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The Oxford Handbook of the Human Essence

Edited by

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*We dedicate this book to our mentors, who have inspired us professionally and have influenced
our lives profoundly. They encouraged us to ask questions of deep significance and thus, without
having to use the term directly, to ponder the human essence.*

*With deepest gratitude and affection, we dedicate this volume to Russell Spears (for MVZ) and
to Samuel L. Gaertner (for JFD).*

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Martijn van Zomeren is Professor of Cultural and Political Psychology of Social Relationships at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. He received his Ph.D. *cum laude* from the University of Amsterdam in 2006, received various dissertation awards, early career awards, and grants, and is an international expert on collective action, activism, and social change. The main theme in his work is the importance of theoretical integration in the various fields that he has contributed to, as reflected in his 2016 book, published by Cambridge University Press, entitled *From Self to Social Relationships: An Essentially Relational Perspective on Social Motivation.*

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PREFACE

What is the *human essence*? Although typically viewed and addressed as one of the "big" questions in philosophy, modern advances in social psychology inform us about what makes us human and what *moves* and *motivates* us in our very essence. In this volume, we have assembled an array of psychological answers to the same "big" question about what it is to be human. Social-psychological answers are absolutely pivotal because the question about the human essence requires a deep and comprehensive understanding of the human condition vis-à-vis a rapidly changing modern world. Are we rational actors? Are we evolutionary survival-seekers? Are we political animals? Indeed, the human essence is not just an academic notion but also very much a political, societal, and practical "big" question. The question of the human essence is thus of central interest to students and scholars in, for example, psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and cognitive science. Simply asking the question already promotes reflection and easily sparks debate both within and across disciplines.

This volume articulates what social psychology can tell us about what makes humans unique and illuminates why it is important for a science of human behavior to develop broader and integrative theories that acknowledge the many different human essences that define us. The volume includes the perspectives of leading international scholars in the field who offer a range of stimulating perspectives for understanding the core issue of the human essence. The contributors offer a broad and diverse set of intriguing answers to the question of what is the human essence based on cutting-edge social psychological theorizing and research. The chapters also raise new and important questions about human nature and identify new directions for future inquiry into this foundational issue. One key observation across all of the chapters is that the field is in need of "bigger-picture'" and integrative theorizing.

Importantly, the chapters are written in an essay-like style that allows contributors to articulate what the human essence is without jargon or empirical details. Furthermore, this volume uniquely brings together scholars who otherwise would not be found in conversation, expressing perspectives ranging from evolutionary approaches to the human essence to social constructivist accounts that essentially deny its existence. As

such, the volume offers a unique view on social psychology, as well as on human nature and existence more generally.

In conclusion, understanding what makes us human is critical for the study of human behavior, institutions, and policy. How we answer the question about what is the human essence not only determines our scholarly agenda but also shapes our personal perspectives on others, our relationships with them, and the decisions we make in our daily life. These assumptions influence how we view the past and the ways we choose to navigate the future. This volume provides diverse scholarly perspectives on the human essence in ways that will thus benefit students, scholars, and those who simply value important insights for understanding who we are in our very core.

The Oxford Handbook of the Human Essence

Essential Self-Evaluation Motives: Caring About Who We Are

Aiden P. Gregg *and* Constantine Sedikides

Abstract

This chapter argues that people care deeply about who they are: that is, their evaluation of their own self as a whole matters greatly to them, one way or another. These evaluations reflect the impact of various self-evaluation motives, or self-motives. Much human psychology addresses the interplay of these self-motives, and whether and how they harmonize or clash. The chapter considers humans' two most fundamental motivations, which are important elements of the human essence: self-assessment and self-enhancement. The chapter suggests that "the essence of being human is caring about who one is and wishing for it to be some desirable way, but at the same time having the conclusions one wants to draw constrained by rationality."

Key Words: motivation, rationality, self, self-enhancement, self-esteem, self-evaluation, self-motives, human essence

Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
No shape so true, no truth of such account;
And for myself mine own worth do define,
As I all other in all worths surmount.
But when my glass shows me myself indeed
Beated and chopp'd with tanned antiquity,
Mine own self-love quite contrary I read;
Self so self-loving were iniquity.

