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Introduction: Ego trouble?

“Es ist unmöglich wahrer über sich selbst
zu schreiben, als man ist”

(Ludwig Wittgenstein¹)

‘Ego trouble’ may seem slightly inappropriate as a title for a volume on early medieval authors.² Some may be reminded of psychoanalytical debates or of Judith Butler’s feminist classic ‘gender trouble’, written in the heydays of postmodernism.³ There were, however, two reasons for choosing it. One is that the debate on medieval ‘individualism’ has been trapped within, or between, linear master narratives for too long. When was the modern individual ‘born’, in the 12th and 13th, in the 15th or only in the 18th century?⁴ Did medieval people have to live without a self? To pose the problem in terms of ‘the origins of the individual/the self’ would already introduce a teleological concept bound to come in the way of a close reading of the evidence. The present title is more open, and spells out that we are not in a position to apply well-defined categories to a clear set of historical sources. We are in methodological trouble indeed. The second reason for choosing the title was that looking for trouble in our evidence is in fact an important and often-ignored methodological tool for the analysis of past individuals, groups and societies. That may be more productive than trying to fit the evidence neatly in simple categories, such as individual/collective, rational/irrational, modern/archaic, or autonomous/heteronomous. This is not to say that such terms are totally inadequate. They allow, up to a certain point, to establish differences and detect developments. But as research moves on, binary opposites and the respective master narratives tend to become methodological obstacles. Intellectuals of our day may well have a capacity for self-reflection superior to the best medieval minds; but at the present stage, that is not a very interesting conclusion any more, and it easily leads to the simplifying view that the Middle Ages were an archaic society

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Über Gewißheit*. Werkausgabe Band 8 (Frankfurt am Main 1984) 496. This contribution, and the volume as a whole, are a result of the project made possible by the award of the Wittgenstein Prize in 2004 by the Austrian Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung, and located at the Institut für Mittelalterforschung der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften and at the Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung at the University of Vienna. I am particularly grateful to Max Diesenberger, Rosamond McKitterick, Helmut Reimitz, Irene van Renswoude and Pavlina Rychterová for suggestions and inspiring discussions. For a balanced discussion of the single contributions of this volume and of the issues raised by them, see the conclusion by Rosamond McKitterick.

² See Christopher Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (Oxford 2009), esp. chapter 6: Issues in Selfhood: Subjectivity and Objectivity.

³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York 1990).

⁴ See, among others: Individualität, ed. Manfred Frank/Anselm Haverkamp (Poetik und Hermeneutik 13, München 1988); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge-Mass. 1989); Ulrich Beck, Die “Individualisierungsdebatte“, in: *Soziologie in Deutschland: Entwicklung, Institutionalisierung und Berufsfelder, theoretische Kontroversen*, ed. Bernhard Schäfers (Opladen 1995) 185–197; *L’individu dans la théorie politique*, ed. Janet Coleman (Paris 1996); *Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der modernen Subjektivität*, ed. Reto Luzius Fetz/Roland Hagenbüchle/Peter Schulz (European Cultures 11, Berlin/New York 1998); Andreas Buss, The evolution of Western individualism, in: *Religion 30* (2000) 1–25; *Entdeckung des Ich: die Geschichte der Individualisierung vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Richard van Dülmen (Köln/Wien 2001); Richard van Dülmen, *Die Entdeckung des Individuums: 1500–1800* (Frankfurt am Main 2002); Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *Die Erfindung des Ich: eine Theorie der Identität* (Konstanz 2005); *Vom Individuum zur Person: neue Konzepte im Spannungsfeld von Autobiographietheorie und Selbstzeugnisforschung*, ed. Gabriele Jancke (Göttingen 2005); *Between the Middle Ages and Modernity: Individual and Community in the Early Modern World*, ed. Charles H. Parker (Lanham-Md. 2007); *Généalogie du sujet. De saint Anselme à Malebranche*, ed. Olivier Boulnois (Paris 2007); Alain de Libera, *Naissance du sujet. Archéologie du sujet 1* (Paris 2007); id., *La quête de l’identité. Archéologie du sujet 2* (Paris 2008).

dominated by irrational collectives. What we want to understand is the rich variety of human existence, with its changing conditions and forms of expression, its contradictions and paradoxes.

Jacob Burckhardt is generally credited with establishing the paradigm of the birth of the modern individual in the Italian Renaissance in his masterly “Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien” which came out in 1860.⁵ This idea soon came to be generally accepted.⁶ From a very different perspective, Stephen Greenblatt has also put considerable stress on the role of the Renaissance self, although he regarded it as culturally constructed and not autonomous.⁷ John Jeffries Martin has questioned these “myths of Renaissance individualism”, and has tried “to understand the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century people on their own terms”.⁸ “The sort of selves that we encounter in the Renaissance”, he argues, “were not the calm, well-demarcated, accomplished autonomous selves that the Burckhardtian myth implies; and they were far more willful and autonomous and far less fragmented and illusory than many postmodern critics have claimed.”⁹ They did not try to adopt one particular stance that would correspond to the modern vision of a coherent ego, but rather developed different stances and wondered how these “might affect one’s relations to the world and, in particular, one’s relations to other human beings.”¹⁰ Still, the master narrative of Renaissance individualism remains part of the origin myth of modernity.

After the Second World War, an alternative chronology became more fashionable among medievalists. The fundamental statement was Colin Morris, “The Discovery of the Individual, 1050–1200”, published in 1972, building on Charles Homer Haskins’ idea of a Renaissance of the 12th century.¹¹ Similar ideas about the origin of the intellectual in 12th-century Paris had already been expressed by Jacques LeGoff in his “Les intellectuels au moyen âge” that came out in 1957. Young Le Goff described the early Middle Ages as a depressing intellectual desert in which manuscripts were copied not out of any interest in their contents but merely as a form of penance: “These books were not made to be read.”¹² This position reflects the minimal interest of the Annales School, and of historians of the individual up to this day, in the early Middle Ages.¹³ Somewhat less influential was Walter Ullmann’s “The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages” of 1966, in which he argued that the individual, the citizen and the human rights developed in the Middle Ages from the combination of feudal rights, particularly in their English form, and of Aristotelian ideas of natural law – the Magna Carta and Aquinas as the sources of modern individualism.¹⁴ Caroline Bynum challenged Colin Morris’s paradigm by putting the 12th-century concern with the inner self in perspective: At the same time, she argued, it was balanced by an acute perception of belonging to different groups, for instance the spiritual communities of different religious orders.¹⁵ Jean-Claude Schmitt also criticized the “historical fiction” of the discovery of the individual.¹⁶ In 1995, Aaron Gurevitch published his “The Individual in the European Middle Ages”, and he

⁵ Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (Basel 1860); Egon Flaig, *Uomo universale und agonales Selbst. Jacob Burckhardts zwei historiographische Geburtsurkunden der Individualität*, in: *Die autonome Person – eine europäische Erfindung?*, ed. Klaus-Peter Köpping/Michael Welker/Reiner Wiehl (München 2002) 95–111.

⁶ See, for instance, William James Bouwsma Jr., *The Renaissance and the drama of Western history*, in: *American Historical Review* 84 (1979) 1–15. See also Hubert Benz, *Individualität und Subjektivität. Interpretationstendenzen in der Cusanus-Forschung und das Selbstverständnis des Nikolaus von Kues* (Tübingen 1999).

⁷ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago/London 1980) (see also below). Greenblatt has been criticized for not taking pre-Renaissance writers into account: Lee Patterson, *On the margin: postmodernism, history and medieval studies*, in: *Speculum* 65 (1990) 87–108.

⁸ John Jeffries Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (Basingstoke/New York 2004) 19.

⁹ Martin, *Myths* 17.

¹⁰ Martin, *Myths* 14.

¹¹ Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050–1200* (Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching 19, Toronto 1991); Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge-Mass. 1927, repr. New York 1957); similar ideas in: Richard W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven 1953) 221.

¹² Jacques Le Goff, *Les intellectuels au moyen âge* (Paris 1957).

¹³ But on the early Middle Ages see Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge 1989); *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World*, ed. Patrick Wormald/Janet L. Nelson (Cambridge 2007).

