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# I, Myself, and Me, The Human Being

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I, Myself, and Me, The Human Being

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

by

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May 2018  
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This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this project are advanced two ways of seeing the ordinary human being with the aim of understanding *who* he is: namely, from the perspective of his personal identity and from the point of view of his self-conception. The chapters included in the first part are meant to treat the issue of personal identity from a practical perspective, whereas the ones included in the second part intend to assess the utility of self-conception from a phenomenological standpoint. Ultimately, I bring together these two perspectives into a unitary understanding of the human being in the context of his everyday life.

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## **DEDICATION**

*To Emīlija, with love*

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## INTRODUCTION

It might be thought at first glance that if there is a question we would be able to address from our own experience, which gets to our core and from which we should be able to draw a definite answer, it could be following: *Who am I?* Because even if we are not prepared to say anything about the world and the lives of others, presumably we would at least be tempted to think that we have enough resources for determining what makes us who we are. But formulating a satisfactory answer to this question has since ancient times eluded the most inquisitive and insightful minds. Indeed, it is no accident that the motto inscribed above the entrance to the oracle at Delphi was “Know thyself,” puzzling figures of the stature of Socrates. It can be gathered, from the vast literature that this question has given rise to, that no small inquiry would settle it.

A further concern growing as an implication of addressing this matter can be posed in the follow-up question – *How do I conceive of myself?* Assuming that we have figured out who we are, the way we see ourselves would have important consequences for the characterization of self-conception. This would be an interrelated problem, as it would seem that we should be able to explain what is our self-conception and how have we acquired it if we have in effect grasped who we are. For if we can explain who we are, we should in principle be capable of justifying the way we have achieved this grasp, making it thus available for the assessment of others.

Contemporarily, these matters have been framed on the one hand in terms of the philosophical problems of personal identity and the nature of the self, and on the other as the issue of the nature of self-conception. We can see how these problems would become tractable by distributing them in three levels or categories of inquiry.

We can begin discerning the human being at a ground level, belonging to the ontological class of inquiry, upon which we can secondly identify a practical level and thirdly a



phenomenological level of its existence. Now, instead of following the tradition in treating personal identity in the context of the first level as an ontological matter, we follow Marya Schechtman (2014) and situate this problem at the second level, thinking of personal identity as something that is practically achieved through our daily interactions and activities. Still, the ontological status of the human being is indirectly referenced based on how we approach personal identity from the standpoint of our practical considerations and concerns. Meanwhile, although the issue of the nature of the self is also traditionally classified as an ontological problem, we do not address this problem in this way. We only concern ourselves with the phenomenological problem of the self, thereby setting it up in the context of the third level of inquiry. Thus, while avoiding the reference to the ontological status of the self, we focus on self-conception since we are more interested in knowing how we see ourselves than pondering the nature the self. This phenomenological account is shown to have important implications on the practical level of the human being's ordinary life, as it revolves primarily around the utility of self-conception.

The three levels just noted correspond to different types of inquiry about the human being, which is the main subject of our investigation. The point of separating our approximations to the human being this way is to avoid conflating types of issues that can be raised about personal identity and selfhood, so as to not further misunderstandings that have made these issues hard to treat. It must be said, though, that we sort the problems we treat here into the mentioned levels in function of the needs and objectives of our investigation with the intention of dividing the labor, such that these problems could have been organized differently had our goals been others.

Assuming this distinction of levels, we advance two different approaches, contexts, or modes of presentation of the same content, i.e., an ordinary human being, whether seen with respect to his personal identity or else from the perspective of his self-conception. Accordingly,

we divide our proposal in two parts. Part One deals with the issue of personal identity from a practical standpoint. Clearly, despite the fact that a human being has a notion of himself (i.e., a self-conception), the relationship of this individual with such an aspect of his identity will not be assessed in this part. This aspect is rather examined in Part Two, which is concerned with the general issue of the self viewed from a phenomenological angle. The intention of examining the topic of self-conception as a further layer of the human being is to see him from a perspective from which his personal identity can be reconceived as an existential issue, making it thereby tractable from an ulterior stance. Therefore, by separating the topics of personal identity and self-conception this way, we can advance alternative ways of understanding the same structure or reference, which is that of a human being.

The practical approximation or mode of presentation of the human being's personal identity is thus proposed in the first part, which consists of chapters I, II and III, though Chapter I is mainly included as a background discussion on the notion of a 'human being', a concept we adopt throughout the extent of this investigation. In the second part, we move on to the phenomenological discussion of the concept of 'self', particularly attending to the issue of the *use* of self-conception. Such a phenomenological account is elaborated in chapters IV and V, assuming indeed the notion of a 'human being' that we have elucidated in Chapter I. The point there is to specify, in the third level of inquiry, the role that the phenomenon of 'oneself' plays in the life of this individual by emphasizing its existential value.

Moreover, the separation of the subjects of personal identity and self-conception in these two parts is viable given that personal identity does not entail a determined self-conception, whereas the latter does not presuppose the former. Particularly, we can make sense of personal identity without having yet accounted for the utility of self-conception, while we are able to

explain the second without presupposing an account of the first. This is due to the fact that, even though a human being has a personal identity, he might still conceive of himself otherwise, attributing a rather different identity to himself; this is, he might have a self-conception that is incompatible with the character of his identity. As will be seen, the previous corresponds to a case of ‘alienation’ or ‘dissociation’ that constitutes part of the target of our treatments in this project. As we classify the problem of personal identity as practical whereas that of self-conception as phenomenological, our overall approach is going to serve us in discerning several factors that contribute to this sort of alienation and further help us determine how it can be surmounted. Conversely, it will be noticed that even as a human being might conceive of himself in a given way, this conception does not require that the individual is able to track the literal persistence of a substance in virtue of which his personal identity is grounded, as if his self-conception had to match this substance.

Nonetheless, it is true that we tend to think of personal identity and self-conception as interrelated subjects insofar as we suppose that how we conceive of ourselves depends on what our personal identity is, so that our self-conception arises from an understanding of what this identity is. In effect, it is arguably the case that by explaining who we are we account for our personal identity and offer at the same time insight into how we see ourselves. After all, we have noticed that personal identity and self-conception can be regarded as two aspects of the same individual, so they would naturally be related to one another. Having said that, in the interest of clarity we will deal with these subjects separately in order to provide a fuller view of the connection of the personal identity of a human being and his self-conception.

To achieve these goals, in Chapter I we start by elucidating the term ‘human being’ with the intention of specifying the concept associated to it that is employed in this dissertation. This is

Wittgenstein's concept of an ordinary human being as it is used in the *Philosophical Investigations* (2009). Furthermore, as a way of positing this concept at the center of our investigation, it is argued that this notion is logically primitive, that is to say, a basic element in our conceptual repertoire that will further serve us in specifying diverse aspects of this individual. The idea is to lay there most of the conceptual framework of this proposal, as in the end it is the same subject –namely, the ordinary human being– which will be seen from one or another perspective in all of the chapters of this investigation.

Then, in Chapter II it is offered the remaining part of this dissertation's framework. The issue of personal identity is advanced there from a practical stance by presenting Schechtman's view of a 'person life'. This way, we are going to expand Wittgenstein's picture of the ordinary person to further capture in it relevant aspects of his everyday life, such as the activities and interactions of this individual with other human beings within the context of a 'sociocultural infrastructure'. The chief aim is thus to forward Schechtman's approach in a Wittgensteinian vein, given that she employs a notion of a 'person' that is based on Wittgenstein's concept of a 'human being'. In this chapter are also offered elements that play a key role in the next one, as we observe similarities between Schechtman's practical account of a 'person life' and Wittgenstein's conception of 'forms of life', such that we can integrate the proposals of these authors in the context of the human being's everyday life.