—*William Shakespeare, Sonnet 62 (stanzas 2, 3)*

Human essence is, perhaps ironically, multifaceted. Here, we highlight a facet pertaining to a set of emergent desires that each human being exhibits in virtue of being self-conscious. In brief, people care deeply about *who* they are: that is, their evaluation of their own *self as a whole* matters greatly to them, one way or another. These evaluations reflect the impact of various *self-evaluation motives* (or *self-motives* for short). Much

human psychology revolves the interplay of these self-motives, and whether and how they harmonize or clash.

To explain why such self-motives are central to human essence, we begin by laying some necessary groundwork. First, we argue that the self is real. Next, we outline a set of cognitive powers, unique to humans, which together make this self what it is. With this groundwork in place, we proceed to our main discussion of two key self-motives, which operate to facilitate and bias self-knowledge, respectively. We end by considering some additional self-motives.

The Reality of Self

Self-motives, by definition, involve the self. Clarifying the nature of the self,

therefore, should clarify the nature of self-motives. Alas, the self resists clarification (Klein, 2013; Strawson, 1997). Every normal human being has, or perhaps is, a self; yet it is difficult to say what this means, because, unlike other objects of scientific scrutiny, the self cannot be pinned down. The term *self* is slippery (Leary, 2002): it overlaps with several related terms of equivalent vagueness (*identity, person, mind, consciousness, soul, spirit*) and supplements other terms as a reflective prefix (*self-concept, self-esteem, self-control*). The term also has many different and defensible meanings, both currently and historically (Martin & Barrasi, 2008). For example, *self* can refer to an enduring person (Locke, 1690/1975), a metaphysical subject (James, 1890/1950), a life narrative (McAdams, 2001), a system of representations in memory (Kihlstrom, Beer, & Klein, 2003), whatever the "I" indicates (Dennett, 1992), whatever someone identifies with (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001), the face someone presents to the world (Leary, 1995), or an underlying authenticity to be discovered (Lenton, Slabu, Bruder, & Sedikides, 2014). Accordingly, the threat of conceptual chaos looms.

Theorists have generally responded to this conundrum in three ways. Some have picked their own narrow preferred definition and stuck with it (Kihlstrom, Beer, & Klein, 2003). This has the merit of rigor but sacrifices coverage (Gregg, Hart, Sedikides, & Kumashiro, 2008), threatening to oversimplify the self. Others have tried to define the self as a field of enquiry, outlining what its key psychological components or underlying dimensions should be (Sedikides & Gregg, 2003). This has the merit of inclusiveness but dodges the hard question of what the self is. Finally, still others have argued more radically that the self does not exist (Metzinger, 2003; Swann

& Buhrmester, 2012), for if it did, it would be amenable to scientific definition and standard methods of enquiry. On this view, the self is but a subjective illusion, which, although functional for an organism entertaining it, is ultimately a chimera. A superior account of the phenomena involved, perhaps neural or computational in character, should be substituted. This would have deflationary implications: self-motives would not be *about* anything. People evaluating the self would be evaluating a fiction, a non-entity.

We would like to push back against such hyper-skepticism about self—which possibly proceeds from the frustration felt by empiricists that the self cannot be conveniently reduced to synapses for laboratory study or to algorithms for computational modelling. Rather, the self is an entity that resists reduction and must be dealt with on its own terms. Three arguments—two philosophical, and one pragmatic—support this conclusion.

First, the bare facts of phenomenology make it impossible to deny that each self—a subject who experiences and apprehends the world—has a unique vantage point on that world. In the absence of selves, however, there could be no such vantage points: the objective world would be undifferentiated (Tallis, 2004). Moreover, without the key distinction between *self* versus *non-self*, other indexical distinctions would vanish too, because they exist only relative to human observers with the power to cognize them: so there would be no *this* versus *that*, no *here* versus *there*. But such distinctions do exist. Hence, the real selves that make them possible must also exist.

Second, if the self is an illusion, then the awkward question arises: just *who* suffers from the illusion? In the absence of a self, the only answer can be: *no one*. The illusion would be freestanding. But this seems

absurd: *someone* must suffer from it. By the same token, the self cannot be just a set of mental representations, for, if so, there would be no one *to whom* they could be represented. Hence, selves must exist—as a necessary presupposition to the very existence of *any* mental content (Searle, 2008).