¹⁴ Walter Ullmann, *Individuum und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter* (Göttingen 1974).

¹⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Did the twelfth century discover the individual?*, in: *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (1980) 1–17; see also her more recent book: *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York 2001), and *History in the Comic Mode. Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person*, ed. Rachel Fulton/Bruce W. Holsinger (New York 2007), especially the editors’ Introduction: *Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person* 1–14.

¹⁶ Jean-Claude Schmitt, *La “découverte de l’individu”: une fiction historique?*, in: *La fabrique, la figure et la feinte. Fictions et statut de la fiction en psychologie*, ed. Paul Mengal/Françoise Parot (Paris 1989) 213–236.

broadened the horizon by taking Scandinavian sagas into account as possible sources for a heroic individualism, pointing back to an archaic age.¹⁷ However, it has to be remarked that in fact this takes us to the 12th to 14th centuries again when these sagas were written down.¹⁸

There is substantial evidence for growing attention to the individual in the ‘long’ 12th century.¹⁹ Scholastic debates not only created a new awareness for the problem of the Trinity, but also concerned many aspects of human individuality.²⁰ In part, this may have been prompted by the discussions on the relationship between the person and the office in the investiture controversy (a problem, however, that had troubled representatives of the Church before).²¹ The spread of private confession instead of public penance followed.²² The reappearance of free-standing life-size sculpture, although initially without individual traits, is another example. Much has been made of the diffusion of personal seals. They were not new as such – even Lombard dukes of the ‘dark’ seventh century had used them.²³ But now, they also served as metaphors for personal identity. Brigitte Bedos-Rezak has pointed to the scandal created by Abelard’s comparison of the Trinity to a bronze seal.²⁴ Abelard’s *Historia calamitatum*, betraying a remarkable personal fate, has become emblematic for the new 12th-century interest in the self.²⁵ The title of his volume on ethics, *Scito te ipsum*, takes up what has been taken as one of the token statements of the classical search of the self.²⁶

It should, however, not be forgotten that his rhetoric of introspection and of personal communication followed well-known formal models. Abelard’s writings, as those of most other medieval authors, are shaped by classical and rhetorical traditions and their Christian appropriation, and can hardly be regarded as spontaneous expressions of the self.²⁷ “Nothing was more conventional to a writer of his day than those apparently telling moments on which we fix as self-relevatory”, as Conrad Leyser remarks in his contribution in this volume about Pope Gregory I; his “glimpse of the inner man” is itself a performance sustained by Gregory in his capacity as a well-educated public speaker and office-holder.” Even the title *Scito te ipsum*, much-used in the theological debates of the 12th century, was by no means unknown in the early Middle Ages.²⁸

As this volume tries to demonstrate, the art of finding rhetorical expressions for inner experience was by no means a 12th-century discovery; it had been widely used by early medieval Christian authors. The use of

¹⁷ Aaron J. Gurevitch, *Das Individuum im europäischen Mittelalter* (München 1994).

¹⁸ Margaret Clunies-Ross, *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society* (Odense 2003).

¹⁹ Jacques Verger, *The contribution of medieval universities to the birth of individualism and individual thought*, in: *The Individual in Political Theory and Practice*, ed. Janet Coleman (Oxford 1996) 59–77; John F. Burton, *Consciousness of self and perceptions of individuality*, in: *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson/Giles Constable/Carol D. Lanham (Oxford 1982) 263–295; Theodor Wolfram Köhler, *Wissenschaftliche Annäherung an das Individuelle im 13. Jahrhundert. Der Einfluß von “De animalibus” des Aristoteles*, in: *Individuum und Individualität im Mittelalter*, ed. Jan A. Aertsen/Andreas Speer (*Miscellanea mediaevalia* 24, Berlin 1996) 22–36; Benedikt Konrad Vollmann, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Subjekts im Hochmittelalter*, in: *Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der modernen Subjektivität*, ed. Reto Luzius Fetz/Roland Hagenbüchle/Peter Schulz (*European Cultures* 11, Berlin/New York 1998) 380–393; Michael Sonntag, *Das Verborgene des Herzens. Zur Geschichte der Individualität* (Reinbek 1999).

²⁰ Alain Boureau, *De vagues individus. La condition humaine dans la pensée scholastique* (Paris 2008); see also Jean-Baptiste Brenet, *Transferts du sujet. La noétique d’Averroès selon Jean de Jandun* (Paris 2003); *Généalogie du sujet*, ed. Boulnois.

²¹ Thomas Zotz, *In Amt und Würden. Zur Eigenart ‘offizieller’ Positionen im frühen Mittelalter*, in: *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 22 (1993) 1–24.

²² *A New History of Penance*, ed. Abigail Firey (*Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition* 14, Leiden/New York 2008).

²³ *Anulus sui effigii. Identità e rappresentazione negli anelli-sigillo longobardi*, ed. Silvia Lusuardi Siena (Milano 2006).

²⁴ Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, *Signe d’identité et principes d’alterité au XII^e siècle. L’individu, c’est l’autre*, in: *L’individu au Moyen Âge. Individuation et individualisation avant la modernité*, ed. Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak/Dominique Iogna-Prat (Paris 2005) 43–58.

²⁵ Abaelards „*Historia calamitatum*“: Text – Übersetzung – literaturwissenschaftliche Modellanalysen, ed. Dag Nikolaus Hasse (Berlin/New York 2002).

²⁶ Petrus Abaelardus, *Scito te ipsum [Ethica]/Erkenne dich selbst* (ed. and trans. Philipp Steger, Hamburg 2006).

²⁷ Michael Clanchy, *Documenting the self: Abelard and the individual in history*, in: *Historical Research* 76 (2002) 293–309; Luc Deitz, *Gebändigte Leidenschaft: zur Interpretation von ‘Historia calamitatum’ 242–370 (=280–424 Monfrin)*, in: Abaelards ‘*Historia calamitatum*’. Text – Übersetzung – literaturwissenschaftliche Modellanalysen, ed. Dag Nikolaus Hasse (Berlin/New York 2002) 204–236, who shows how “die gezielte Verwendung formaler, zum größten Teil strukturell zu beschreibender Mittel der klassischen Rhetorik einer an sich banalen, fast möchte man sagen: alltäglichen Geschichte den Charakter des Einzigartigen und Außergewöhnlichen zu verleihen vermag.” (*ibid.* 235). I owe this reference to Pavlina Rychterová.

²⁸ Rainer M. Ilgner, *Scito te ipsum – Ethica nostra. Zu Herkunft und Bedeutung des Titels von Abaelards Ethik*, in: *Theologie und Philosophie* 76 (2001) 253–270; Abelard, *Scito te ipsum*, ed. Steger XII.

exegetical techniques to ‘read’ and model one’s inner self, layer by layer, had been perfected by educated monks.²⁹ But the early medieval evidence is remarkably little known. For instance, it is usually maintained that there was no autobiography in the West between Augustine and Abelard. Rather of Verona, a querulous tenth-century bishop, is a striking example to demonstrate the contrary.³⁰ But there is more. Hardly anybody, for instance, knows the seventh-century author Valerius of Bierzo (Valerius Bergidensis) and his repeated attempts to come to terms with his trials and grief: The *Ordo querimoniae, praefatio discriminis*, complemented by the Further Account Since First Conversion (*Item replicatio sermonum a prima conversione*) and by What Remains of Former Grief (*Quod de Superioribus querimoniis residuum*).³¹ It is a pity that the Liber prosopopoeia imbecillitatis propriae by his older contemporary, Bishop Ildefonsus of Toledo, has not survived. Otloh of St Emmeram’s Liber de tentationibus cuiusdam monachi, written in the eleventh century, is a better-known example.³² Thus, Abelard’s complaint about his personal problems links up with a considerable earlier tradition of autobiographical writings and fragments, often containing complaints about ‘ego troubles’. Many authors who did not write autobiography proper inserted autobiographical digressions into their historiographic texts. Besides many authors treated in this volume (Bede, Paul the Deacon, Brun of Querfurt or Thietmar of Merseburg), this is the case of Gregory of Tours, Nithard, Erchempert, Regino of Prüm, Liudprand of Cremona, Dudo of St Quentin, to name just a few.³³ One may debate whether all of that is autobiographical in the modern sense, given its reliance on, and sometimes excessive play with literary models. Texts about medieval ‘ego troubles’ are not epiphanies of an author’s otherwise hidden self. But neither do they represent naïve, ‘archaic’ ways to deal with the self. As expressions of an individual mind, they can be quite sophisticated. For us, they are interesting both as traces of personal problems, and for the ways in which these were communicated: often in traditional rhetorical form, but using a wide variety of literary strategies, from silence to exaggeration and from self-debasement to relentless claims to moral high ground. Surely, Abelard did not invent ego troubles, he could rely on a long and unbroken tradition to represent them which is still poorly researched.