Next, in Chapter III a treatment of the problem of personal identity is presented by appeal to Wittgenstein's understanding of the end-goal of his philosophy, this is, the transformation of life. Since the issue of personal identity is posed as a practical one, it is only natural that its 'solution' be practical as well. Roughly speaking, this problem is conceived as a type of 'alienation' in which a human being has lost a large degree of ordinariness. It will be clear,

however, that with “solution” it is meant the sort of ‘treatments’ or ‘therapies’ Wittgenstein recommends in his latter philosophy. Therefore, in this chapter the picture of a ‘person life’ offered by Schechtman plays a crucial role, because it is in terms of the relationship between a person’s life and the forms of life of a community that the type of ‘solution’ we propose to this practical issue can be accomplished.

In Part Two, the notion that an ordinary human person has of himself is brought to the forefront, such that a phenomenological account of self-conception can be elaborated. In Chapter IV, the issue of the utility of self-conception is posed by first addressing the question of the origin of self-conception. Nevertheless, the previous question leads to the puzzle of self-conception, which basically challenges ways in which we have supposedly come up with a notion of ourselves. This is why we must address the puzzle of self-conception in the second part of this project, since, without a basic grasp as to the origins of self-conception, its utility would hardly be explained. We advance and criticize there traditional approaches to this puzzle that are framed in a static vein, and then argue that we need to change our approach by embracing a dynamic standpoint in order to make the puzzle of self-conception tractable.

Lastly, Chapter IV proposes a dynamic approximation to the puzzle of self-conception and, thereby, to the problem of self-conception’s utility. After advancing some relevant dynamic approaches, I introduce the Two-Moment View as a way of accounting for the role of self-conception from a dynamic standpoint. With these resources in hand, and with the aid of Mead’s notion of the self understood as a social construct, it is then possible to address the puzzle of self-conception. Additionally, this final chapter provides several elements needed in our treatment of alienation that are not made explicit in Part One, so that by outlining there the importance of self-conception we can point out other requirements that must be satisfied to overcome alienation.

This much is stressed in the Conclusions, where the richness of our twofold approach to the human being in terms of his personal identity and his self-conception is shown in the combination or synthesis of these heterogeneous aspects.

Part One

**Personal Identity**

## I. AN ORDINARY UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN BEINGS

What does it mean to say that an individual is human? It is generally thought that we place others in the ‘human being’ category insofar as we ascribe them a wide range of properties such as corporeal states like size, weight, and a physical location – and, more importantly, psychological states such as intentions, beliefs, desires, and feelings. Usually we do not have any trouble recognizing that others possess mental states or classifying other people as human. However, once we begin to view this matter from a philosophical perspective, we can question the nature of our knowledge of others as human beings. For how is it that we know for a fact that the individuals we see on the streets, with whom we interact on a daily basis, are actually people? Ultimately, the only mental states that are transparent are my own, whereas those of others lie beyond my realm of experience. If I am aware at all of the existence of these states, it is because *I* perceive my own — but I can only perceive the behavior of others and not the concrete beliefs, desires, and feelings motivating it, so the problem of whether it is an expression of mental states appears to be unsolvable. Thereby, if the only way I can decide whether others are human beings is by verifying that they have psychological states, it seems that I can never determine if I am surrounded by humans.

It could be argued in response that our ability to judge others as human beings rests solely on the capacity of recognizing that they must be attributed the sort of properties mentioned above. Still, this answer does not prove satisfactory as it presupposes that viewing others as human necessarily means recognizing them as worthy of the application of a large set of *human*-like properties. On the other hand, it could be said that we recognize the existence of psychological states in others based on the analogy with our own case, as this analogy provides us with sufficient knowledge about humanity in individuals. Yet, for one thing, the way in which my



verbal behavior relates to my own mental states could hardly constitute an adequate basis for inferring that the behavior of others correlate, in sufficiently similar ways, to their own mental states. The evidence I have so far gathered about my own case is notably limited, so it could not serve in accounting for an indefinite number of cases; it would merely allow hasty generalizations about what occurs in a far greater number of cases where others are involved. Furthermore, the way I verify psychological self-ascriptions significantly differs from the method through which mental properties are usually attributed to others. In contrast to other-ascription of mental predicates, I do not rely on the observation of my own behavior in order to self-ascribe these predicates (see Strawson 394). Given, then, that I cannot know solely on the basis of the analogy with my own case whether others have mental states like my own and which these might turn out to be, it appears that I cannot know, either, whether others are human, that is, if I can only know about the humanity of others after I have determined that they undergo such states.

Even so, it is not clear that we judge others as human beings only after we have reached the conclusion that they (must) have psychological states. An alternative approach to be explored in this chapter is that we naturally or instinctively treat others as human beings and attend to the psychological states they experience without previously questioning whether or not they possess such states. For if we are ever to know that others are people, it would rather be due to the characteristic reactions and responses they elicit from us.

Now, given the multiplicity of meanings of 'human being' such as the genetic and moral acceptations of the term, we should distinguish in the course of this inquiry which notion we have in mind to demarcate the traits of the being we are referring to. This way, we will be able to clarify what we mean when saying that a certain individual is human. I shall thus analyze several notions typically associated to the term 'human'. This analysis will primarily revolve around

Wittgenstein's notion of a human being (1953). Other conceptions will be examined as well, particularly, Paul Snowdon's genetic notion (2014). Additionally, I will advance and defend the claim that Wittgenstein's notion can be interpreted as logically primitive. To substantiate this claim, I will argue that there exists a parity of cases with Strawson's approach to the concept of person.

### **I.1. Human Beings**

In the context of addressing a large set of philosophical assumptions, Wittgenstein appeals in his *Philosophical Investigations* to a common sense of 'human being' that applies to an individual who "has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious" (§ 281). He regards this individual as someone towards whom we possess a natural or instinctual attitude that consists of an extensive range of characteristic reactions, responses and dispositions. This is a creature that we automatically treat as someone in possession of mental states, which partly constitute what he is. This attitude goes hand in hand with the treatment of this creature *as a human being*, which crucially differs from a belief or opinion we form in order to include him in the human being category. As Wittgenstein states, "[m]y attitude towards him [i.e., a human being] is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul" (II, IV, § 22). The notion that human beings have mental states, then, is not just a conclusion we reach based on the observation of their verbal behavior. On the contrary, we have a practical concern towards these beings that results from several interactions with them, a concern particularly shown in reactions that contrast those we have towards other objects of our attention.

David Cockburn accounts for this 'practical orientation' as instinctually given "in part in the fact that certain emotions and actions would come naturally to me in response to certain

behavior” on the part of a human being (6). Furthermore, he stresses how important this practical orientation is to Wittgenstein’s approach by arguing that he places it in the center of his picture of the human being. What this picture offers is an ordinary context wherein numerous engagements with people already include a characteristic treatment that reveals the fact that we already conceive them as having mental states. Wittgenstein’s framework circumscribes an ordinary understanding of the human being meant to oppose a rationalist portrayal, where one would be in the position to treat others as humans only if one knew for a fact that they have experiences. In principle, this ordinary understanding would assist us in resisting the rationalistic view that leads us to be puzzled about whether others are actually human. Thus, from the ordinary standpoint, we *feel* compelled to react to someone’s manifestation of pain, e.g., treating him in consequence as a human being, whether we take pity on him, respond irascibly, or else feel apathy. Indifference would not amount to the absence of a reaction but, rather, to one reaction more amongst others. The main discrepancy with the rationalist picture resides then in the natural fact that we do not usually infer the existence of a psychological state of pain residing somehow ‘under the surface’ of the human being grimacing in front of us. The target of our reactions is not a putative homunculus expressing his pain through the human being’s features. Rather, the target is only the flesh-and-bone human being we are confronted with.

