not seem to distinguish these two aims (Hawley, 2002). By the time children are 8 or 9 years of age, however, they not only recognize the difference between affiliation and power but they also demonstrate consistent motivational tendencies in prioritizing and pursuing goals related to these two domains (Rodkin, Ryan, Jamison, & Wilson, 2013). From grade school onward, girls appear to care somewhat more about affiliation, and boys about power, but both are considered to be very important by nearly all children, even when they feel that they are not faring well in attaining goals in these two domains.

In an illuminating study of 980 Finnish children in third, fourth, and fifth grades, researchers found that the motivational domains of affiliation and power break out into three factors: social development goals, demonstration–approach goals, and demonstration–avoid goals (Rodkin et al., 2013). Mapping directly onto affiliation, *social development goals* aim at improving relationships and social skills, as in gaining insights into friends or learning how to get along with others. Social relationships are formed, maintained, and developed for the inherent positive qualities they provide. With respect to the power domain (demonstrating social status), a basic distinction was observed between the goal of achieving dominance on the one hand and the goal of avoiding being dominated on the other. *Demonstration–approach* goals aim at attaining status and garnering positive feedback from others. *Demonstration–avoid* goals involve avoiding negative judgments from others (e.g., not being seen as a “geek” or “loser”).

The findings from the study showed that children who consistently pursued social development goals tend to engage in more prosocial behavior and to be seen by their peers as nice and caring. But they were *not* the most popular kids in the class. Popularity was positively associated with demonstration–approach goals and negatively related to demonstration–avoid goals. The most popular children were those who pursued goals aimed at attaining status; the least popular were those whose main aims were to avoid being rejected and dominated, perhaps as a function of their self-perceived lower status. Interestingly, demonstration–approach goals were also positively associated with *aggression*. In a finding that distresses many teachers and parents, numerous studies have shown that popularity among older children and adolescents (both boys and girls) is often linked to at least a moderate degree of aggressive behavior, as well as to social dominance, athleticism, and physical attractiveness (Hartup & Abecassis, 2002). Prioritizing goals related to improving relationships and expressing care for others (social development goals) may buy some degree of intimacy and likability, but it is not the best ticket to popularity among older children and adolescents. Getting along and getting ahead are not exactly the same thing.

The extent to which older children and adolescents achieve valued goals appears to have a substantial impact on their *self-esteem*. Self-esteem is the overall evaluation—from highly positive to highly negative—that a person makes of the self. Before the age of about 8 or 9, most children see themselves in a brightly positive light, showing nearly uniformly high levels of self-esteem (Harter, 2006). Around second and third grade, however, something rather dramatic happens. Marked individual differences

in self-esteem begin to appear, with some children maintaining high levels, others dropping to very low levels of self-esteem, and many falling somewhere in between. Self-esteem may also be domain-specific (Marsh & Hattie, 1996): A child may feel good about him- or herself in sports but feel inferior in schoolwork. Roughly tracking the age 5–7 shift, it is as if self-esteem suddenly becomes a relevant issue in the mind of children once they have, in turn, consolidated a theory of mind, developed cognitive skills linked to concrete operations, and begun to pursue temporally extended personal goals.

The idea that self-esteem may be tied closely to human agency goes back at least as far as the seminal writings of William James. James (1892/1963) defined self-esteem with a famous ratio: Self-esteem = “success” divided by “pretensions” (p. 175). What James depicted as “pretensions” includes the goals, values, and expectations that people seek to achieve; success is what people feel when they achieve them, or at least make good progress toward achieving them. The implication in James’s simple formula is that if people did not have pretensions—if they never held out valued goals to pursue—they would never have to worry about self-esteem. In other words, self-esteem is strongly linked to the concept of a motivated agent, a goal-oriented striver, a decision maker who exerts his or her will in order to achieve valued ends in the future. Indeed, self-esteem’s appearance on the psychological scene, around age 8 or 9 years, signals the culmination of the development of motivated agency in the childhood years, as indicated in Table 5.1.

Many researchers suggest that the emergence of individual differences in self-esteem around the age of 8 or 9 results in part from increasing expectations for achievement coming from parents and teachers and from cognitive-developmental changes that enable older children to compare their own goal-based achievements in various domains—from sports to academics to moral behavior—to the achievements of others. Of course, self-evaluations appear even in areas in which it occasionally feels as if little can be done by way of goal attainment. For example, relative judgments of physical attractiveness play into self-esteem, especially for girls (Harter, 2006). Even in this domain, however, young people (and older people) strive for improvement, through clothing, hairstyles, and the like early on, and in later years through dieting, exercise, plastic surgery, and on and on. For some people, improving physical appearance can become an overriding life goal and a key element in determining overall self-esteem.