There is another moot point in the main-stream master narrative: Most scenarios of the medieval or early modern ‘rebirth of the individual’ require the death of the ancient individual in the first place. Scholars generally assume a see-saw movement in the rise of the self: In primitive societies, so the master narrative runs, humans are like children, unconscious of themselves.³⁴ Classical Antiquity reached a first peak in the development of a self-conscious individual.³⁵ The Greek *gnothi seauton, scito te ipsum*, serves as an indicator of a deliberate interest in the self in classical Antiquity. Horkheimer and Adorno, in their Dialectic of Enlighten-

²⁹ Ineke van t’ Spijker, Fictions of the Inner Life. Religious Literature and the Formation of the Self in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries (Disputatio 4, Turnhout 2004) 1–17, acknowledges that “in the Early Middle Ages, the notion of an inner life had not disappeared”, but argues for a revival in the 11th and 12th centuries.

³⁰ See the contribution by Irene van Renswoude, in this volume. For much of this paragraph, I am deeply indebted to her suggestions.

³¹ Valerius Bergidensis (ed. Consuelo Maria Ahern, Valerius of Bierzo: An Ascetic of the Visigothic Period. The Autobiographical Writings, Studies in medieval history 11, Washington 1949) 68–109. See Francisco José Udaondo Puerto, La autobiografía de Valerio del Bierzo, in: Actas del I Congreso Nacional de Latín Medieval, ed. Maurilio Pérez González (Léon 1995) 379–386; Giovanni Polara, Il VII secolo, in: Letteratura latina medievale. Un manuale, ed. Claudio Leonardi (Firenze 2003) 17–40, at 37f.; Roger Collins, The “autobiographical” works of Valerius of Bierzo: their structure and purpose, in: Los Visigodos: historia y civilización, ed. Antonino González Blanco (Murcia 1986) 425–442, reprinted in: id., Law, Culture and Regionalism in Early Medieval Spain (Aldershot 1992) IV.

³² Otloh of St Emmeram’s Liber de tentationibus cuiusdam monachi. See, for example, Patrick J. Geary, Phantoms of Remembrance. Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium (Princeton 1994) 178f. (who links Otloh’s autobiographical interest to that of his older colleague Arnold of St Emmeram); Willemien Otten, The bible and the self in medieval autobiography: Otloh of St Emmeram (1010–1070) and Peter Abelard (1079–1142), in: The Whole and Divided Self, ed. David E. Aune/John McCarthy (New York 1997) 130–157.

³³ See, for instance, Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter, ed. Anton Scharer/Georg Scheibelreiter (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 32, Wien/München 1994); Emily Albu, The Normans in Their Histories: Propaganda, Myth, and Subversion (Woodbridge 2001).

³⁴ A strong statement in that vein: Johannes Fried, Der Weg in die Geschichte. Propyläen Geschichte Deutschlands Band 1: bis 1024 (Berlin 1994) 144f. See Hans-Werner Goetz, Moderne Mediävistik. Stand und Perspektiven der Mittelalterforschung (Darmstadt 1999) 293.

³⁵ Richard Sorabji, Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death (Oxford 2006); De Libera, Naissance du sujet. Cf. Gill, The Structured Self.

ment, traced the development of the modern, ‘enlightened’ self to the myth of Ulysses.³⁶ Of course, as with Renaissance individualism, one may question the assumptions behind the familiar model, and some authors in this volume voice their doubts about it.³⁷ Michel Foucault has made much of the classical techniques of self-stylisation.³⁸ One might argue that ancient self-fashioning should rather help to restrict instead of enhancing the self.³⁹ But likewise, the development of the modern individual was largely due to a repressive dialectic of social control and restrictive techniques of the self. Charles Larmore, in a recent philosophical study, has maintained that the relationship of the ‘Moi’, the Self, to itself is first of all normative.⁴⁰ In any case, it is not self-indulgence that is at the roots of the self. Debate has also arisen about the changing role of the individual in Greek or Roman culture.⁴¹ Peter Brown has sketched the particular development of the self in Late Antiquity: “The individual had a growing sense of possessing something in himself that was infinitely valuable and yet painfully unrelated to the outside world. After generations of apparently satisfying public activity, it was as if a current that had passed smoothly from men’s inner experience into the outside world had been cut.”⁴² This was an attitude that Christianity came to express more successfully than other late-antique cults, religious communities or philosophical schools.

Thus, the Christian experience became central to the transformation of the classical self. Christianity is mostly regarded as an obstacle to the unfolding of self-assured individuals. On the other hand, the Church Fathers are often taken to represent a last flowering of ancient self-concern.⁴³ It would be hard to deny a strong sense of personal identity to Saint Augustine, author of the *Confessiones* and the *Retractationes*.⁴⁴ Undoubtedly, he also gave a new twist to ancient thinking on the self.⁴⁵ But what happened to the individual after Rome? Had the end of the ancient self arrived when Augustine died with the Vandals already raging at the gates of Hippo? Or was that a century later, when Boethius was executed after Lady Philosophy had administered her consolations in his jail?⁴⁶ Or only when the Platonic School in Athens was suppressed by Justinian in 529/31?⁴⁷ Or when the pontificate of Pope Gregory the Great ended after years of pressure from Lombard invaders, Byzantine generals and Romans adverse to his spiritual teachings?⁴⁸ In any case, the general assump-

³⁶ Max Horkheimer/Theodor Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (1944; Frankfurt 1971) 42–73. A recent, and controversial statement that traced the “invention of the subject” back to Ulysses: Eva Cantarella, *Scelgo dunque sono. Ulisse e l’invenzione del soggetto*. Paper at the Festival della Mente, Sarzana, August 28, 2008.

³⁷ See the contributions by Kate Cooper and Conrad Leyser, in this volume.

³⁸ Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité 1: La volonté de savoir* (Paris 1976); 2: *L’usage des plaisirs* (Paris 1984); 3: *Le souci de soi* (Paris 1984).

³⁹ Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris 1981).

⁴⁰ Charles Larmore, *Les pratiques du Moi* (Paris 2004).

⁴¹ Egon Flaig, *Griechischer Individualismus und Römischer Gemeinsinn. Über die Tauglichkeit eines historiographischen Mythems*, in: *Das Individuum und die Seinen. Individualität in der okzidentalen und in der russischen Kultur in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Yuri L. Bessmertny/Otto Gerhard Oexle (Göttingen 2001) 3–14; Norbert Ohlig, *Christentum – Kirche – Individuum*, in: *Die Entdeckung des Ich. Die Geschichte der Individualisierung vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Richard van Dülmen (Köln/Weimar/Wien 2001) 11–40, at 13.

⁴² Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity. A.D. 150–750* (London 1971) 51, referring to the time of Marcus Aurelius and Plotinus.

⁴³ But see the contribution by Kate Cooper, in this volume, and Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta 1981).

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Confessionum libri tredecim* (ed. Luc Verheijen, CC SL 27, 1, 1, Turnhout 1981); id., *Retractationum libri duo* (ed. Almut Mutzenbecher, CC SL 57, Turnhout 1984); for a fundamental biography: Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1967). See Roderich Barth, ‘Et quomodo iam inveniam te, si memor non sum tui?’ Die religionsphilosophische Bedeutung der Subjektivität nach Augustin, in: *Krisen der Subjektivität: Problemfelder eines strittigen Paradigmas*, ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth/Philipp Stoellger (Tübingen 2005) 493–512; and the contributions by Kate Cooper and Richard Corradini, in this volume.