Moreover, conceiving myself as a human being involves in the same sense having a certain attitude towards myself, which is to say, a practically driven concern about me (20). This attitude, again, is instinctual in that it is not the end result of a thought process through which I confirm that I am actually human given that I happen to find ‘in myself’ psychological states like those of other humans. That I am a proper object of the sort of reactions and responses Wittgenstein has in mind is shown in the several ways I treat myself, while these in turn incite

reactions and responses from other human beings. Ultimately, the attitudes I possess towards myself come about instinctually.

### **Resisting Behaviorism**

Although Wittgenstein opposes the rationalist picture of human beings, this does not imply that he advocates for a class of physicalism such as behaviorism (*Philosophical Investigations* § 307). According to him, the object of our natural reactions and responses is not just a human *body*, for what sort of distinction are we making when we say that it is the body that feels pain and not the man? In effect, he asks, “How does it become clear that it is not the *body* [that feels pain]?” (§ 286) After all, there is some absurdity in saying that it is merely a body or a part of it that feels pain: “if someone has a pain in his hand, then the *hand* does not say so (unless it writes it)” (§ 286.). In the end, when it comes to tracking our own reactions and responses to someone’s pain, it is the whole human being and not only his body who we sympathize with: “one does not comfort the hand, but the sufferer: one looks into his eyes” (§ 286.). It is true that human behavior is a constitutive aspect of Wittgenstein’s picture, but to limit the picture to this aspect would exclude several dimensions of the human being that are purposely meant to be encompassed in his depiction.

In this regard, John Cook advises against reading Wittgenstein as embracing behaviorism. When one interprets human beings in terms of their types of actions, one’s ordinary judgments are not grounded in “protocol statements,” which are propositions merely about humans conduct amounting to “colorless bodily movements” (118). Such an analysis would depart from our ordinary interpretation of the actions of humans, for it is not based upon such statements. Indeed, Cook maintains that the assumption whereby “we are forced to recognize descriptions (or

observations) of bodily movements as being epistemologically basic in our knowledge of other persons” is unwarranted (118). Our ordinary perception of human beings does not rest on their description of them as bodies in movement. On the contrary, it is only after we have ordinarily judged the actions of humans that we can move on to a more abstract level of comprehension, thus perceiving them solely as physical objects moving through space. But this level would be derived from the ordinary perception of them and, ultimately, would depend on it.

### **The Holism of Living Human Beings**

It is worth noting that Wittgenstein restricts the logical type of an individual deserving psychological attributions to a *living* human being and what resembles or behaves like it (*Philosophical Investigations* § 281). As discussed previously, recognizing others as human beings involves possessing a wide range of reactions with which to reciprocate them, insofar as they initially act in ways that provoke such reactions. Now, all of this is possible because of our responses to these individuals as particular forms of life. “Only surrounded by certain normal manifestations of life,” Wittgenstein writes in *Zettel*, “is there such a thing as an expression of pain. Only surrounded by an even more far-reaching particular manifestation of life, such a thing as the expression of sorrow or affection” (§ 534). This suggests, broadly speaking, that the presence of human life is a precondition for our ascriptions of mental states. In the absence of human life, the aforementioned reactions and responses to humans could not be provoked and, consequently, people’s psychological states would not be a matter of our concern. Actually, we do not include dead human beings in the category of individuals towards whom we react in the ways described by Wittgenstein because we do not regard them as having experience: “a corpse seems to us quite inaccessible to pain. — Our attitude to what is alive and to what is dead is not the

same. All our reactions are different” (*Philosophical Investigations* § 284). As Wittgenstein observes, this difference does not yet imply that we do not respond to human corpses in a specific manner, which is evidently different from, say, our responses to dead animals and inanimate objects. To be precise, the typical responses we exhibit towards human forms of life compose a distinguished set, the specificity of which delimits the attitudes we would consider to be oriented towards living humans and what resemble them. For example, we do not fear inanimate objects in the same sense that we fear the aggression of human beings. As Cockburn suggests, “[f]or most of us another’s intense anger can be disturbing in a way which is quite different from that in which a landslide is generally thought of disturbing” (4).

Then again, we are not usually disturbed only because we have determined that someone must hate us on the basis of observing his demeanor, as if such hatred would potentially bring about harm to us by using his body in a specific way so as to inflict pain on us. Quite the opposite: we *feel* one way or another about a human being as a whole. Consider Merleau-Ponty’s illustration:

Imagine that I am in the presence of someone who, for one reason or another, is extremely annoyed with me. My interlocutor gets angry and I notice that he is expressing his anger by speaking aggressively, by gesticulating and shouting. But where is this anger? People will say that it is in the mind of my interlocutor. What this means is not entirely clear. For I could not imagine the malice and cruelty which I discern in my opponent’s looks separated from his gestures, speech and body. None of this takes place in some otherworldly realm, in some shrine located beyond the body of the angry man. It really is here, in this room and in this part of the room, that the anger breaks forth. It is in the space between him and me that it unfolds ... anger inhabits him and it blossoms on the surface of his pale or purple cheeks, his blood-shot eyes and wheezing voice. (85)

It is thus that Merleau-Ponty rejects the notion that psychological states inhabit something other than an entire human being. “Other human beings,” he argues, “are never pure spirit for me: I only know them through their glances, their gestures, their speech – in other words, through their bodies” (82). By the same token, he continues, “*another human being* is certainly more than

simply a body to me: rather, this other is a body animated by all manner of intentions, the origin of numerous actions and words” (82). Similarly, we can interpret Wittgenstein as thinking of the human being in a holistic way: namely, as a creature who we ordinarily perceive as undivided, capable of receiving psychological and corporeal ascriptions since he is uniformly the natural bearer of both.

The point, then, seems not to be so much that we are human because we have human bodies and human psychology. Instinctively, we respond to these creatures as having mental states and processes with the same degree of confidence that we ascribe corporeal traits to them. To the same degree that we may trivially consider others as being of a certain weight and height – although we do not know exactly what those might turn out to be - we can rightly expect others to have intentions, beliefs, desires and dispositions. Therefore, whichever is the way we end up perceiving someone as a human being, we nonetheless treat him as one regardless.

### **Countering Skepticism of Other Minds**

A notable implication of Wittgenstein’s approach is that it presents a way out of the Cartesian problem of other minds. His line of argumentation serves as a precedent for contesting radical skepticism about the humanity of others. Insofar as our treatment of others is in accordance with our natural reactions and dispositions towards humans, such treatment demands no justification. The burden of the proof rather lies on the skeptic, who must provide sufficient evidence for questioning humanity in others by doubting the validity of our natural reactions and dispositions towards them. In fact, at times one may have reasonable doubt about the authenticity of the expressions of sorrow or pain of other humans; but in what contexts would one deny the humanity of individuals even though one manifests natural reactions toward them? Without the possibility

of error, as Wittgenstein would say, we cannot possibly be right, so the skeptic would have to find plausible reasons to undermine the authenticity of our reactions. In this regard, Cook asks the following:

If the question is whether they are people or not, we must ask: ‘People as opposed to *what?*’ And here the answer is not at all clear. If I look at my son playing near by and ask, ‘What else might he be?’, no answer suggests itself. He is clearly not a statue, nor is he an animated doll of the sort we sometimes see looking very lifelike. He is my own child, my own flesh and blood. (121)

Cook thus interprets Wittgenstein as claiming that, when pushed to the extreme, the skeptic’s doubt becomes unsatisfactory. As a consequence of adopting the philosophical ideas of ‘body’ and ‘bodily movement’, he thinks that we create a metaphysical fissure between an ordinary human being and his body that cannot exist (128). However, once we take an ordinary human being to be central to our reactions, this fissure cannot exist. Thereby, in the absence of such a gap, the skeptic will have to find other ways to question the humanity of others. The burden of the proof lies with the skeptic, who must provide reasons for doubting our normal understanding of humans. In other words, the burden lies on those who want to deny humanity in the individuals towards whom the skeptics have already displayed natural reactions *as if they were* human beings. These reactions and responses are ‘basic’ in the sense that we do not need reasons for having them.