For the motivated agent, then, a central issue is this: How well are you doing? To answer the question, you take stock of your valued goals

TABLE 5.1. Developmental Steps in Becoming a Motivated Agent

Age (years)	Developmental emergence
0	<i>Goal directedness.</i> Even newborn infants respond to the world in a goal-directed manner. For example, the baby moves its head toward the nipple in order to suck. Human behavior is rarely random.
1	<i>Intentionality.</i> Toward the end of the first year, infants show a preference for observing and imitating the intentional, rather than unintentional, behaviors of others. They show a rudimentary understanding of the fact that people intend to do things. <i>Joint attention.</i> When attending to an object, an infant may check back with the caregiver to determine if the caregiver is also attending to the same thing as a way of gaining information on the caregiver’s intentions and point of view.
2	<i>Agency projection.</i> In the second year of life, toddlers attribute intentionality to other people and to many objects in the world, such as toys and dolls. They may reveal an implicit assumption that these objects possess their own agency (e.g., desires, beliefs). Some researchers argue that children as young as 18 months therefore show a primitive, implicit “theory of mind.”
3–4	<i>Theory of mind.</i> Children develop an explicit theory of mind: They come to understand that people are motivated agents in the sense that they have desires and beliefs in their minds upon which they act. Goal-directed behavior is motivated by what an agent wants (desire) and what an agent believes to be true. Children apply this understanding to themselves.
5–7	<i>Schooling and socialization.</i> In most societies, children leave home to begin school around age 5 and/or they begin systematic training in social and technical practices that contribute to the economic and moral well-being of the group. Children take on increased responsibilities, such as minding younger siblings and helping out with domestic tasks.
7–8	<i>Concrete operations.</i> Thinking about the concrete world becomes more systematic, rational, and logical. Children become experts in classifying and organizing the material world; they are able to apply rational cognitive operations to make sense of reality. The powers of concrete operations enable an understanding of moral and social conventions while enhancing skills in planning and goal-setting.
8–9	<i>Self-esteem.</i> Children begin to evaluate themselves in terms of how well they are doing with respect to achieving valued personal goals, often linked to concerns about peer acceptance and status. When goal attainment is high, they experience high levels of self-esteem; failure in goal pursuit leads to low self-esteem.

and evaluate your progress toward achieving them. Social comparison facilitates the evaluation. You may look around and conclude that you are doing quite well compared to others. In James's (1892/1963) terms, your pretensions may be high, but social comparison suggests that your successes are also substantial. Or you may see that you are not doing so well, compared with others in your social environment. In this case, social comparison tells you that the discrepancy between your successes and your pretensions is quite large, leaving you with a distressingly tiny fraction for self-esteem.

As soon as individual differences in self-esteem begin to show up in middle childhood, girls show lower scores than boys (Harter, 2006). The sex difference persists in varying degrees across much of the rest of the lifespan, with the largest advantages for males typically showing up in middle and late adolescence (Harter, 2006; Robins, Trzesniewski, Gosling, Tracy, & Potter, 2002). Children and adolescents from East Asian societies, such as China and Japan, tend to show somewhat lower scores on self-esteem than their American and Canadian counterparts (Harter, 2006). Still, warm and supportive parenting in both Eastern and Western societies tends to predict high self-esteem in offspring (Gutman & Eccles, 2007). From adolescence onward, African Americans tend to score higher on self-esteem than do European Americans (Twenge & Crocker, 2002). Following adolescence, self-esteem scores tend to rise gradually, reaching a peak around age 60 years, then beginning to decline around age 70 (Robins et al., 2002).

Social psychologists have conducted a wealth of research on the vicissitudes of self-esteem (Baumeister & Bushman, 2008). What factors enhance or undermine self-esteem? How do people maintain high levels of self-esteem, even when they receive negative feedback? What benefits follow from having high self-esteem, and what negative ramifications follow from low self-esteem? For example, high self-esteem tends to be associated with greater initiative in the pursuit of goals and greater enjoyment of success in goal attainment. Low self-esteem is associated with fear of failure, higher levels of internal conflict and ambivalence, and with a cautious, prevention-focused orientation toward life's challenges. At the same time, there is considerable evidence to suggest that high levels of self-esteem may not be all that they are cracked up to be. It is not clear that boosting self-esteem actually improves people's performance on challenging tasks. What seems more likely is that success on challenging tasks boosts self-esteem. Cross-national comparisons suggest that many Americans report unrealistically high levels of self-esteem

compared to citizens of other countries. Bullies, violent criminals, and narcissists often show very high levels of self-esteem. Furthermore, pursuing self-esteem as an end in itself can be counterproductive, leading to lower levels of well-being and diminished commitments to other people (Crocker & Park, 2004).