⁴⁵ Brian Stock, *After Augustine. The Meditative Reader and the Text* (Philadelphia 2001) 3: “The manner in which he united the soul’s progress with the theme of the body’s passage through historical time was greatly indebted to the Christian doctrine of incarnation. The individual life thereby became the setting for a reenactment of the biblical drama of alienation and return.”

⁴⁶ Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae* (ed. Claudio Moreschini, *Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*, München/Leipzig 2005).

⁴⁷ Alan Cameron, *The last day of the Academy at Athens*, in: *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society 195* (1969) 7–29; Christian Wildberg, *Philosophy in the age of Justinian*, in: *The Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas (Cambridge 2005) 316–340, at 328–333.

⁴⁸ Robert A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge 1997); Carole Straw, *Gregory the Great – Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1988); Sofia Boesch Gajano, *Gregorio Magno – Alle origini del medioevo* (Roma 2004);

tion is that there was a slump back to the archaic in the early Middle Ages, when barbarians and/or Christians quenched whatever individual spirit there was left in a decadent Late Antiquity. After that, humans were so overwhelmed by their God and by rigid collectives that they could not develop individuality in the full sense: almost a ‘brave old world’, a ‘984’ in which ‘Big Brother’ did not need any technological gimmicks to watch over perfectly conformist souls.⁴⁹

The problem with this master narrative is that this view of the ‘fall of Rome’ and its consequences is outdated, in spite of recent attempts to resurrect the paradigm of catastrophe.⁵⁰ In particular, the role of Christianity needs to be reassessed. A number of scholars have produced fundamental and very differentiated studies about the way in which a Christian world was constructed in Late Antiquity.⁵¹ More remains to be done for a better understanding of the way in which early medieval Christianity changed peoples’ lives, in spite of a number of important publications.⁵² But these works seem to have gone unnoticed among most historians of the self. Handbooks still tend to define the role of medieval Christianity in the light of modern ideas about religion. Either they regard the Church, from a long tradition of enlightened thinking, as a force of suppression of independent minds; or they defend it, from an apologetic position, as the one institution that preserved ancient culture in a dark age. Many Christian scholars are also ready to acknowledge that the medieval Church had strayed from its true Christian roots, and succumbed to the influence of the barbarians.⁵³ In such sweeping historical panoramas, there is usually little space for an in-depth understanding of early medieval minds. This volume seeks to fill the gap, but can only offer a first overview of a rich intellectual landscape in the Latin West between c. 400 and c. 1050 A.D. Regrettably, many early-medieval authors could not be included, among them Cassiodorus, Gregory of Tours,⁵⁴ Isidore of Seville (who is indirectly represented in Yitzhak Hen’s contribution) and several other Visigothic writers of the seventh century, Boniface, Walahfrid Strabo, Hincmar, Anastasius Bibliothecarius, Regino of Prüm, Liudprand of Cremona, to name just a few. Still, the exemplary studies in this volume will hopefully open the floor for debate, and for more substantial work on early medieval individuality.

One reason why the medieval individual has received comparatively little attention in the second half of the 20th century also lies in the dominant intellectual fashions of the period. Structuralism, marxism, conservative German institutional history and the traumatic experience of human impotence in the face of totalitarianism – all these did not favour dealing with the individual in history. Post-war historiography, spearheaded by

Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford 2000).

⁴⁹ Cf. Walter Pohl, *Ursprungserzählungen und Gegenbilder. Das archaische Frühmittelalter*, in: *Meistererzählungen vom Mittelalter*, ed. Frank Rexroth (Historische Zeitschrift Beiheft 46, München 2007) 23–41, with a critique of exaggerated views of archaic early Middle Ages.

⁵⁰ A paradigm change is owed to the work of Peter Brown, specifically *The World of Late Antiquity* (London 1971, repr. 1989). See also *East and West: Modes of Communication*, ed. Evangelos Chrysos/Ian N. Wood (The Transformation of the Roman World 5, Leiden/Boston/Köln 1999). A contrary view in: Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall Of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford 2005), with the review by Guy Halsall, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 16, 3 (2008) 384–386.

⁵¹ The work of Peter Brown has been fundamental in this respect; see, among his many publications: Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity A.D. 200–1000* (Oxford/Cambridge-Mass. 2003). See also Robert A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge 1990); Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford 1991); Leyser, *Authority*; Kate Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household: Religion, Gender, and the Household in the Sixth Century* (Cambridge 2007).

⁵² See, for instance, Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms, 789–895* (London 1977); Yitzhak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, A.D. 481–751* (Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions 1. Medieval and Early Modern Peoples, Leiden/Boston/Köln 1995); Ian N. Wood, *The Missionary Life. Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400–1050* (Harlow 2001); Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State. Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious (814–840)* (Cambridge 2009).

⁵³ See, for instance, Arnold Angenendt, *Geschichte der Religiosität im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt 2000) 1–30, with an extensive discussion of the problem of medieval “rearchaization”.

⁵⁴ For a pilot study on Gregory, see Ian N. Wood, *The individuality of Gregory of Tours*, in: *The World of Gregory of Tours*, ed. Kathleen Mitchell/Ian N. Wood (Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions 8. Medieval and Early Modern Peoples, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2002) 29–46. Cf. also Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregor von Tours (538–594) “Zehn Bücher Geschichte”*. Historiographie und Gesellschaftskonzept im 6. Jahrhundert (Darmstadt 1994); Helmut Reimitz, *The art of truth. Historiography and identity in the Frankish World*, in: *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Corradini/Rob Meens/Christina Pössel/Philipp Shaw (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, Wien 2006) 87–104.

the Annales school, was mostly interested in structures.⁵⁵ In the 1970s, meandering theoretical attempts were made to locate a subjective factor somewhere in a world dominated by its material basis and social structures.⁵⁶ When those imposing structures finally gave way to new paradigms, it was to the death of the subject and of the author in postmodernism. There is, of course, enormous potential for research on the individual in postmodern theory, for instance in Foucault's "Le souci de soi" and his theories of ancient self-fashioning.⁵⁷ The post-modern 'soi', however, is an elusive phenomenon. French authors still play with pronouns to express concepts of self that are as lofty as possible, le moi, le soi, l'être-soi, le devenir-soi.⁵⁸ The essential message in this play of words is that the ego is not some kind of creature that evolves over the centuries and slowly grows additional organs, but the ever-precarious result of the manifold ways in which troubled human beings dealt with themselves and their environment; and this is a message to which we should pay attention. From a broadly similar approach, cultural constructivism tended to see the self as a product of power relations and ideologies, as in the works of Stephen Greenblatt: "Whenever I focused sharply upon a moment of apparently autonomous self-fashioning, I found not an epiphany of identity freely chosen but a cultural artifact."⁵⁹ On the whole, structuralism, post-modernism and cultural constructivism have made us understand that the self does not simply develop naturally, but is the result of a complex web of relations between power, society, texts, symbols and the embodied individual. Texts do not necessarily reflect given identities, they represent efforts of identification.⁶⁰ However, that does not mean that the individual, whether medieval or post-modern, would simply be an illusion and lack any capacity for thinking and acting coherently.

In recent years, the individual has returned to the stage, and sometimes with a vengeance. A considerable number of philosophical and social-anthropological studies have appeared.⁶¹ Many of them react to the post-modern challenge by going back to the classics – from Descartes, Locke, Fichte to the more traditional philosophical and psychological statements of the post-war period.⁶² But that does not mean going back to the classical modern myth of the autonomous and sovereign subject.⁶³ "La vague persistante et mobile de l'individu s'oppose à la fixité trompeuse de la personnalité"; what sounds like an, if moderate, affirmation of postmodernism in Alain Boureau's programmatic phrase refers to the expression *individuum vagum* used by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas.⁶⁴ The debate how to escape from the apories of traditional philosophy of the subject has been reopened; hopefully, it will also lead to a more nuanced understanding of the history of the individual.

⁵⁵ Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution. The Annales School, 1929–89* (Cambridge 1990).

⁵⁶ See, for instance, *Geschichte & Psychoanalyse*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Köln 1971).