A skeptic, though, could try to shift the burden of the proof back and demand evidence from Wittgenstein which would substantiate his ordinary characterization of human beings. Still, at this stage Wittgenstein would claim that we have reached the rock bottom of our beliefs (*Philosophical Investigations* § 248). That we feel inclined to treat others as human beings is already part of what is involved in belonging to a human form of life. The only valid way to err in ascribing humanity to these forms of life would require seeing those individuals from outside a



historical, social, and physical context. But, as we are already situated in a given context and we are in constant contact with other humans (Taylor 76), we cannot make sense of such radical doubt. The starting point of our inquiries is precisely a ‘rough ground’ (Cf. *Philosophical Investigations* § 107) where we ascribe mental properties to people. This ground does not have or need a foundation, inasmuch as one does not ordinarily need proof of the humanity of others to treat them as such.

In this respect, Wittgenstein observes a type of immediateness in the way that we become aware of the fact that others undergo mental states, particularly, as we naturally feel compelled to respond to the feelings, beliefs, and desires of others. Such immediacy takes place in the context of a ‘rough ground’ (§ 107) where everyday human beings interact with each other in several ways. Notice, though, that Wittgenstein is not simply pointing out that there is a connection between having instinctive attitudes towards others and recognizing them as human beings. Instead, he provides a picture of this connection where the rationalist assumption that there is something more basic or fundamental than these attitudes – such as *recognizing* others as humans – is excluded. “The attitude,” Cockburn explains, “is what is basic in our relations with each other; it does not have, or need, any underpinning in the form of a ‘belief’ about the character of what we are confronted with” (23). The reason is that we immediately and spontaneously come up with such a belief: “To ‘recognize these as people’, we might say, just *is* to have the attitude” (*Ibid.*). This explains why Wittgenstein does not see the need to justify our reactions and responses to individuals, since forming a belief about the character of others is one more attitude amongst others. Therefore, insofar as ascribing mental states to others occurs instinctively – i.e., as effortlessly as treating others like human beings –, forming an opinion about their

psychological states is not in and of itself a ‘basic’ process on which our reactions and responses to others could be grounded.

Let us now turn to Strawson’s conception of a person in order to establish the basis for arguing later on that Wittgenstein’s human being concept can be shown to connote similar attributes.

## **I.2. Persons**

In *Individuals* (1959), Strawson refers to a concept of a person that denotes a logical type of entity that can be ascribed different types of predicates, regardless of their class. This is, “the concept of a type of entity such that *both* predicates ascribing states of consciousness *and* predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics, a physical situation, etc. are applicable to a single individual of that single type” (388). These predicates apply to such an individual in virtue of the fact that *person* is a logically primitive notion, meaning that it has a central place in our conceptual scheme and in our linguistic practices. The fact that it is an elementary tool in our linguistic repertoire explains how it shapes our attributions of states of consciousness. The concept of a person, he stresses, is logically prior to that of an individual consciousness or body (389), so that ascriptions of psychological and bodily properties are logically secondary, derived from the notion of a person (389). By implication, a *person* cannot be analyzed in terms of those psychological or corporeal concepts, i.e., either as “an animated body or ... an embodied anima.” (389). On the contrary, “states of consciousness could not be ascribed at all, unless they were ascribed to persons” (389) in that the existence of persons is a requisite for mental ascriptions. In other words, the primitive character of this notion is “a necessary condition of states of consciousness

being ascribed at all,” because they are ascribed “to the *very same things* as certain corporeal characteristic, a certain physical situation, etc.” (389).

It follows that the idea of a ‘pure individual consciousness’ understood as a logical ingredient of persons could not exist, or, at least, he thinks that it could not exist as a primitive concept by appeal to which the concept of person could be explained. Rather, if such a notion exists at all, it must be “a secondary, nonprimitive concept, which is itself explained, analyzed, in terms of the concept of person.” (389). A person is thus conceived as a “two-sided thing,” and not as the combination of “two one-sided things” (389) — i.e., as a mind or pure consciousness, on the one hand, and a discrete body, on the other. Therefore, affirming that an individual is a person would not involve conceiving it as an entity made out of a mind and a body (see Descartes 1997 48). From one perspective, a person is said to have a body, not to be one (Hacker “Strawson’s Concept of a Person” 39). From another, mental states like beliefs and desires apply not merely to a body but to a person undergoing those states. According to Strawson, then, ‘I’ does not refer to an ‘inner’ subject of experience or else to someone’s body. Instead, it refers to the *person* employing the pronoun, which is the genuine bearer of both psychological and material ascriptions. The genuine bearer of mental predicates – a person – is naturally suitable for ‘I’ “because I am a person among others. And the [mental] predicates which would, *per impossibile*, belong to the pure subject [of experience] if it could be referred to, belong properly to the person to which “I” does refer” (390).

### **On the First Person/Third Person Asymmetry**

When it comes to ascribing mental states, though, Strawson notices an asymmetry between first- and third-person methods of correction. It can be verified by contrasting how a subclass of

psychological predicates is applied to oneself and how it applies to others. According to him, one attributes these predicates to oneself without the help of any behavioral criterion, but judges the correctness of their ascription to others solely on the basis of their behavior (394). Other-ascription of this set of predicates entails an intention or a state of consciousness which is shown in an action, that is, a pattern of bodily movements (398): “I mean such things as ‘going for a walk,’ ‘furling a rope,’ ‘playing ball,’ ‘writing a letter’” (398). For instance, ‘going for a walk’ is a psychological predicate that we can ascribe to others based on the observation of their actions. The asymmetry, though, resides in the natural fact that I can self-ascribe this property without external basis of observation. To be sure, I can predict my actions without interpreting my own behavior. Strawson claims that that the basis for self-ascriptions of mental properties is “entirely adequate,” and yet, “this basis is quite distinct from those on which one ascribes the predicate to another” (394), as this subset is other-ascribable only on the basis of behavioral criterion.

At the same time, Strawson considers that first- and third-person methods of correction of mental ascriptions are interdependent. Such interdependence lies in the fact that we can interpret others as suitable objects of mental predicates *only if* we are disposed to self-ascribe them. The reverse is also true: namely, we can predicate these psychological properties to ourselves without any observational criterion *because* we are disposed to ascribe them to others. Moreover, in order to interpret the bodily movements of others as *actions*, one conceives oneself in function of the concept of a person: “It is easier to understand how we can see each other, and ourselves, as persons, if we think first of the fact that we act, and act on, each other, and act in accord with a common human nature” (399). As Hacker points out, the methods through which self-ascribable and other-ascribable psychological predicates are applied are not processes with absolutely nothing in common. They rather represent “two sides of a single coin” (“Strawson’s Concept of a

Person” 27). Indeed, he finds that “we interpret ... the movements of the bodies of others only by seeing them as elements of plans of action akin to our own, of which we know the present course and future developments without observation of the present movements of our own body” (27). Strawson’s idea, then, is that we ascribe *intentions* to the persons whose bodily movements we can observe because of a displayed pattern of action *only* to the extent that we are also disposed to ascribe such actions to ourselves. If one is to make sense of one’s own intentions, one must have a sense of what it means to be a person with intentions or dispositions to actions, which can be developed only by conceiving others as relating to one another on the basis of what they intend to do. Therefore, the asymmetry existing between first- and third-person methods of verification does not make any one of these methods more indispensable over the other, for they complement each another in the process of learning how to apply psychological predicates pertaining to the subclass mentioned above.