Third, suppose someone were to write a defamatory review of a book by a theorist who denies the existence of self (e.g., *Being No One*, by eminent neuroscientist Thomas Metzinger, 2003). Could *no one*, like the author, ever be personally offended by that review, strictly speaking? Would it be better to say that offense was simply taken, impersonally, in some sort of neural or computational way? (Note: strictly speaking, *no one* could give offense either; it would just be given, again impersonally!) To the contrary, is it not more natural, and at least adequately "scientific," to posit that the defamatory review, by insulting *someone*, might entail *self*-evaluational consequences and might arouse *self*-related motivations?

Thus, there is good reason to believe that the human self indeed exists, and that it serves as a locus of motivational concern. Both its existence, and the fact that it matters, are part of human essence. True, much mystery remains as to what the self is, and why it matters. However, at least some light can be shed on it. And we attempt to do so.

Cognitive "Killer Apps"

Here is one account of how the self comes about. Imagine the mind of a non-human beast, such as a dog. It comes already equipped with an array of cognitive, affective, and conative abilities. A beast perceives and discriminates, likes and hates, wants and strives. The beast is also a subject of experience, feeling pain and pleasure, and plenty more besides. However, human beings—thanks to a denser mass of neo-cortical connections—possess an emergent

set of interlocking cognitive powers above and beyond those possessed by beasts. Such powers are what *transforms* the primordial consciousness of a beast, who impulsively reacts to the environment, into the sophisticated consciousness of a human, who is reflectively present to himself or herself (Van der Meer, Costafreda, Aleman, & David, 2010). The mind thereby develops new capacities. These amount to much more than the mere ability to recognize bodily alterations in a mirror, often taken to be the hallmark of selfhood, but which is also present in many beasts, including the Eurasian magpie (de Waal, 2009). Moreover, every component of the mind, while retaining its original character, acquires a deeper dimension too. This mental upgrade—which occurs phylogenetically from hominid to homo and ontogenetically from child to adult—reflects the impact of a collection of cognitive "killer apps" (Ferguson, 2011).[1] Sorting out priority among these "apps" is difficult, as they are intimately entangled; but suffice it to say they jointly enable selfhood, and define human essence, by interacting synergistically. What are they?

First, humans are capable of *explicit knowledge* (Tallis, 1991). They know that things are the case. Specifically, not only are they aware of something being there or being some way, they are also aware that something is there or is some way. Contrariwise, humans are also aware of what is not the case. Accordingly, they inhabit a world, not only of things, but also of propositions, true and false (Wittgenstein, 1922/1974).

Second, humans are *articulate mammals* (Aitchison, 2011). They are innately disposed to deploy linguistic or numerical symbols, governed by a complex syntactical rules or logical conventions, to represent what is or is not the case, including at an abstract level (Pinker, 1994). This affords

them the ability to process and order sets of propositions, rather than merely responding mechanically to the promptings of immediate stimuli. Using language, humans may assert or deny those propositions, and conditionally, based on criteria.

A third attribute of the human mind—also isomorphically present in symbolic systems—is *reflexivity* or recursion (Corballis, 2011). Humans can ponder, not only propositions, but also the act of pondering itself; and then they can convey this explicitly (for example, in this very sentence).

Together, explicitness, articulateness, and reflexivity come together to enable the emergence of a coherent self at a single point in time: a *synchronic self*. At any moment, the mind of a conscious subject can turn back upon its origin, apprehend that it is the case, and explicitly represent itself as an abstract object bearing particular attributes. This is the foundation of the *self-concept*, rooted in semantic memory (Kihlstrom et al., 2003). From an evolutionary perspective, such symbolic capacities have been argued to confer adaptive advantages in the form of greater self-understanding (Sedikides & Skowronski, 2000), especially if they co-evolved with perspective-taking capacities to understand the social dynamics of alliances and conflicts (Sedikides, Skowronski, & Dunbar, 2006).

However, the space of selfhood is not confined to the here and now. A fourth feature of the human mind is the capacity to cognize, not merely the present, but the past and future too. That is, humans are capable of *mental time travel*, of moving themselves mentally through the past and future (Suddendorf & Corballis, 2007). This temporal extension enables the emergence of a self over multiple points in time—a *diachronic self* continuously chronicled in a life-long narrative and supported by autobiographical knowledge (McAdams,

2001). This is also the beginning of a fully-fledged *identity*, extending beyond raw self-awareness, rooted in episodic memory. An extended identity is likely to have conferred additional evolutionary advantages (Skowronski & Sedikides, 2007), such as enabling recall of exactly when, in one's personal past, various events critical to one's survival and reproduction occurred, including the storage of food (facilitating adequate nutrition) or the taking of mates (facilitating paternity detection).