⁵⁷ Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*. The goal of the late antique "care for oneself", according to Foucault, was to achieve "full sovereignty above oneself"; quoted here after the German edition: Michael Foucault, *Die Sorge um sich* (Frankfurt am Main 1986) 305. For an overview of post-modern theories of the self, see Peter V. Zima, *Theorie des Subjekts. Subjektivität und Individualität zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne* (Tübingen/Basel 2007).

⁵⁸ Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak/Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Introduction générale: La question de l'individu à l'épreuve du Moyen Âge*, in: *L'individu au Moyen Âge. Individuation et individualisation avant la modernité*, ed. Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak/Dominique Iogna-Prat (Paris 2005) 7–29, at 7f.

⁵⁹ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 257.

⁶⁰ See, for instance, *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Corradini/Rob Meens/Christina Pössel/Philipp Shaw (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 12, Wien 2006).

⁶¹ See, for instance, Stéphane Chauvier, *Dire 'Je'*. Essai sur la subjectivité (Paris 2001); Vincent Descombes, *Le complément du sujet* (Paris 2004); Larmore, *Les pratiques du Moi*; Eric Olson, *Personal identity*, in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online edition (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-personal/>, rev. March 2008); Regine Kather, *Person. Die Begründung menschlicher Identität* (Darmstadt 2007); De Libera, *Naissance du sujet; Der Mensch und die Person*, ed. Bernard N. Schumacher/François-Xavier Putallaz (Darmstadt 2008); Vincent Descombes/Charles Larmore, *Dernières nouvelles du Moi* (Paris 2009).

⁶² Sidney Shoemaker, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Ithaca 1963); Ernst Tugendhat, *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung* (Frankfurt a. M. 1979); Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Oxford 1981); Dieter Henrich, *Selbstverhältnisse. Gedanken und Auslegungen zu den Grundlagen der klassischen deutschen Philosophie* (Stuttgart 1982); Manfred Frank, *Die Unhintergebarkeit von Individualität. Reflexionen über Subjekt, Person und Individuum aus Anlaß ihrer ‚postmodernen‘ Toterklärung* (Frankfurt a. M. 1986).

⁶³ Vincent Descombes, *Reconnaître la diversité des manières de se rapporter à soi*, in: id./Larmore, *Dernières nouvelles du Moi* (Paris 2009) 69–97, at 73f., quickly discards the postmodern destruction of the subject as „fausse solution“, but also refuses the use of the capitalized ‚Moi‘.

⁶⁴ Boureau, *De vagues individus* 17 and 275.

The new interest in the individual is also reflected in historical studies, and several collaborative volumes on the medieval individual have appeared. One of the best of these collections is the volume “L’individu au Moyen Âge”, edited by Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak and Dominique Iogna-Prat in 2005.⁶⁵ Characteristically it does not deal with the early Middle Ages at all; but it establishes several approaches that can also be made fruitful for the period from the 5th to the 11th century. It demonstrates how research on the individual can proceed after the post-modern challenge. This should not simply mean going back to business as usual, forget about postmodernism, and pretend to have a solid terminological basis. The term ‘individual’ is problematic in itself; I have used it here because that is how the problem has been discussed among medieval historians, in much the same way as I think we can use ‘state’ for the early Middle Ages once we give up the notion that the only real state – or the only real individual – is the modern one.⁶⁶

One problem with the term ‘individual’ is that it is traditionally regarded as indicating an “abstract individual”, a separate entity which requires ‘society’ as its opposite.⁶⁷ But individual and collective identities can hardly be distinguished so clearly. We need to understand, as modern psychology has done since Simmel,⁶⁸ the individual within its social context. Herbert Mead, whose ground-breaking lectures in social psychology came out in 1934 under the title “Mind, Self and Society”, has regarded membership in a social group (which he has termed the ‘me’) as fundamental for personal identity: “Without this structure, the self could not exist.”⁶⁹ So it is not so much the relative weight of the individual vs. society that we need to look for in the past, but changing forms of individuality-within-society.⁷⁰ They clearly depend on complex historical circumstances, as studies of our own period can show.⁷¹ The concept of ‘identity’ as a dynamic interface between self and society can help in this respect.⁷² More precisely, we can also speak of the ‘relational self’, “the self embedded in a network of social reciprocities”, as Kate Cooper puts it in her contribution to this volume. She uses the term to characterise Augustine’s thinking on individuality; but modern selves are surely also relational in many respects. Past experiences, just as the study of different cultures, can help to understand the dynamics of the self up to our own day, by contrast or by analogy. The Vietnamese language, for instance, has no transcontextual word for ‘I’; self-referential utterances are only possible with regard to specific social roles and contexts.⁷³

Therefore, we need to historicize the concept of the individual. This is what the early modernist Richard von Dülmen stated in the introduction to a collaborative volume published in 2001, entitled “Die Entdeckung des Ich”.⁷⁴ But how do we then define the ‘individuality’ we are looking for in past societies? The possible criteria are manifold: consciousness, self-perception, soul, intellect, reason, free will, emotions, intentions,

⁶⁵ L’individu au Moyen Âge. Individuation et individualisation avant la modernité, ed. Brigitte Bedos-Rezak/Dominique Iogna-Prat (Paris 2005).

⁶⁶ On the question of the state: Walter Pohl, Staat und Herrschaft im Frühmittelalter: Überlegungen zum Forschungsstand, in: Staat im frühen Mittelalter, ed. Stuart Airlie/Helmut Reimitz/Walter Pohl (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 11, Wien 2006) 9–38.

⁶⁷ Steven Lukes, Individualism (New York 1973) 74f.; for a critique, Barbara Rosenwein, Y avait-il un “moi” au moyen âge?, in: Revue historique 307 (2005) 31–52, at 50.

⁶⁸ Georg Simmel in Translation. Interdisciplinary Border-Crossings in Culture and Modernity, ed. David Kim (Cambridge 2006); Lukes, Individualism; Rosenwein, Y avait-il un “moi” 50. See also Otto Gerhard Oexle, Konsens – Vertrag – Individuum. Über Formen des Vertragshandelns im Mittelalter, in: Das Individuum und die Seinen. Individualität in der okzidentalen und in der russischen Kultur in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit, ed. id./Yuri L. Bessmertny (Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 163, Göttingen 2001) 15–37, at 22.

⁶⁹ George Herbert Mead, Mind, Self and Society. From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist (Chicago 1934); here quoted after the German translation which interestingly renders ‘Self’ with ‘Identität’: Geist, Identität und Gesellschaft (Frankfurt am Main 1973) 258.

⁷⁰ Cf. Bynum, Did the 12th century discover the individual? See also Charles Larmore, Le Moi et ses raisons d’être, in: Vincent Descombes/Charles Larmore, Dernières nouvelles du Moi (Paris 2009) 41–68, at 45: “Nous ne sommes pas d’abord des spectateurs du monde pour ensuite nous y mêler.”

⁷¹ See, for instance, Anthony Giddens, Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age (Stanford 1991).

⁷² Walter Pohl, Aux origines d’une Europe ethnique: Identités en transformation entre antiquité et moyen âge, in: Annales: Histoire, Sciences sociales 60, 1 (2005) 183–208.

⁷³ Steven W. Laycock, Vietnamese mode of self-reference: A model of Buddhist egology, in: Asian Philosophy 4, 1 (1994) 53–70.