Now that we have examined Wittgenstein’s notion of a human being and Strawson’s concept of a person, let us see in what ways there is a parity of cases between these approaches.

### **I.3. On the Logical Status of the Human Being Concept**

“Human being” is an ambiguous expression that connotes at least four notions. First, there is the genetic sense of the term referring to a member of the *Homo sapiens* species (Cf. Snowdon 2014). Secondly, there is the moral sense that applies to a member of the moral community (Cf. Warren 1973). Furthermore, Aristotle defines a human being essentially as a rational animal, offering thus a third notion that focuses on the cognitive capacities of this creature. Lastly, there is the ordinary notion instantiated in Wittgenstein’s usage of the expression. During this dissertation, I will employ “human being” in the fourth sense by appealing to the notion with which Wittgenstein

denotes an individual towards whom we possess natural reactions, responses, and dispositions. I will now elaborate on the status of this concept by considering whether it can be interpreted as primitive in our conceptual scheme. Then, I will describe the ways it relates to the genetic notion to further explain the central place it has in our conceptual scheme.

### **The Human Being in a Primitive Conception**

As previously discussed, Strawson speaks of the primitiveness of ‘person’ in relation to the secondary status of notions like ‘consciousness’, ‘mind’, and ‘body’. He argues that the notion of a person cannot be analyzed as that of an individual consciousness or body (389), while maintaining that ascriptions of states of consciousness, together with corporeal ascriptions, can be explained relative to a holistic understanding of a person. Even more, he conceives of the presence of a person as a necessary condition for the ascription of mental and physical states.

Similarly, we can characterize Wittgenstein’s concept of a human being as primitive if it cannot be explained or analyzed either into the genetic, moral, or Aristotelian conception of a human being. Inasmuch as Strawson considers the concept of body to be derived from ‘person’, the ordinary concept of a human being is primitive or basic in relation to the (secondary) status of the genetic notion of a human being. If this is the case, the genetic, moral, and Aristotelian notions of a human being are not logical ingredients of the ordinary concept. Conversely, the ordinary notion must be a logical ingredient of the genetic, moral, and Aristotelian conceptions.

Moreover, Wittgenstein considers the human being holistically, which can be interpreted – like Strawson’s conception of a person – as a unified object of our concern. To the same extent, then, it can be inferred that the common concept we possess of individuals must be present in our conceptual repertoire in a primitive form. For, in the end, through this concept we ultimately

attend to the common man. Practically speaking, from Wittgenstein's perspective we react to the ordinary human being and not just to *some* of its attributes, that is, regardless of what is our attitude towards the individual in its entirety. For instance, we are instinctively prone to attend to the person's suffering; his pain is part of our concern, but only insofar as it is a concern for his individual wellbeing. The ordinary human being, then, is not something we find in the world already categorized either according to a biological, moral, or psychological set of properties. On the contrary, it is after we grasp the common notion that we are able to develop other notions of a human being, depending on the interests and necessities of our endeavor.

Thus, since the ordinary concept occupies a central position in our conceptual network, it serves as a starting point on which the questions driving our inquiries about human beings are based. It would thus be possible to explain our ascriptions of biological, moral, and cognitive properties relative to humans based on our primitive understanding and employment of the human being notion, since these properties can all be traced to the common human. Either a biological, moral, or psychological examination has its own advantages and disadvantages. For although it serves to explain a series of aspects of the ordinary human, since it is interested in one sense of 'human being' over the rest, either investigation cannot do justice to all of the dimensions of the human being. Either way, as each secondary notion of the human being emerges by emphasizing aspects or characteristics of the ordinary individual, each can be said to derive from our ordinary understanding of this being, which is not yet categorized from either perspective.

Now, another way in which Wittgenstein's approach resembles Strawson's is that the presence of an ordinary human being can be interpreted as a necessary condition for the ascriptions of biological, moral, and cognitive characteristics. Let us examine as a case study how the genetic characterization of a human being presupposes the existence of the ordinary human

being, to which we attribute biological properties that fix the latter within the category of a species. What we need to find out, then, is whether the set of properties ascribable to the ordinary human can be exhausted in a complete and accurate biological description of this creature. Specifically, we need to determine if our applications of the ordinary sense of ‘human being’ can be satisfactorily explained in function of a biological account of this individual. With this intention, let us see how the genetic notion of a human being is employed in an animalist approach.

### **A Vantage Perspective on the Ordinary Human Being**

According to Paul Snowdon, what persists over the course of a person’s life is the bodily continuity of an animal. This view is supported on an identity thesis whereby “[e]ach of us is identical with, is one and the same as, an animal” (7). The person one is would amount to no more or less than a human animal situated in a discernible space, so that ultimately “[t]he person is the animal (where the person is)” (4). From his perspective, then, the person does not differ in any relevant way from the *Homo sapiens*. He suggests that many traits we would assign to the ordinary person or human being are explained by evolutionary theory, so that psychology, for example, is irrelevant to animal persistence over time. Its cognitive and linguistic capacities have thus arisen in the course of evolution, just as any other device from which this animal has benefited from (4). The development of these capacities is explained in terms of the ways this organism has thought about its environment.

Yet, Snowdon seems to expand the notion of ‘animal’ so as to capture diverse types of properties we generally attribute to the ordinary human. In his appeal to natural selection, he privileges the biological dimension of the ordinary human being by selecting the genetic category



as the most ‘basic’ perspective to be taken on the human being. This way, the genetic concept is appealed to in order to argue that bodily continuity is what really matters when it comes to deciding what persists during the course of a human life. But it is not clear how this expansion of meaning would be justified. First, in its common sense, “human being” is not meant to apply exclusively to the *body* of a human being. We rather denote with it a single entity, an individual of a primitive logical class. Actually, our instinct is to respond to the other as a human being with physical characteristics, and not particularly as a *homo sapiens*. Secondly, this use of ‘animal’ would at least not be completely justified by evolutionary theory, since, for all we know, the cognitive and linguistic faculties of this animal make it a special case in evolutionary biology. Indeed, we only attribute *some* traits to human beings – such as using language and having culture, which entails passing on knowledge to future generations. Thus, it is not clear how this broad conception of ‘animal’ would be supported through the appeal to natural selection.

Then again, the theoretical advantages of evolutionary theory are not in question. The expansion of the meaning of ‘animal’ could in turn be justified as offering one vantage perspective on the human being based on the background of evolutionary biology. That is, a standpoint on the ordinary human being from which we can predict and explain much of his behavior. Nonetheless, the point is rather that we do not *ordinarily* conceive of the human being as a *homo sapiens*: our understanding of a human being as pertaining to a species comes after the fact, when we classify what type of animal we are from the vantage point offered by evolutionary theory. Our primitive comprehension of the human being would thereby not presuppose or require the biological grounds afforded by evolutionary theory, as we can explain the actions and reactions of common human beings without its help. The issue then with how Snowdon expands the genetic notion of animal is that it sets stringent boundaries on the ordinary notion of a human

being, whilst actually the ordinary concept lacks such limitations. Our primitive understanding of a human being does not involve a distinction between a genetic, moral, or psychological category. From Wittgenstein's perspective, the ordinary expression "human being" has no fixed or definite rules of application (see *Philosophical Investigations* § 81), just as any other ordinary expression. In consequence, we cannot *strictly* define what an ordinary human being is based on necessary and sufficient conditions, given that this ordinary notion has no such sharp boundaries. Setting, then, those strict limitations would not actually solve the natural imprecision of the ordinary sense of "human being."