The restless self wanders still further. For all its metaphysical discreteness, it intersects content-wise with the social world (Baumeister, 1998). Humans naturally regard who they are as overlapping with individual peers and larger groups, meaning that their self-concept takes on an important interpersonal and collective dimension (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). Indeed, the self exhibits an amazing flexibility in terms of the implied fifth cognitive capacity: *identification* with entities beyond the physical organism that houses it. For example, human beings can even identify with things such as physical possessions (Sedikides, Gregg, Cisek, & Hart, 2007).

A sixth cognitive capacity, complementing the two preceding, affords the self a near-unlimited range of operation: *imagination*. The human mind can represent, not only what is, but what could be (i.e., hypotheticals; Evans, 2007) or what could have been (i.e., counterfactuals; Roese, 1997). Accordingly, human beings envisage, not only their actual selves, but also possible selves (Oyserman & James, 2009). Moreover, they can engage in comparison between actual and possible selves, particularly when prompted by information about relevant others in their social milieu, which sets up moral and aspirational standards against which the self is routinely measured (Corcoran, Crusius, & Mussweiler, 2011).

Thus, the self is real, an essential part of human nature; and it can be characterized in terms of the six interactive cognitive capacities we have outlined. The next question is: What motivational implications follow? For they, too, by extension, would be part of the human essence.

The Self-Assessment Motive

Unsurprisingly, motives related to the acquisition of *self-knowledge* emerge. As people attempt to navigate their physical and social environment, with its complex mix of opportunities and risks, it pays for them to appreciate their actual strengths and weakness. For example, people who are higher in social status—in virtue of receiving greater respect or having more resources at their disposal—are likely to enjoy a competitive edge in conflicts with people lower in social status; accordingly, self-knowledge of status facilitates the adoption of that behavioral strategy liable to optimize the outcome of such conflicts, with greater assertiveness better suiting people higher in status, and greater acquiescence better suiting people lower in status (Mahadevan, Gregg, Sedikides, & De-Waal Andrews, 2016). In such cases, it would clearly be advantageous if people also *desired* to discover what their actual strengths and weakness were.

Accordingly, people exhibit a *self-assessment motive*—they seek to *arrive at an accurate conception of who they are* (Trope, 1986). Much empirical evidence for the motive exists. For example, presented with a choice of feedback about important abilities, people preferentially opt for the more informative type, including when it concerns failure as well as success (Trope, 1980), and especially when they were earlier made uncertain of themselves (Trope, 1982). Notice, moreover, how the self-assessment motive depends on the

existence of the six cognitive "killer apps" considered earlier. The self-knowledge that people seek, to properly involve knowledge, must be articulated explicitly, and to involve the self, it must also be reflexive in nature. Moreover, people will seek such self-knowledge over the course of their personal histories, and with reference to the social groups with which they are identified; and they will consider, not only their actual standing in each case, but also how they might stand or might have stood under alternative circumstances.

Yet the self-assessment motive is peculiar. To begin with, it involves the pursuit of objective knowledge about the self. Hence, it is satisfied when one's thoughts map on to reality. Formally speaking, it has a mind-to-world *direction of fit* (Humberstone, 1992). However, most motives have the reverse: a world-to-mind direction of fit. They are satisfied when reality maps on to them—as when, for example, the delicious meal that one hungrily imagines finally arrives on one's plate. Second, the self-assessment motive is often experienced, not as a felt deprivation and longing (as in our earlier example), but as a felt obligation and imposition. For, to be rational in assessing oneself (and indeed in assessing anything at all) is precisely *not* to believe whatever one wants, but rather to base one's beliefs on defensible external criteria, to which one's judgment *must* defer (Gregg & Mahadevan, 2014). It is responsibility defined epistemically. For example, although many people would love to be labelled a "saint," most would still dutifully refuse the label: they *know* that their peccadillos forbid it. The very ubiquity of rationality may often lead us to take it for granted. However, such rationality is phylogenetically unprecedented: its manifestation in human beings, including the self-assessment motive, is a distinctive part of human essence, and yet

another sign of how they differ from mere beasts. Its psychological significance, moreover, resides in that it acts as a brake on the impact of other self-motives that would otherwise accelerate the biased construal of the self in some direction or other.