⁷⁴ Richard von Dülmen, Einleitung, in: Die Entdeckung des Ich. Die Geschichte der Individualisierung vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart, ed. id. (Köln/Weimar/Wien 2001) 1–10, at 1. Here, he also argues against the problematic “Gegenüberstellung von ‘Individuum’ und ‘Gesellschaft’, von ‘Individualisierung’ und ‘Vergesellschaftung’”, and warns: “Die ‘Geschichte der Individualisierung’ versteht sich nicht als eine Beschreibung eines linearen Prozesses von konstant zunehmender Individualität und individualisierten

memory, imagination, physical presence, sex/gender, social role, status.⁷⁵ It is hard to envisage that medieval human beings lacked any of these things. Most historians implicitly or explicitly employ the criterion proposed by Herbert Mead, self-referentiality.⁷⁶ This category has also been used as a key concept by Niklas Luhmann, both for social systems and individuals.⁷⁷

Some recent studies have taken the cue to posit a fundamental distinction between modern self-referentiality and pre-modern *Fremdreferenz*. Medieval human beings, they conclude, were not self-reflective; their self-construction was oriented towards God and/or the (religious) community, not themselves.⁷⁸ There is no doubt that God was ‘good to think with’ in pre-modern Europe. But did a more or less strong sense of belonging to religious or other communities and the belief in a Christian God necessarily obliterate the sense of self in medieval Europe? And, seen the other way round, is the modern individual free of transcendental and collective references?⁷⁹ Recent philosophical contributions to the debate have generally been rather sceptical against the criterium of self-referentiality because it leads to various paradoxes, for instance splitting the subject into a subject and an object.⁸⁰ However that may be, such dichotomies may have less explicatory value than many scholars assume. They may also inspire the mostly implicit assumption that the individual can only come into its own after a dramatic act of self-assertion, a Luther- or Galileo-type of confrontation with society.⁸¹ Late antique and early medieval martyrs and heretics had to face similar dramatic confrontations, which were stylized in widely-diffused martyrs’ lives,⁸² but historians of the self usually do not take note of that.

Were medieval human beings conscious of their own selves? Could they distinguish between themselves as members of a given group or society and themselves as ‘individuals’, and between different individualities? Egon Flaig rightly regards “die Annahme eines präreflexiven Zustandes” in primitive societies as “unsinnig”.⁸³ The ‘individual’ did not have to be discovered at any one stage in history, as much as its notions and self-image may have differed over time and even between different social groups in the same period. For all we have learnt from discussions about the ‘process of civilisation’, the balance between self-assertion, self-fashioning and social discipline has to be negotiated and re-established in each successive scenario of social integration, and there is no linear progress in any of these elements.⁸⁴ “Die Anstrengung, das Ich zusammenzuhalten, haftet dem Ich auf allen Stufen an”, as Horkheimer and Adorno observed: the effort to integrate the ego is not a modern phenomenon.⁸⁵ The result of these efforts is not necessarily, as many of the contributions in this volume

Lebenswelten.” Again, the focus of the volume is on the modern age, and most authors rather follow the title of the volume than van Dülmen’s introduction in their quest for a ‘discovery’ of the individual.

⁷⁵ Cf. Bedos-Rezak, *Signe d’identité* 44.

⁷⁶ Mead, *Geist, Identität und Gesellschaft* 184.

⁷⁷ Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme* (Frankfurt am Main 1984) 166f. See also Winfried Nöth, *Selbstreferenz in systemtheoretischer und semantischer Sicht*, in: *Empirische Text- und Kulturforschung* 2 (2002) 1–7.

⁷⁸ Cornelia Bohn, *Inklusion, Exklusion und Person* (Theorie und Methode 28, Konstanz 2006); Eva Kormann, *Ich, Welt und Gott. Autobiographik im 17. Jahrhundert* (Selbstzeugnisse der Neuzeit 13, Köln 2004). I owe these references to Franz Arlinghaus, Bielefeld.

⁷⁹ Mead, *Geist, Identität und Gesellschaft* 210f., has remarked that we are only capable of resisting the sanctions of society against non-conformism if we refer to a superior community. This is what Christians were encouraged to do, and what non-conformists still do (regardless of whether their dissent is religious, political or moral).

⁸⁰ Descombes, *Reconnaitre la diversité* 70, with reference to Tugendhat, *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstbestimmung*: “Les doctrines qui engendrent ces paradoxes sont justement le sommet de l’effort spéculatif de toute une tradition pour penser le sujet d’une conscience de soi comme sujet rapporté à lui-même par un acte de réflexion sur lui-même (...) On doit donc prendre ces paradoxes au sérieux.”

⁸¹ For Luther, see the fundamental work by Erik H. Erikson, *The Young Man Luther. A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York 1958).

⁸² See, for instance, *The Roman Martyrs and the Politics of Memory*, thematic issue, ed. Kate Cooper (Early Medieval Europe 9, 3, 2000).

⁸³ Flaig, *Griechischer Individualismus* 14.

⁸⁴ Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*, 2 Bde. (Bern 1969); *Materialien zu Norbert Elias’ Zivilisationstheorie*, ed. Peter Gleichmann/Johann Goudsblom/Hermann Korte (Frankfurt am Main 1979); Jeroen Duindam, *Norbert Elias und der frühneuzeitliche Hof. Versuch einer Kritik und Weiterführung*, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 3 (1998) 370–387; Gerd Schwerhoff, *Zivilisationsprozeß und Geschichtswissenschaft. Norbert Elias’ Forschungsparadigma in historischer Sicht*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 266 (1998) 561–605; *Zivilisationstheorie in der Bilanz: Beiträge zum 100. Geburtstag von Norbert Elias*, ed. Annette Treibel/Helmut Kuzmics/Reinhart Blomert (Figurationen. Schriften zur Zivilisations- und Prozessstheorie 1, Opladen 2000).

⁸⁵ Horkheimer/Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* 33.

show, a coherent ego – perhaps not quite unlike the contemporary age. Early medieval authors are capable of displaying different, sometimes conflicting, social roles; they use the appropriate literary ‘masks’ and rhetoric to express them; and they are usually well, sometimes woefully aware of the tensions implied. In many cases, the act of writing may be interpreted as an effort to explain and balance such contradictory identifications, as in the case of Paul the Deacon, Lombard nobleman, ambitious poet and scholar, pious monk and loyal subject of Charlemagne (see my contribution in this volume). Defining such early medieval selves through what they lack by comparison with the modern ego does not seem to be a very promising research strategy.

Corresponding to the variety of identifications and models of the self, there are several types of sources that need to be studied to understand more about the medieval individual: philosophical and theological writings, political discourse, letters, hagiography and biography, autobiographies and other ‘ego-documents’, narratives, heroic legends, dreams, passports and letters of conduit, signs of the self (such as seals or coats of arms) or bodily signs, evidence for legal status and more. Much of that has recently been discussed.⁸⁶ There is certainly no lack of ‘ego’ in early medieval texts, as many of the contributions in this volume demonstrate. But how difficult the question is becomes apparent if we look at the medieval roots of modern terminology.⁸⁷ The ‘subject’ originally was the *subiectus*, the subjugated. The ‘individual’ is the undivided, the *atomos*; the most important use of this word in the Middle Ages was for the Trinity, the *individua trinitas* invoked at the beginning of so many regnal charters. ‘Person’ comes from the ancient *persona*, a mask or character of the theatre, which could also have a more general juridical or rhetorical meaning.⁸⁸ In this sense, Cicero defines the person in his *De inventione* by a number of individual attributes: *nomen, natura, victus, fortuna, habitus, affectio, studia, consilia, facta, casus, orationes*, which he goes on to exemplify further in the text, for instance: *Naturam ipsam definire difficile est; or consilium est aliquid faciendi aut non faciendi excogitata ratio.*⁸⁹ This scheme was further elaborated by the 4th-century grammarian C. Chirius Fortunatianus in his *Ars Rhetorica*, who listed 21 *modi* of the person. The text survives, among other manuscripts, in an eighth-century handbook of grammar and rhetoric, in which the traits of the *persona* are shown in a diagram and explained in the text below.⁹⁰ As compared to Cicero’s text, a number of interesting changes occur: Chirius (or his 8th-century copyist) leaves out Cicero’s *natura, consilia* and *sexus*, whereas *natio, patria* and *genus* move into prominent position; among the additions, under *conditione* and *conditione alia* we find servitude or freedom that Cicero had listed under *fortuna*. But interest in Cicero’s *De inventione* also continued in the early Middle Ages, for instance in the same manuscript which contains an anonymous commentary *De adtributione persone et negotio* which refers to Cicero’s original list of eleven attributes of the person, and, clearer than Cicero himself, distinguishes those attributes that are extrinsic to the person: *Natura est adtributum extra ipsum hominem, praeter in patria, gente, sanguine ceterisque ... ergo natura accidens qualitas est, ut animae vel corpori vel extrinsecus, et accidens ab ortu ac natali.*⁹¹ Alcuin also discussed the properties of the person, a point made by David Ganz in his contribution in this volume.⁹²

In Christian theology, *persona* came to be used for each of the three persons of the Trinity, specifically for the ‘person’ of Christ, which consisted of two substances, the human and the divine. It was Boethius who defined the person as “the individual substance of a rational nature”: *personae proprie dicitur naturae rationalis individua substantia.*⁹³ Now, following the example of Christ, the person has also become indivisible, ‘individual’. The German theologian Karl-Heinz Ohlig has recently underlined the enormous influence that Boethius’s definition had for the development of the concept of a spiritual and rational self in the Middle Ages, which was distinct from the classical and platonic notion of a universal spirit only materially embodied

⁸⁶ See, for instance, Valentin Groebner, *Der Schein der Person. Steckbrief, Ausweis und Kontrolle im Mittelalter* (München 2004).