NARCISSISM: A PROBLEM OF UNMITIGATED AGENCY

In the ancient Greek legend, the beautiful boy Narcissus falls so completely in love with the reflection of himself in a pool that he plunges into the water and drowns. The story provides the mythical source for the modern conception of *narcissism*, which is conceived as excessive self-love and the attendant qualities of self-centeredness, arrogance, and a lack of regard for other human beings. Empirical efforts to assess individual differences in a tendency toward narcissism consistently identify two central features: *grandiosity* and a *sense of entitlement* (Brown, Budzek, & Tamborski, 2009). Grandiosity is self-importance: The narcissist believes that he or she is an exceptional human being, more important than anybody else, destined for greatness. Sense of entitlement is the expectation that other people will also see the narcissist in the same way and therefore shower admiration and attention upon the narcissist. They will love and adore the narcissist as much as he loves and adores himself, or herself, though men tend to be more narcissistic than women. In their self-absorbed minds, narcissists are entitled to the admiration of others, highly deserving of praise and esteem. On self-report measures of narcissism, such as the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1981), they tend to endorse items such as these: “I really like to be the center of attention”; “I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve”; “I think I am a special person”; and “I like to look at my body.”

Among other things, narcissism typically entails *excessively high self-esteem* (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010). Some theories of narcissism suggest that the excessively high self-esteem is a cover-up for an underlying (even unconscious) deficit in self-worth. For example, the great psychoanalytic theorist Heinz Kohut (1977) believed that the origins of narcissism could be traced back to the parents’ failure to affirm their child and to build up a secure sense of a core self. Other theories suggest that narcissists have never really suffered from lack of affirmation, yet they still crave more and more anyway, to feed their insatiable

need to be esteemed. Either way you look at it, the research shows that manifest narcissism is often linked to social problems. People who score high on measures of narcissism express more hostility and are more likely to behave aggressively when they are insulted compared to those who score low in narcissism (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998). Narcissism has been linked to extreme mood swings and intensity of emotional experience in daily life (Emmons, 1987), and to problems in inhibiting negative social responses (Vazire & Funder, 2006).

Yet narcissists are also often capable of garnering positive attention from others, especially early on in a relationship. Studies show that narcissists can be charming and attractive on first sight, and can even attain high levels of popularity in the short term (Back et al., 2010). Their dynamic social demeanor, often fueled by high levels of extraversion, can attract positive attention. They also tend to wear flashy and attractive clothing. Perhaps you wanted to know that young female narcissists wear more makeup and tend to show more cleavage, compared to their less narcissistic counterparts (Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008). All other things being equal, narcissists also tend to be rated as significantly more physically attractive than less narcissistic people (Holtzman & Strube, 2010). Being a physically beautiful human being, like Narcissus himself, may breed narcissism: When people consistently notice your good looks (and when you notice the same every time you look in the mirror), you may begin to believe that you are indeed a really special person.

Most narcissists eventually wear out their welcome. Over time, people become increasingly annoyed by the self-centeredness that narcissists relentlessly display and by their relative inattention to the needs of others (Back et al., 2010). In the long run, the social costs of narcissism can be high, leading to social rejection rather than the admiration that narcissists crave. Nonetheless, some highly narcissistic people attain positions of high esteem in the arts, sports, politics, and other domains (Corry, Merritt, Mrug, & Pamp, 2008; Wink, 1992). Moreover, people may put up with a narcissist, or be forced to put up with him or her, if the narcissist is gifted with other redeeming qualities, such as leadership skills or creative genius. Take, for example, the case of Steve Jobs.

Steve Jobs (1955–2011), the charismatic chairman and CEO of Apple, Inc., revolutionized personal computing. At age 21, he teamed up with Steve Wozniak to invent and market the Apple I computer, assembling machines in his parents' garage. When Apple went public just a few years later, Jobs was suddenly worth \$256 million. By the time he

introduced the Macintosh to the world in a famous 1984 Super Bowl commercial, Jobs had proven himself to be the industry's leading innovator in computer technology and a marketing genius.