The Self-Enhancement Motive

Rationality does not always prevail—including when people assess themselves. In particular, a *self-enhancement motive* is inclined to assert itself (Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). This involves the desire to conclude (or avoid not concluding) *that the self is valuable and significant and thereby entitled to a positive appraisal.* Note that one might well expect that, as a result of the "killer apps" upgrade, the self would become the subject of evaluation. After all, the survival of any organism depends upon its capacity to distinguish a propitious environment from a dangerous one. Humans, being the reflexive object of their own contemplation, might explicitly judge themselves to be good or bad too, express that judgment verbally, and situate it with respect to their past or future selves, or various ideal ways they might be, or their social context. In short, it is unsurprising that people have some level of *self-esteem* (Sedikides & Gregg, 2003), contingent on some criteria. What remains to be explained, however, is people's *desire* for their self-esteem to become or to remain *high*—that is, to elevate or consolidate the value of their self, either through promoting it (self-aggrandizement) or protecting it (self-defense; Sedikides & Alicke, 2012). The desire is all the more puzzling given the elusiveness of the self. People may not know exactly what the self is, but their own self had better be good.

What empirical evidence attests to the operation of self-enhancement, above and beyond honest introspection and the proclamations of philosophers? One telling line of evidence comes from investigating what type of questions people generally prefer to ask themselves. Across a series of experiments, Sedikides (1993) had participants, in a private and anonymous context, select a subset of questions from a larger set that they would be most likely to ask themselves. (Note how explicitness, articulateness, and reflexivity—the building blocks of the synchronic self—are again presupposed by this task.) Even when instructed to be objective, participants mostly opted for questions whose answers implied that they possessed positive traits, especially on dimensions that mattered more to them and that they were more familiar with, suggesting the predominance of the self-enhancement motive over the self-assessment motive (which, to reduce uncertainty, would have prioritized the selection of questions about *less* familiar traits). Moreover, when someone else was made the target of enquiry, the selection bias duly disappeared. Such biased stacking of the feedback deck, to facilitate the drawing of favorable conclusions about the self, suggests that the self-enhancement motive has a regular world-to-mind direction of it, unlike the self-assessment motive.

Manifestations of the self-enhancement motive also involve the diachronic self. For example, people show signs of self-enhancement even across their temporally extended identity. In particular, they regard themselves, like fine wine, as getting better over time (Ross & Wilson, 2003); and they feel subjectively closer in time to positive than to negative events in the completed past or projected future (Wilson & Ross, 2001). But perhaps the most intuitively compelling prima facie sign of the self-enhancement motive involves others: the *better-than-average* effect (BTAE; Alicke & Govorun, 2005). Most people believe that they possess commonplace positive characteristics in greater abundance than most of their peers. The percentages are often stark. In the United States, 90% of motorists think they drive better than 50% of those on the road (Svenson, 1981), 50% of academics think they teach better than 90% of their colleagues (Cross, 1977); and 25% of high-school students think they socialize better than 99% of young people (College Board, 1976–1977). Furthermore, the BTAE often emerges despite apparently clear evidence to the contrary: prisoners consider themselves just as law-abiding as the "average community member" (Sedikides, Meek, Alicke, & Taylor, 2014)! Finally, even informing people that the BTAE exists (Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002), or paying them to provide accurate judgments (William & Gilovich, 2008), fails to eliminate the BTAE.

But not so fast: just because the BTAE is consistent with the operation of a self-enhancement motive does not mean that it is the only possible explanation. Several non-motivational factors have been implicated. For example, comparing the self to others, in a single question, involves comparing the (individual) self to a collective (group); yet there is a known cognitive bias for preferring individuals to collectives (Klar, 2002). Such confounding factors, however, do not entirely explain the BTAE (Sedikides & Alicke, 2012). In particular, it persists, albeit to a reduced degree, even when the target to which the self is compared is individualized and/or precisely matched to the self (Alicke, Vredenburg, Hiatt, & Govorun, 2001). Moreover, some BTAE moderators defy purely cognitive explanation, such as the finding that, the more important the characteristic judged, the larger the BTAE observed (Brown, 2012). Hence, the BTAE cannot be wholly explained *without* invoking the self-enhancement motive. A similar story can be told about other prima facie signs of the self-enhancement motive, such as the *self-serving (attributional) bias* (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999)—the tendency to explain successes relatively more in terms of internal factors (e.g., ability, effort) and to explain failures relatively more in terms of external factors (e.g., luck, adverse circumstances).