⁸⁷ Bedos-Rezak/Iogna-Prat, *Introduction générale* 25–29.

⁸⁸ See also Boureau, *De vagues individus* 260–267, on the ancient and medieval meanings of *persona*.

⁸⁹ Cicero, *De inventione* I, 34 (ed. Karl Halm, *Rhetores Latini minores*, 1863, Frankfurt am Main ²1964) 216.

⁹⁰ Köln, Dombibliothek cod. 166, fol. 1r–50r, at 22v; online facsimile: CEEC/Codices Electronici Ecclesiae Colonensis, <http://www.ceec.uni-koeln.de/ceec-cgi/kleioe>. I owe this example to Helmut Reimitz, Princeton.

⁹¹ Köln, Dombibliothek cod. 166, 184v–189v; Halm, *Rhetorici Latini minores* 305 (attributed to a Darmstadt manuscript 166, which he dates to the 7th century). I am grateful to Irene van Renswoude for this quote.

⁹² Alcuin, *De rhetorica et virtutibus* (ed. Wilbur S. Howell, *The Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne*, Princeton 1941) 104.

⁹³ Boethius, *Opusculum contra Eutychem et Nestorium* 3, PL 64, 1337–1354D, at 1343; Ohlig, *Christentum – Kirche – Individuum* 20; also cited in Bedos-Rezak/Iogna-Prat, *Introduction générale* 28.

in the individual.⁹⁴ Boethius' concept was used, for instance, in the adoptianist controversy and endorsed at the council of Frankfurt in 794,⁹⁵ and later developed by Hugo of St Victor and Roger Bacon.⁹⁶

More frequent than Boethius's approach was the definition of man (*homo*) as a union of body (*corpus*) and soul (*anima*). This distinction received a strange treatment by Isidore of Seville. On an etymological basis, he first refutes the definition of man through both elements: "It is an abuse of language when man refers to the whole compound of both essences, i.e. of spirit and body in partnership. For proper use is man-from-manure (*homo ab humo*)"; only God raises him up to gaze upon his maker. But then, Isidore returns to the distinction to say: "Man is double-sided: inner and outer. The inner man is spirit (*anima*), the outer man is body (*corpus*)."⁹⁷ Isidore's concept of *anima* is in fact different from our idea of the soul. To define it, Isidore refers to the passion of Christ in the version of the Gospel of John: the authority to lay down, and to take back life (*anima*).⁹⁸ In turn, *anima* is complemented, and partly overlapped, by *spiritus* and by *mens*, the mind (*quod excellit in anima*).

As in other semantic fields, there was no linear development of the terms for the individual in the Middle Ages. And one observation, I think, is particularly important: The concepts of individual identity are intricately linked with Christian theology. God as individual may not be the same as God as a person. And He created man in His likeness. Rather than judging that as an obscure, pre-modern myth that created obstacles for individual self-referentiality, I would assume that it opened a field of tension that made intensive reflection and debate necessary, in Nicaea and elsewhere, not least in the 12th and 13th century.⁹⁹ That may have had consequences on individual self-perceptions. The Christian God may represent a very ambivalent force in individual lives. He makes (as the God of the Hebrew Bible) strong moral demands and requires human beings to conform to a rigid set of rules, set out, for instance, in numerous early-medieval penitentials.¹⁰⁰ But more importantly for those who are able to face the challenge, the goals of Christian existence are universal love and spiritual experience that have to be sought in sophisticated ways. It is therefore not simply social conformity that God asks for, on the contrary: He encourages each Christian to face his or her very own moral drama in which nothing less than eternal life is at stake, and which may, in many cases, imply difficult choices between the habits of the *saeculum* and the rules of the City of God. Belonging to the community requires repeated individual decisions.

Thus, we have to look at Christian discourse to find out more about medieval ways of self-reference and self-fashioning. Dominique Iogna-Prat has very cautiously but clearly stated that as a conclusion to his analysis of 12th-century theological debate: "On peut faire l'hypothèse d'une ascendance chrétienne du sujet moderne, paradoxal héritier de l'individu médiéval plein de la substance sacramentale offerte par l'église – une substance qu'il ne resterait plus qu'à modeler avec tous les raffinements possibles des 'techniques de soi' chères à Foucault."¹⁰¹ The paradoxical Christian ascent of the modern individual through the foucauldian techniques of the self to 'model' the soul; this is a path to a new paradigm that we should take seriously. Self-modelling was particularly important in monastic life that offered a great variety of ascetic, spiritual and exegetical practices

⁹⁴ Ohlig, *Christentum – Kirche – Individuum* 20f.

⁹⁵ Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794. Kristallisationspunkt karolingischer Kultur. Akten zweier Symposien in Frankfurt am Main, Teil 1: Politik und Kirche, Teil 2: Kultur und Theologie, ed. Rainer Berndt (Quellen und Abhandlungen zur mittelhochdeutschen Kirchengeschichte 80, Mainz 1997); John C. Cavadini, *The Last Christology in the West. Adoptionism in Spain and Gaul, 785–820* (Philadelphia 1993).

⁹⁶ Ohlig, *Christentum – Kirche – Individuum* 20f.

⁹⁷ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri viginti XI*, 1, 6 (ed. Wallace M. Lindsay, 2 vols., Oxford Classical Texts, Oxford 1911): *Abusive autem pronuntiat ex utraque substantia totus homo, id est societate animae et corporis. Nam proprie homo ab humo. ... Duplex est autem homo: interior et exterior. Interior homo anima, exterior homo corpus.* Translation and brief commentary in John Henderson, *The Medieval World of Isidore of Seville. Truth from Words* (Cambridge 2007) 144. I cannot go into the body/soul problem here; but see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Material continuity, personal survival and the resurrection of the body: a scholastic discussion in its medieval and modern context*, in: ead., *Fragmentation and Redemption. Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York 1992) 239–298.

⁹⁸ Ioh 10, 18: *Potestatem habeo ponendi animam meam, et rursus potestatem habeo sumendi eam.* Cf. Ioh 19, 30.

⁹⁹ Boureau, *De vagues individus* 285 (about the 13th century): "L'analogie entre la personne humaine et la personne divine se heurte donc à de fortes difficultés ... La personne humaine, séparée de son modèle, n'avait plus de consistance."

¹⁰⁰ See Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms, 789–895* (London 1977) chapter 5.