His stupendous rise was followed by an even more precipitous fall when he was ousted from a leadership role at Apple during a 1985 coup. After Jobs left, the company fell on hard times, but Jobs himself recovered gainfully to found NeXT computing and to produce animated films, such as *Toy Story* (1995) and *Finding Nemo* (2003), through the Pixar partnership and the Disney company. Jobs returned to Apple as a conquering hero in 1996. He took the company from near bankruptcy to profitability by 1998. Over the next decade, Jobs famously orchestrated the development and marketing of the iMac, iPod, iPhone, and iPad. The magical powers and sleek designs of these products gave Apple a cachet that no company has ever been able to match. When Jobs died from complications of pancreatic cancer at age 56, Apple had become the world's most valuable publicly traded company. More importantly, Jobs changed the world forever. He dramatically impacted how hundreds of millions of people carry on their daily lives, how they work, how they spend their leisure time, how they listen to music and communicate with each other, and even how they shop. His cultural influence was on a par with such great 20th-century innovators as Thomas Edison and Henry Ford.

As a devotee of all things Apple (I am typing this book on a new iMac), I would love to tell you that Steve Jobs was also a really nice guy. But I would be lying. To use one of Jobs's favorite appellations (with all due apologies), he was truly an "asshole." He called himself that on occasion, but as I read fair-minded accounts of Jobs's life (e.g., Isaacson, 2011), I would say that those were occasions of understatement, for he was often much worse. Jobs brutalized employees, demeaned and humiliated them on a daily basis. If he did not like somebody's work, he might scream at them in a rage: "These charts are bullshit!"; "This deal is crap"; "You are a fucking idiot." As Isaacson noted, Jobs operated with "an almost willful lack of tact. . . . It was more than just an inability to hide his opinions when others said something he thought was dumb; it was a conscious readiness, even a perverse eagerness, to put people down, humiliate them, show he was smarter" (p. 223). "Under Steve Jobs, there was zero tolerance for not performing," a CEO of a supplier remarked. When VLSI Technology failed to deliver computer chips to Apple on time, "Jobs stormed into a meeting and started shouting that they were 'fucking dickless assholes'" (p. 359). At the same time, people were drawn to Jobs for his genius and charisma. "He would shout at

a meeting, ‘You asshole, you never do anything right,’” recalled Debi Coleman, who was in charge of Macintosh manufacturing in the 1980s. “It was like an hourly occurrence. Yet I consider myself the absolute luckiest person in the world to have worked with him” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 124).

The same mixture of repulsion and attraction characterized his relationships with friends and lovers. When Jobs was happy with what a friend could provide him, the friend became the prized object of his attention. But once the friend failed to deliver or disappointed Jobs in some way, Jobs simply severed the tie. There was no loyalty. A girlfriend from high school described Jobs as “an enlightened being who was cruel.” It was “a strange combination,” she said (Isaacson, 2011, p. 32). In his 20s, Jobs struck up a romantic relationship with Chrisann Brennan. In 1978, she gave birth to their daughter Lisa. Jobs denied paternity and refused to offer any financial support. Chrisann and Lisa lived off of welfare for a time, in a tiny dilapidated shack in Menlo Park, California. Finally, the County of San Mateo sued, and Jobs agreed to pay \$385 a month in child support, just before Apple was to go public. He eventually named one of his NeXT computers after his daughter, Lisa. But Jobs rarely exercised his visitation rights.

Another girlfriend, who came close to marrying Jobs, was “entranced by him, but she was also baffled by how uncaring he could be.” Tina Redse recalled, “I couldn’t abide his unkindness” (Isaacson, 2011, pp. 264–265). While Jobs was dating Redse, he was also courting the woman who would ultimately become his wife, Laurene Powell. Not surprisingly, both were beautiful women. Which one should he marry? Jobs “surprised a wide swath of friends and even acquaintances by asking them what he should do. Who was prettier, he would ask, Tina or Laurene? Who did they like better? Who should he marry?” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 272). It was as if the two women were nothing more than competing commodities. Which one should Jobs buy? Although he eventually settled into a more or less happy marriage with Laurene, raising three children and reconnecting with Lisa, Jobs never matured out of his manipulative and objectivizing orientation to interpersonal relationships. Jobs claimed to love his children, but even Laurene admitted that he rarely paid them much attention. She thought he might change his priorities when health problems arose: “After two years of him being ill, he finally gets a little better, and they [the kids] expected he would focus a bit on them, but he didn’t,” she remarked (Isaacson, 2011, p. 543). In contrast to Bill Gates and many other wealthy entrepreneurs, Jobs gave almost nothing to charities.