### **A Sense in which the Ordinary Human is Favored**

But is not the ordinary sense of "human being" *just another sense* of the expression, so that in the end it is not logically primitive? For why should the ordinary concept be privileged over the other notions of a human being? At this stage, it is important to notice that, if the ordinary concept of a human being were primitive, it would only acquire this status in virtue of its relationship with other notions such as the genetic, moral, and Aristotelian. As the latter derive from it, the ordinary concept would be primitive in a relative way. There would not be, so to speak, a *real* sense of "human being" to be favored, for it is clear that this expression is ordinarily ambiguous — favoring such *real* sense would thus be artificial. The common sense, though, is preferred for its practical advantages, to the extent that it plays a central role in our conceptual practices, particularly, in relation to the use of notions derived from it. The ordinary notion is a precondition in our understanding of the different possible senses of "human being," so that without it we could not benefit from the theoretical advantages offered by adopting any particular notion

connoted by it. Thereby, we only favor the ordinary concept insofar as it is the logical beginning of our biological, moral, and psychological inquiries.

On a final note, it is not clear though that metaphysical questions about the nature of human beings can be answered by favoring any secondary sense of “human being” over the rest. All one can do is point out the theoretical advantages and disadvantages of the biologist’s viewpoint, who might be interested in the genetic sense; the psychologist’s stance, who might be concerned with the cognitive-capacity sense; or, finally, the philosopher’s (or someone else’s) stance, who might be interested in the moral sense. In our day-to-day life, however, we seem rather prone to viewing others as ordinary human beings in virtue of our practical concerns. The ordinary sense is thus favored insofar as we naturally fall back on it when it comes to characterizing others as human beings.

Let us now turn to the main issue of the first part of this investigation, namely, the relationship of an ordinary human being and his everyday life so as to understand what his personal identity consists of.

## II. A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO PERSONAL IDENTITY

The main goal of this chapter is to address the philosophical issue of personal identity by expanding Wittgenstein's picture of the human being in a way that further encapsulates aspects of his ordinary life such as his activities and exchanges with other human beings. This will be achieved by elaborating on Schechtman's Person Life View, since her understanding of the concept of a 'person' is in tune with Wittgenstein's notion of a 'human being'. Accordingly, I will be laying out her position while being in agreement with it, as it is also part of the conceptual framework of this project. The reason is that her position will complement Wittgenstein's image of the human being by explicitly including in it his everyday life. In this context, Schechtman's practical approach to the problem of personal identity will be explained by taking over especially her dependence model, the general structure of a person life, and her Person Life View, which are the aspects of her account that will be important when we propose in Chapter III a 'solution' to the issue of personal identity. As will be seen in the last section of this chapter, what is mostly relevant in these places of agreement is her 'external' approximation to a person's identity as opposed to an 'internal', 'essentialist' view of it. It is in this sense that her *practical* approximation to personal identity will be made clear.

The issue we seek to get acquaintance with in this chapter is this: How can one remain the same individual over time? Given the alterations of state and condition that any human being must undergo, in what way can anyone be said to persist continuously, unaltered, during a lifetime? If someone is, strictly speaking, going to *remain*, the issue is then whether a person's hypothetical avoidance of substantive change could somehow have an impact on the constitution of his personal identity. To put it differently: How could anyone in any way bypass all of the

changes implied in fully living? And why would such changes undermine the identity of a person?

In general, we tend to think of a person as having some constituting feature or element “which is there and remains the same” as he grows up, rendering the person ‘the same’ despite the diverse stages of life (Hunter 33). We believe that we have identified such a constituent element after completing the process of identifying a person, or at least assume its presence regardless of whether we can explicitly point out such a constituent (33). Our conception of the identity of a person thereby entails the continuity of a single element during the life of a person, since, upon its presence, a criterion for deciding whether an individual is the same person at different times would help settle the matter. In its absence we would have to decide upon such a criterion that someone is no longer the same but a different person —we would have to insist that the *person* has changed. That is, the individual has not merely changed radically in personality, physical traits, or in some other ‘basic’ way his life has undergone a radical transformation. The person has rather lost his identity:

If Caesar becomes an alcoholic, it is Caesar who is now addicted; but if Caesar becomes Cleopatra, it is not Caesar but Cleopatra who is now Cleopatra. (33)

It makes no sense to talk about two distinct individuals as being the same by saying that one has become the other, the first thereby losing completely his identity: if Caesar is an alcoholic and becomes Cleopatra, then it is Cleopatra who is an alcoholic. If we accept a change of identity, it follows that “we cannot attribute the new identity to the old person” (33). When we refer to a person’s *substantial* change, we are not merely speaking of a change in personality or physical appearance: as the psychological and physical functions of human beings unavoidably decay, by default none of these can constitute the one element capable of continuing ‘the same’ through time and guaranteeing a person’s identity.

However, do we require a grasp of what this alleged constitutive element might be before we can identify people as the individuals they are? From the standpoint of our regular experience, it is clear that identifying human beings is an effortless process, at least to the extent that it does not presuppose theoretical knowledge of the persistence of such an element in a person for the latter to be individuated. But then, if identifying persons is an ordinary activity that does not entail knowledge of the literal preservation during the span of a lifetime of a quality defining who we ‘really’ are, why do we even think of the identity of a person in terms of the continuity of an unaltered element? If our ordinary conception of personal identity does not presuppose an ontological commitment to the continuation or preservation of such a feature, our problem must not be primarily ontological. Since the question of what makes a person the same over time does not require establishing the nature of such an essential element or property constitutive of persons’ identities, we can then focus on the significance of personal identity as it concerns a large range of interactions through which human beings are normally individuated. We can restrict our analysis to the diverse ways that someone’s identity is ordinarily fixed, thus putting aside the philosophical problem of which is the property that gives rise to one’s identity.

Still, an appeal to the specificity of each human being in the context of his exchanges with others would not suffice when it comes to determining how his identity is constituted. We could trivially say that a person’s identity consists of the specific attributes and capacities he possesses, but this would hardly be of help. If we are looking to move on from a basic understanding of what a person is, we need to establish which sort of traits determine whether persons are to be considered as being ‘the same over time’. The defining elements we are seeking must particularly serve in individuating persons if they are going to constitute their identity. Subsequently, whatever might be the elements giving rise to a person’s identity, they must have individuating

characteristics since “otherwise ... [their] presence would not show who a person is (but at most that he is a human being)” (36). As a matter of fact, we do not merely see people as exhibiting features pertaining to a common ‘human nature’ when we track characteristics of individuals with the intention of determining whether they are the same people we used to know. Instead, we distinguish each one as a unique individual depending on the qualities that are *particular* to their humanity, like those “having to do with place of birth, parents, sex, race, social status, job, personality, wishes and dreams” (Canfield 21).

Now, we ordinarily think that such personal traits are central to our understanding of others and ourselves (21), and in this way we feel entitled to the belief that each human being is endowed with ‘selfhood’. Yet, whichever traits might give rise to who a person is, we are not going to be able to discern the latter in virtue of noticing constant traits in him, “since it is agreed that all such characteristics can change without our being bound to say that we have on our hands a different person” (Hunter 36). In effect, everything that matters for deciding whether a person has changed or not happens not to be, as it were, presently displayed for us to appreciate. Perhaps the first-person singular pronoun does not simply denote a particular person or human being uttering it. For if we have at our disposal a criterion of identity for deciding whether someone remains the same through time, we must presumably possess a degree of insight into something *more* than whatever a detailed and comprehensive examination of a specific person at any given moment can show.