Pertinently, the BTAE illustrates the potential for *conflict* between the motives to self-enhance and self-assess (Gregg, Sedikides, & Gebauer, 2011). Where reality provides sufficient leeway, the BTAE waxes; where it does not, the BTAE wanes. For example, when a positive characteristic is more broadly defined (e.g., *talented*) as opposed to narrowly defined (e.g., *thrifty*), people are more likely to overestimate their standing on it (Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989). This is because the greater ambiguity of the former allows for a positively biased interpretation (i.e., the selective recruitment of self-relevant exemplars) that facilitates self-enhancement and impedes self-assessment. People do the same for positive traits that are less verifiable, such as moral traits (e.g., *honesty*), as opposed to those that are more verifiable, such as abilities (e.g., *intelligence*), this time because the criteria in terms of which they are assessed are themselves more or less amenable to positively biased interpretation, respectively (Van Lange & Sedikides, 1998).

The confrontation between egotism and evidence illustrated by these findings—which, too, is a pivotal part of human essence—is memorably captured in the chapter's opening quotation from Shakespeare. The protagonist in the poem conceitedly contemplates of the fineness of his face—until, alas, he espies it in the looking-glass, whereupon his rationality compels him to shamefully admit its objective flaws. Indeed, to invert one of David

Hume's (1738/1951, p. 415) famous aphorisms, passion (i.e., self-enhancement motive) is, at least partly, the slave of reason (i.e., the self-assessment motive). Cases where the slave escapes—such as narcissism—are still comparatively rare, although evidently on the rise (Twenge & Foster, 2008).

Readers should note too that the evidence for the self-enhancement motive is not confined to self-reported judgments: it is also apparent in basic workings of the mind. For example, the affection for self automatically transfers itself—Midas-like—to self-related stimuli, such that people prefer such things as their own theories over others' theories (Gregg, Mahadevan, & Sedikides, 2016) and even letters in their name over letters not in it (Hoorens, 2014), often without realizing it—effects arguably indicative of *implicit* self-esteem. Indeed, when, across a range of different indices, one compares people's implicit esteem toward themselves to their implicit esteem toward their most favorite other, the self still comes out better (Gebauer, Göritz, Hofmann, & Sedikides, 2012). Even unconsciously, people manifest a "better-than-everyone-else" effect.

Additional Self-Motives

We have focused on the dynamic interplay between two motives pertaining to the self: self-assessment and self-enhancement. To recap, the former aims at establishing the truth about the self whatever it is, whereas the latter aims at concluding that the self merits a positive appraisal. These motives, and the antagonism between them, are essential to human nature. Moreover, they can be intelligibly understood as the outgrowths of other essential features—six cognitive powers unique to the human mind.

Nonetheless, other self-motives have been alleged to exist, and empirical evidence of their existence has been furnished. Two stand out: *self-improvement* and *self-verification* (Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Both pertain particularly to the diachronic self and how it may or may not change over time. The former motive aims at ensuring that the underlying value of the self is increased going forward (Sedikides & Hepper, 2009), whereas the latter aims at ensuring that one's current conception of self is maintained intact indefinitely (Swann, 2012). Clearly, both motives also pull in opposite directions: the former has to do with modifying the self and the latter with resisting such modification. Thus, we have another potential conflict on our hands.

In the interest of theoretical integration, we suggest that the drives toward self-improvement and self-verification might be substantially understood in terms of the drives toward self-enhancement and self-assessment. For example, self-improvement can be understood as a type of *tactically delayed self-enhancement*: people seek accurate rather than positive information themselves in the present so as to become better in the future. The analogy would be with spending more frugally now so as to spend more lavishly later: in both cases, delaying gratification ultimately increases it. As for self-verification, several studies (Giesler, Josephs, & Swann, 1996) show that people with negative self-views are more inclined, when given the option, to opt for negative feedback consistent with their self-views rather than for positive feedback inconsistent with them, suggesting that the desire to self-verify outstrips the desire to self-enhance. However, another equally plausible interpretation is that people with negative self-views, in virtue of earnestly holding negative views of self, naturally infer that only feedback consistent with their negative self-views is

epistemically credible and worthy of consideration (Gregg, 2009). If so, then the same imperative to be rational that underlies the self-assessment motive may also explain the patterns of choice attributed to the self-verification motive. One way to decide between these alternatives would be to ask people with negative self-views which feedback—positive or negative—they would *prefer to be true*. In particular, if people with negative self-views, who opted for negative over positive feedback, nonetheless maintained that they wanted the positive rather than the negative feedback to be true, it would suggest their feedback choice does not reflect their epistemic aspirations, but rather credibility constraints.