Years after they broke up, Tina Redse happened to read a psychiatric description of *narcissistic personality disorder*. She was amazed at how closely the label captured the personality of Steve Jobs: “It fits so well and explained so much of what we had struggled with, that I realized expecting him to be nicer or less self-centered was like expecting a blind man to see” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 266). Although the assignation of a clinical diagnosis to Jobs is beyond our expertise here, there is little doubt that he would be placed at the high end of any narcissism continuum one might imagine. And we would likely place him there even if I never mentioned that Jobs threw a tantrum in 1982 (age 27) when he learned that *Time* magazine had not chosen him to be Man of the Year. Or that he expressed outrage that President Barack Obama, in office for only a few months in 2009, had not yet given him a phone call.

For the purposes of this chapter, Jobs’s case is instructive for many reasons. First, it illustrates how an insatiable drive to enhance one’s self-esteem can shade easily into narcissism. Second, it shows how narcissism cannot be fully understood from a Layer 1 trait perspective in terms of personality. Like many narcissists, Steve Jobs was high on extraversion and low on agreeableness when it comes to dispositional traits (Chapters 1–4 in this book). But the nature of his narcissistic engagement of the self and the world was less about his emotional and behavioral traits as a social actor and more about his pursuit of valued goals as a motivated agent. The dynamics of a narcissistic personality require a consideration of Layer 2 in personality—the motivated agent’s goals, plans, and values (Chapters 5–7 in this book). The second layer of personality—the layer of motivated agency—begins to manifest itself after the age 5–7 shift, when the person begins to conceive of him- or herself as a full-fledged motivated agent who strives to attain valued goals in the concrete world. Third, and relatedly, the problem of narcissism may stem from an uncontrollable proliferation or expansion of agency, as if agency itself were like a cancerous tumor whose unrestrained growth ultimately threatens the host. Becoming a motivated agent is a good thing. But agency needs to be held in check, mitigated, or softened in some way if a person is to enjoy conventional psychological health and adjust to the demands of group life.

As a *social actor*, Steve Jobs consistently displayed characteristics suggestive of grandiosity and a sense of entitlement. But the key to his narcissism, for better and for worse, was the way in which he moved through life as a *motivated agent*. In a comment containing more insight than she may have realized, Laurene Jobs hinted at the distinction between Jobs as actor and Jobs as agent: “Like many great men whose gifts are

extraordinary,” his wife said, Steve Jobs is not “extraordinary in every realm. He doesn’t have social graces, such as putting himself in other people’s shoes, but he cares deeply about empowering humankind, the advancement of humankind, and putting the right tools in their hands” (Isaacson, 2011, pp. 543–544). Put differently, Laurene asserted that Steve Jobs may have been sorely deficient as a social actor, but what really matters is the power of his personal agency—his *desire* to empower, his *belief* in the advancement of humankind, his *goal* to put the right tools in people’s hands, his indomitable *will* to change the world.

At its core, narcissism is an expression of what the great philosopher/psychologist David Bakan (1966) called *unmitigated agency*. Bakan argued that healthy psychological adjustment typically requires that a person’s will to assert the self over and against the world needs to be mitigated or softened by countervailing concerns for community and interpersonal relatedness. Agency tends to run amok in the absence of communion, and when agency runs amok, narcissism may result. In a similar line of reasoning, social psychologist Keith Campbell (1999) developed an *agency model of narcissism*, which depicts narcissism as resulting from a strong and abiding motivational emphasis on pursuing goals of power, status, personal perfection, and the like, to the exclusion of communal concerns, and a relentless focus on enhancing self-esteem. People who score high on measures of narcissism fantasize about power and status to a greater extent than do people low in narcissism (Raskin & Novacek, 1991). Importantly, their fantasies involve an imagined audience. For the narcissist, it is not enough to be successful in achieving goals. One must be widely recognized for the achievement, glorified and honored by others. The narcissist needs other people, not as communal companions so much as fawning admirers, who serve to affirm the narcissist’s agency and boost self-esteem.

Narcissists endeavor to bend reality so that it conforms to their indomitable will. Borrowing a term from a famous episode of the television show *Star Trek*, one colleague invoked the term “reality distortion field” to describe how Jobs refused to accept limitations to his vision, aiming to bend the laws of physics or logic to make impossible things possible. In unmitigated agency, physical and social facts must be bent to accommodate the agent’s plan. The colleague considered the expression to be both a compliment and a caution: “It was dangerous to get caught in Steve’s distortion field, but it was what led him to actually be able to change reality” (Isaacson, 2011, p. 118).