All the same, in a vague, general sense we do not hesitate in identifying ourselves with a particular human being with a given set of psychological and physical properties. However, when it comes to defining who this human being is, we cannot make the definition of who we are precise enough to put the matter to rest. We seek to narrow down the extension of ‘I’ trying to

pick out whatever we assume makes up for the person we are. But are we going to posit the existence of a ‘self’ as opposed to a specific, ordinary person we recognize ourselves to be, so that we will say that ‘I’ in a narrow sense selects a ‘self’? Suppose, then, that whatever it is to be a *I* in the narrow sense is not exhausted in being a specific person. Accordingly, whatever it is to be a person would not be equivalent to being a *self*. For if being a person presupposes being a *self*, and if this in turn presupposes being a unity (this is, given his numeric identity), we cannot make use of the concept of a ‘person’ to select the concept of ‘I’. The reason is that ‘I’ is already assumed in the concept of a person. Thereby, personal identity would have little to do with the identity of the ‘self’. As a consequence, it would not be necessary to conceive of ‘I’ as a concept denoting a *self* in the narrow sense in order to understand the multiple ways that persons are individuated. Indeed, inasmuch as a single element or property in persons need not be selected for us to be thought of as being ‘the same’ over time, we do not require ‘selves’ for particular human beings to be identified.

Still, if it is the case that the concept of ‘I’ is not exhausted when defined in terms of the ordinary notion of a human being, why should we define the former by appealing to the latter? At any rate, cannot we define ourselves exclusively as moral, biological, or psychological individuals when it comes to selecting an element capable of meeting the persistence conditions for a human being to continue in life as the same individual? When seen from a metaphysical standpoint, animalism (e.g., Snowden 2014) could provide an appealing theoretical assessment, such that our personal identity would be accounted for through our physical continuity. Nevertheless, as in the case of defining personal identity either in terms of a moral or rational agent, the animalistic alternative would offer an incomplete –although probably accurate– picture of the matter. It would basically fail to speak to the different types of properties and capacities that can be ascribed



in general to ordinary human beings (see I.3). It is by virtue of the many sorts of characteristics that are ascribable to ordinary persons that we end up deciding whether we are confronted with the same person we knew. Thus, even though it is true that in a way each individual is a *Homo sapiens*, this would not get us any closer to fulfilling our task. Even if this account helps us determine *what* we are, it would not serve to individualize *who* we are (see Olson 66).

Meanwhile, one could argue that under a psychological conception of a 'person', personal identity is successfully defined as the continuity of character and memory (see Locke Book Two, ch. xxvii). Nonetheless, this would not help draw a complete picture of the persistence of an ordinary human being over time: while the character of a person might drastically change, there is no loss of identity (see Cockburn 137). Though again, it is not as if the distinction made by Locke between a human animal (which is understood as a living organism) and a person (which is seen as the continuity of psychological capacities and attributes) could not prove useful. This would depend on the type of properties we are looking to underscore so as to explain a given aspect of the ordinary human person. The general point is rather that his distinction between human animal and person makes no real difference in the ordinary human being.

So far we would only have a trivially correct view of personal identity framed within the limits of the types of properties and faculties that can be attributed to ordinary human beings. An alternative meant to overcome this difficulty consists in reconceiving personal identity as a practical issue. Thus understood, our view of the problem would be such that many unwarranted assumptions about the continuity of a single, essential element in a human being could be dropped. As the difficulties concerning the literal identity of persons are pushed to the background, we would focus instead on understanding the conditions under which the identity of a person is practically established. Indeed, as we rethink our general objectives in practical terms,

it looks like we are not searching anymore for a substance concept to explain the meaning of ‘I’, say, as a rational agent, a moral agent, or a Homo sapiens. We are thus not searching for a simple, continuous element, property, or principle constituting our personal identity. This would also demand a change in our methodological expectations, as we are not trying to construct a theory about what satisfies the persistence conditions of a human being. If personal identity is to be treated as practical problem, it naturally requires a practical ‘solution’. The latter will be proposed and evaluated in Chapter III.

In this chapter, we are trying to explain what it means to approach the problem of personal identity from a practical perspective. I want to focus here on the issue of personal identity assuming a primitive, elementary conception of ordinary human beings (Cf. I.3). I follow Schechtman in the idea that we should examine the relevant characteristics of our ordinary lives in order to properly articulate a practical account of personal identity. Thus, the basic connection between Schechtman and Wittgenstein’s considerations about ordinary persons will be presented here.

### **II.1. Personal Identity from a Practical Standpoint**

In order to justify a turn from a metaphysical to a practical approach to the identity of human persons, I adopt the strong dependence model of the relation between practical considerations and the literal identity of these individuals that is offered by Schechtman.

She advances an account of personal identity that takes a person to be an appropriate target of all of our practical concerns, which is to say, of “the different interests, judgments, and practices involved in our interactions with other people” (68). When speaking of a ‘person’, she thinks of the locus of the multiple conceptual activities through which we get to individuate an ordinary human being. According to a strong dependence model of the relationship between

personal identity and practical concerns, the reality of persons is a necessary condition for the application of a wide set of practical considerations about them. Although our main endeavor is restricted to practical concerns about a human person, that does not mean that there is nothing to be said about the literal identity of this individual. On the contrary, from the standpoint of the strong dependence model there is an ontological commitment to the existence and reality of a person conceived as “an appropriate target of practical questions and concerns” (41). An account of personal identity is thus meant to individuate the target of our considerations for these to be intelligible (41), so that, ultimately, our practical concerns presuppose such a target. Schechtman sees this model as one in which there is a logical dependence between personal identity and practical concerns. The relationship between these two is conceptual: “an account of personal identity ... [is] conceptually dependent upon practical considerations because the relation which constitutes identity must by necessity be one which makes a person an intrinsically appropriate unit about which to raise particular practical questions” (41). A practical approach to personal identity would then shed light onto the metaphysical status of persons, since practical questions and considerations end up fixing the reference of these individuals in order to evaluate them as objects of our concerns: “[p]ractical concerns are dependent on facts about personal identity in the sense that identity must be in place before particular practical judgments can be appropriately made—identity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for these judgments” (41). Therefore, Schechtman relies on such a model to indirectly provide an account of the literal identity of persons.

Given our objectives in this chapter, we can think of Wittgenstein’s understanding of human beings as supporting this strong dependence model. From this perspective, his picture of the human being presupposes the existence of an individual with whom to enter in contact and

towards whom to develop instinctive attitudes. From another point of view, it is worth mentioning that Strawson underscores the primitive character of the notion of a ‘person’ to suggest that this notion constitutes a necessary condition for the attribution of states of consciousness and physical characteristics (389). One might thus say that most of our conceptual practices are intrinsically tied to the ontological commitment to human persons.

In the following sections, we will see how to expand the picture of the ordinary human being provided by Wittgenstein so as to include in it elements that are pertinent to the discussion of his personal identity.

### **The Expanded Set of Practical Considerations**

On the basis of an expanded conception of a ‘person’, Schechtman tackles the issue of which practical considerations are inherently linked to a person’s identity. She proposes an explanation of the full range of person-related practices that constitute a practical unity relative to a person and his life. In effect, she is looking for a type of complex unity to be associated with the concept of a ‘person’ that includes a full range of practical considerations and interests.