Several theorists have posited additional, and partly overlapping, sets of motives relevant to self or identity. For example, Vignoles, Manzi, Regalia, Jemmolo, and Scabini (2008) explored the implications of six motives for the construction of possible selves: *esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, meaningfulness, efficacy, belonging*. Also, according to *self-determination theory* (Deci & Ryan, 2000), people have three fundamental needs—for *autonomy, efficacy*, and *relatedness*—which must be satisfied in order for them to psychologically thrive. Finally, Swann and Bosson (2010), in their review of the literature on the self, contend that people strive to attain goals that fall into the broad categories of *agency, communion*, or *coherence*. All such motives might also be characterized in terms of the six cognitive "killer apps." However, their level of involvement would be likely to differ somewhat across motives. For example, the continuity motive is, like the self-improvement and self-verification motives, particularly reliant on the diachronic aspects of self, whereas the belonging/relatedness/communion motive could

be satisfied by successful affiliation without relying too much on self-reflexivity, as is the case for human babies and non-human animals.

Conclusion

The human mind possesses unparalleled cognitive powers. These powers give rise to the self, which is real. This real self, in turn, becomes an object of motivation. People experience self-directed desires to be some way, on the whole—most notably, to see their self as something valuable and significant, which merits a positive appraisal. But they also desire to know, and feel duty-bound to respect, the truth about themselves. Ultimately, part of the essence of being human is caring about *who* one is and wishing for it to be desirable in some way, but at the same time having the conclusions one wants to draw constrained by rationality.

Note

1. The term "killer app" is short for "killer application"—an accolade reserved for pieces of software that are, according to *PC Magazine*, "exceptionally useful or exciting. Killer apps are innovative and often represent the first of a new breed, and they are extremely successful." Drawing on the same analogy, but for different purposes, the historian Niall Ferguson (2011) has argued that the contemporary preeminence of the West is due to emergence of six sociocultural "killer apps": competition, the scientific revolution, property rights, modern medicine, consumer society, and work ethic (http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/45817/killer-app).

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The Tripartite Motivational Human Essence: Value, Control, and Truth Working Together

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Abstract

This chapter argues that the human essence can be understood as the functioning of three fundamental motives working together—value, control, and truth. It shows that each of these motives represents an independent source of goal pursuit, and that each, in its fulfillment, represents a unique factor in the achievement of well-being. It also argues that effectiveness in each of these motivational domains is inherently related to effectiveness in each of the others, such that achievement of full effectiveness in any of them entails effectiveness in all of them. This produces the emergent experience of their *effective organization*. Illustrating the relevance of these concepts for the human essence, the chapter draws parallels between this threefold view of motivation and the tripartite views of the soul in ancient Greek thought, and between the achievement of their effective organization and the experience of Brahman in Vedanta Hinduism.

Key Words: control, motivation, prevention focus, promotion focus, truth, value, human essence, pleasure, pain, free will

"Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim." So opens Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, one of the most influential works in the Western canon (Aristotle, trans. 2009). In this seminal study of what it means for human beings to be successful and to live well, Aristotle begins with the subject of motivation. In a similar spirit, we argue that the human essence—what human life is at its core—is motivation. "Essence" is synonymous with the word "soul," and our exploration of the "human essence" can be understood as another way of asking about of the motivational nature of the soul. Taking a psychological perspective is fitting, given that the word "psychology" is derived from the Greek word "psyche," which means soul.

The purpose of this chapter is to show that the ancient and classical view of the soul in philosophy closely resembles and shares many of the characteristics of contemporary motivation science, and thus demonstrate that questions of motivation lie at the heart of questions of the human essence. Based on this formulation, we argue that the human "essence" consists of a motivational equivalent of this ancient perspective on the soul. We show that reflection concerning the soul in the Western