Jobs was famous for demanding perfection in Apple products, especially with respect to product design. He obsessed over the tiniest details

of every product, in an effort to achieve a perfect look and feel. Paying little heed to physical and financial constraints, to say nothing of interpersonal niceties, Jobs relentlessly pushed suppliers, engineers, designers, and marketers to do exactly what had to be done to actualize his vision.

Agency run amok. Yet the tangible results were sometimes awe-inspiring. By the end of his life, the reality distortion field, and Jobs's animating agential vision, had become the defining mythos for Apple, Inc., as expressed in the company's motto, "Think different." You may think that the narcissist is crazy, but sometimes crazy can pay off, as expressed in a tone poem developed for the Apple brand:

Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do. (Isaacson, 2011, p. 329)

CONCLUSION

Beyond the realm of dispositional traits such as extraversion and conscientiousness lies the land of motivated agency—the goals, plans, projects, and values that fill in many of the details of psychological individuality. If human beings begin (literally) to see themselves as social actors around the age of 2 years, an understanding of oneself as a motivated agent awaits the age 5–7 shift. In middle childhood, then, a second layer of personality begins to form, even as temperament tendencies continue gradually to develop into full-fledged personality traits. *Personality thickens over time*. We begin with an initial layer of temperament, morphing gradually into dispositional traits. In middle childhood, we start to add a second layer that comprises nascent goals and values. As we see in the next two chapters, goals and values develop toward greater depth, articulation, and coherence over time, as motivated agents move into adolescence and beyond. The first and second layers of personality, therefore, continue to develop over time, sometimes in tandem and other times with surprising independence or asynchrony. The social actor's traits sometimes relate in predictable ways to the motivated agent's

goals, and other times traits and motivations have little to do with each other. It is a cliché to say that personality is complex. But it is nonetheless true. Personality is complex and multilayered, increasingly so with increasing development.

The age 5–7 shift is a rough marker, as well as a deep metaphor, for the emergence of motivated agency in the human life course. Yet the line of personality development described in this chapter, and summarized in Table 5.1, runs back to the first year of life and well beyond the age of 7. Like all animals, human infants are born to be motivated agents in the primitive but crucial sense that their behavior is directed toward the achievement of goals. The newborn orients itself toward the breast in order to take in nutrition. The newborn is not conscious of the goal, but the goal is there to give guidance and structure to behavior. By 9 months of age, human infants recognize intentionality in others, expressing a special interest in the goal-directed nature of other agents' behavior. Around the same time, they engage in scenarios of joint attention with caregivers, monitoring the reactions of others in response to objects or events in the environment and coordinating their own intentions with the assumed intentions of others. Young children are agency detectors. By age 4, most of them have developed an explicit theory of mind, which tells them that human agents (themselves included) are endowed with minds, within which reside desires and beliefs. By the time they hit kindergarten, most children have developed a folk psychology of human motivation. People act upon their desires and beliefs, children reason. Motivation is fundamentally about what agents want and what agents believe to be true about the world.

Cognitive development and schooling catalyze the growth of motivated agency in middle childhood. The emergence of what Piaget called concrete operations confers upon children's thought a more systematic and logical quality. Equipped with concrete operational thought, children are then able to organize and make rational sense of the concrete world and the conventions that structure social relations. As potentially rational agents, children in third and fourth grade can construct reasonable plans and scenarios for the achievement of personally valued goals. When they make good progress toward achieving their goals, children enjoy a boost in self-esteem. Failures in goal pursuit reduce self-esteem. From age 8 or 9 onward, we all covet high self-esteem. But the relentless quest for stratospheric self-esteem can sometimes become an overriding preoccupation, as in the case of narcissism. When the pursuit of valued goals, especially those related to power and status, crowds out any concerns for positive social relatedness, motivated agents may begin

to display the grandiosity and sense of entitlement that we all recognize as narcissism.

The narcissist is a motivated agent on steroids. The narcissist wants too much and believes too strongly in his or her animating agential vision. Still, it is good and proper for personality development that we all want *something*, that we all begin in middle childhood to transcribe our wants into valued goals upon which we stake our esteem. Our goals and our values orient us toward the future and provide structure and meaning to our agential strivings. They urge us to make plans and develop strategies, so as to turn our wants into realities over time. Motivated agency begins with what we want. And this, of course, raises a timeless question for personality development: What *do* we want?

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