¹⁰¹ Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Édification personnelle et construction ecclésiale*, in: *L'individu au Moyen Âge. Individuation et individualisation avant la modernité*, ed. Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak/id. (Paris 2005) 247–270, at 269.

to deal with interiority.¹⁰² But we should not limit ourselves to conscious self-fashioning or Christian rationality. Charles Larmore has recently called attention to “our moments of inattention or passion” as elements of a primordial relationship with ourselves.¹⁰³ In a ground-breaking article published in the *Revue Historique* in 2005, “Y avait-il un ‘moi’ au haut moyen âge?”, Barbara Rosenwein encourages us to reconsider early medieval individualities, and to turn our attention to the “emotional self”.¹⁰⁴ In the article, she underlines that medieval individuals were strongly self-referential in moments of intense emotion, and thus could acquire a clear consciousness of their selves. Among others, she uses Gregory the Great and Gregory of Tours as examples.¹⁰⁵ Late antique and early medieval authors were quite aware of the role of emotions; for instance, Chirius Fortunatianus’ list of modes of the person accommodates emotional expressions under three different headings, *adfectione* (*equorum armorum canum*), *vultu* (*ut laeto tristi*) and *adfectu* (*ut laetitia ira morbo debilitate*).¹⁰⁶

This volume proposes yet another focus to find out more about the ego, the self, the soi, the moi, the individual, about personal identities or whatever we choose to call it in the early Middle Ages. What did authors write about themselves? Some scholars have, in line with mainstream opinions on the genesis of the individual, hypothesized a ‘birth of the author’ in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance.¹⁰⁷ But many of the authors presented in this book emerge quite clearly in their texts, and some are even obsessed with themselves.¹⁰⁸ Of course, these texts do not give us direct access to the individual behind the text, but rather, to the persona, the “masks” of the author.¹⁰⁹ Narratologists have proposed to distinguish between three different figures in autobiographic texts: the narrator, the protagonist (the subject within the narrative) and the person (the ‘real’ individual outside the narrative to whom the text refers, and who remains in a precarious balance with the protagonist).¹¹⁰ This is interestingly similar to the distinction between *actor*, *auctor* and *auctoritas* that can be established in the writings of Gregory of Tours.¹¹¹ Narratives of oneself, or fragments of such narratives, whether pre-modern or modern, constitute strategies of self-stylization. They use a rich grammar of self-representation, a varied rhetoric of the self full of intertextual references. Thus, early medieval authors used biblical, patristic and classical patterns of discourse to make their points about themselves. One might regard these rhetorical strategies as ‘opaque barriers’ that prevent access to their ‘true’ personalities. But these discourses and their uses are interesting in themselves. And there is more to it, for ego narratives and patterns of self-styling may have influenced the way in which these authors lived their lives, perceived of themselves and communicated with others, not only the ways in which they presented themselves in writing. “The notion of ourselves as people, self-directed, motivated, responsible for what we do and say, able to assimilate and order even what happens to us by accident or apart from our own will, all this derives from our ability to interpret

¹⁰² On the role of spiritual exercise, see Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*. Both ancient philosophy and Christian spiritual practice, he argues, tend to transcend the individual instead of fashioning it. Of course, one may ask whether such transcendence may not be seen as a form of self-fashioning.

¹⁰³ Larmore, *Le Moi 45*: “Nos moments d’inattention ou de passion, non moins que ceux où nous réfléchissons et disons ‘moi’, sont des expressions du Moi que nous sommes. C’est ce rapport à soi primordial qui constitue, en fait, la ‘subjectivité’ inhérente à toute notre expérience.”

¹⁰⁴ Rosenwein, *Y avait-il un “moi”*.

¹⁰⁵ See also Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca 2006); ead., *Worrying about emotions in history*, in: *The American Historical Review* 107, 3 (2002) 821–845; ead., *Identity and emotions in the early middle ages*, in: *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen: Von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters*, ed. Walter Pohl (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 8, Wien 2004) 129–137.

¹⁰⁶ C. Chirius Fortunatianus, *Ars Rhetorica*, Köln, Dombibliothek cod. 166, fol. 23r.

¹⁰⁷ Burt Kimmelman, *The Poetics of Authorship in Later Middle Ages. The Emergence of the Modern Literary Persona* (New York 1999).

¹⁰⁸ For a strong role of authors in early medieval historiography, Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History, A.D. 550–880. Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton 1988).

¹⁰⁹ Erich Kleinschmidt, *Autorschaft. Konzepte einer Theorie* (Tübingen 1998); I am grateful to Naomi Segal (London) for the suggestion. For the current debate on the author in literary studies, see also *What is an Author?*, ed. Maurice Biriotti/Nicola Miller (Manchester 1993); *Authorship. From Plato to the Postmodern*, ed. Seán Burke (Edinburgh 1994); *Rückkehr des Autors. Zur Erneuerung eines umstrittenen Begriffs*, ed. Fotis Jannidis/Gerhard Lauer/Matias Martínez/Simone Winko (Tübingen 1999); *Texte zur Theorie der Autorschaft*, ed. Fotis Jannidis/Gerhard Lauer/Matias Martínez/Simone Winko (Stuttgart 2000).

¹¹⁰ Dieter Thomä, *Erzähle dich selbst. Lebensgeschichte als philosophisches Problem* (München 1998) 26f. I owe the reference to Max Diesenberger, Vienna.

¹¹¹ See Helmut Reimitz, *Die Historiographie der Zukunft. Geschichte und Identität in den Frankenreichen der Merowinger- und Karolingerzeit* (Habilitationsschrift, in preparation); cf. id., *The art of truth*.

events according to a ‘plot’ ... Stories, then, control our ability to manage and understand the world.”¹¹² Early medieval authors writing about themselves, directly or indirectly, may try to cover up what ‘really’ happened, including their ego troubles in all their confusing contingency and embarrassing bleakness (just as we do when we write about ourselves). But that effort was part of what we are looking for: early medieval self-fashioning and self-perception. These authors did not simply accept themselves unreflectively for what they were, humble members of overwhelming communities. They were well equipped to use sophisticated classical rhetoric and metaphors to keep narrator, protagonist and person carefully suspended in a plot full of implicit tensions.

Many of the writers discussed here were ‘difficult’ individuals who had trouble belonging, who felt excluded or superior, lived through crises or conflicts of identity, viewed themselves and their problems with irony or anger, or followed an idiosyncratic agenda in their writings. Some, such as Rather of Verona or Gottschalk, constantly changed their perspectives of self-reflection in a manner better understood through post-modern theory than using conventional models of the self. Many others worked in a tension between self-promotion and self-suppression, of eloquence and silence. The aliases chosen by Alcuin and by Paschasius Radbertus were not intended, as Mary Garrison and Mayke de Jong show, to obscure the true identities, but to introduce implicit characterisations in a play of double identifications. The articles on Dhuoda and on Angelberga can give at least a hint of the importance of gendered models of the self. The selection of about twenty well-known authors should not suggest that a history of ‘the individual’ could be written on the basis of a handful of exceptional individuals, which is one of the shortcomings of traditional intellectual history. But their problems can serve as examples. It is through the tensions and difficulties that their writings express that we can try to get an idea of what individual and social identities meant. Conflicts of identity and the corresponding textual strategies may reveal that individuals did not simply belong once-and-for-all to ethnic, religious and social collectives. Some of the texts that early medieval authors have left behind are traces of their negotiations of identity in specific contexts, and in many cases the authors seem to have been quite conscious and self-reflective about their ‘ego troubles’.

This volume does not propose a simple reversal of the ‘history of the individual’. It does not contest the theories that something fundamental changed in the 12th, the 15th and the 18th century, and it has not been written to maintain that early medieval intellectuals were as self-reflective as those of our own time. But it seeks to explore a blind spot in modern perceptions of the complex history of the self in Europe. The authors presented here demonstrate that early medieval individuals were not necessarily dull, primitive and limited to archaic forms of additive, non-analytic thinking, lost in an unstructured time-space continuum and incapable of grasping how society worked.¹¹³ Perhaps such representations of early medieval Europeans rather reflect the hesitation to see something of ourselves in that ‘distant mirror’? The master narrative of the ‘Birth of the modern individual’ is not just a received way to render history intelligible by focusing on key elements and their development.¹¹⁴ It is central to our very own origin myth as ‘modern’ individuals. As such, it necessarily contrasts the brighter sides of European history, with its renaissances and enlightenments, its intellectuals and sovereign subjects on the one side, and the ‘dark ages’ as part of a long-gone, but still threatening archaic world on the other side. Thus, it has created a powerful matrix in which differentiated research tends to become absorbed in simplifying perceptions of the ‘discovery of the individual’. This volume has a different aim: it invites readers to discover distant individuals – a number of early medieval authors and their specific ways to deal with their ‘ego troubles’ that are, perhaps, not so different from our own.

¹¹² Mary Warnock, *Imagination and Time* (Oxford/Cambridge-Mass. 1991). See also the fundamental studies by Hayden White, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore/London 1987); and Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et Récit*, 3 vols. (Paris 1983–1985).

¹¹³ Thus, for instance, Fried, *Der Weg in die Geschichte* 144f.

¹¹⁴ See *Meistererzählungen vom Mittelalter*, ed. Frank Rexroth (Historische Zeitschrift Beiheft 46, München 2007).