Schechtman argues for opening up our understanding of the notion of a ‘person’ so as to capture not only with it individuals that fall in the forensic category –those that can be rightly praised or blamed for their actions– but, moreover, the full range of behaviors encompassed in ‘treating others’ as ordinary persons. In harmony with Wittgenstein’s holistic picture of a human being, she conceives of the notion of a ‘person’ as connoting “the full range of everyday behaviors that make up the lives of human persons” (72). Such comprehension of a ‘person’ is thereby not restricted to the range of behaviors generally associated with those of either a moral or rational agent. Being a person would not only entail a range of forensic capacities and moral

attributes but, even more, the large set of behaviors of ordinary human beings in the context of their daily lives.

This way, Schechtman enlarges the forensic notion of a ‘person’ used by Locke so as to capture ordinary aspects of our interactions with one another. Recognizing someone as a person would not be limited to judging him as such in virtue of the moral or rational properties he exhibits. While adopting Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘forms of life’, she argues on the contrary that conceiving “someone as a person is not to make a particular kind of judgment about her, but rather to treat her in the myriad ways that this form of life entails” (72). Seeing and treating someone ‘as a person’ would not then presuppose “sophisticated assessments of moral responsibility or prudential rationality,” as it rather involves basic practices that help constitute someone’s personal identity (75). Being a person, therefore, is not just about bearing rights, being the object of duties, or being a proper object of praise and blame (75) as it entails a wider range of behaviors, including the instinctive responses by means of which we regularly interact with other human beings. She thus widens the concept of personhood as applying to individuals that might not be regarded as such according to a psychological description of personhood that excludes infants, those who have lost their mental capacities, and the mentally challenged: “[e]ven those who lack these capacities (e.g., very young children, the demented, and those with significant deficits) can be treated as, and so constituted as, persons with personal identities” (74). For instance, treating someone with dementia as a person involves more than judging him as a person *because* it meets a minimum rational threshold. Schechtman thinks of ‘person’, instead, as a concept designating the individuals connoted by the forensic notion and the ones excluded by it, like the patient with dementia, who is still treated as a person although he might actually be acting like an animal. Likewise, it can be argued that “those who lack sentience can be (and are)

included, albeit minimally, in person-effective activities,” as in the case of an individual in a persistent vegetative stage: “[it] is typically dressed in clothes, lies in a bed with sheets, and is referred to by a name” (74). It is thus that, while these individuals might not actually possess and exhibit the cognitive properties normally ascribed to human beings, “[t]hey are the recipients of person-specific attentions even if they cannot actively reciprocate” (74).

Schechtman stresses that she is not diminishing the significance of the forensic notion of personhood. Her point is rather that an account of personhood and personal identity focused solely on this notion would not be complete: “it is not enough to define identity in a way that makes persons exclusively forensic units” (76). An adequate account, she suggests, has to comprehend also the multiple practices constituting a person’s identity, “such that on it persons are appropriate units of forensic concern as well as of other kinds of concerns and practices associated with personal identity” (76).

## **II.2. The Unity of a Person Life**

While addressing the issue of personal identity, Schechtman simultaneously tackles what she refers to as the ‘problem of multiplicity’, i.e., the difficulties encountered when trying to provide an account for the single relationship in virtue of which a person has an identity (81). By insulating such a relationship, a response to the issue is in principle attempted as such a relation would account for the continuity of an individual by meeting its persistence conditions. As these problems are interconnected, she addresses them simultaneously by selecting a unit as an appropriate target of a wide net of practical concerns.

The problem of multiplicity specifically involves accounting for how “an *individual* person, defined as the appropriate target of the range of person-related practices and concerns,”

can be constituted by “a single entity” (87). The difficulty lies in the fact that, if we think of ‘human being’ or ‘person’ as terms denoting different types of individuals, we would not have a unified locus for our multiple practical considerations and questions. With the use of a moral conception of a ‘human being’, for instance, we would refer to a moral agent bearing rights and respect; with a genetic sense of the expression, we would denote a *Homo sapiens*; and by means of defining a human being as a rational and speaking animal, we would target a rational agent. Similarly, when we employ ‘person’ in a forensic sense, we signify an individual accountable for his actions; but while we use it in a moral sense, we refer to an individual that is a member of the moral community. How, then, can the variety of considerations we can have about human beings and persons, respectively, be explained in terms of a single, continuous entity? With regard to a ‘human being’, such an entity would have to be at once a *Homo sapiens*, a moral and a rational agent, while in the case of a ‘person’ it would have to be both a rational and moral agent. Yet, if we are looking for a single relationship explaining the continuity or persistence of an individual, it appears as if we are confronted with an impossible choice.

Admittedly, it is not clear how embracing one or another notion of either ‘human being’ or ‘person’ can help since, for example, when using ‘person’ in a forensic sense infants and those with severe cognitive deficits would fall out of the category. But if we follow Schechtman in the idea that several types of practical considerations relative to persons in ordinary contexts help constituting their identities, then the forensic notion will not do. For if we operate solely with the forensic notion, we readily dismiss any dimension of a human life that is not an object of duties and responsibilities as external or accidental to what constitutes his identity. But as there many different types of practical concerns that apply to an ordinary person, Schechtman argues, “it is by no means obvious that we will be able to encounter a single relation that defines an appropriate

target for them all” (81). This means that there is no single practical relation that makes up for a person identity, so that “the project of finding a single relation that defines the appropriate locus for our practical concerns appears ... hopeless” (81). Given the complex unity of the life of a person or human being in which there is no single relation underlying all of the different types of practical concerns and questions that can be raised about him, there is nothing to select as uniquely responsible for his personal identity. As there is no one thread, as it were, based on which we could say what the identity of a person resides in, a potential solution to problem of multiplicity seems incoherent: “[i]f the aim is to define a locus which is the appropriate target of *all* of our person-related practices (including forensic judgments) *and* to define personhood in such a way that those who are not appropriate targets of forensic judgments are persons,” such an aim “is going to be pretty hard to meet” (81).

Now, Schechtman does not quite abandon the problem of multiplicity as if it were ill-founded. On the contrary, according to her we encounter in the ordinary world “unified (albeit ridiculously complex and multi-faceted) individuals” (83). This much is clear in the context of our daily interchanges with others:

[t]he son I feed and clothe and comfort is the same person I chastise for behaving badly to her sister and the same person to whom I try to teach the value of hard work and explain the benefit of making small sacrifices now for larger benefits later. He is also the same person whose straight As bring me pride and whose disappointments are a cause for my sadness, and the person whose health I am concerned to safeguard. I do not have a moral son and an animal son and a psychological son—I have a single son who has all of these aspects and is important to me in all of these ways. (83)

She suggests there is something odd in the presuppositions that give rise to the problem of multiplicity. Particularly, this issue is at odds not only with how our practical exchanges come about but with how our practical concerns demand the existence of a unified individual as their target, however complex this might actually be. The point, then, is not that the individual cannot



be treated solely according to one of his given dimensions; one could be concerned only with a person as a psychologically endowed animal insofar as the task of a psychiatrist, for instance, is to enhance someone's mental wellbeing. But, one way or the other, we presuppose the existence of other facets of a person without compromising the integrity of his identity when focusing only on his psychological aspects. Therefore, "[h]owever much complexity there is to our practical lives each of us is, in the end, a single thing" (84), meaning, *one* multifaceted entity. This is why we might after all "have a further question about *what* it is that possesses self-consciousness, rationality, and the ability to act as a moral agent" (84). Ultimately, our practical considerations are about a single individual: they are "concerns ... directed at *someone*, and in the end we want an answer to the question of what constitutes the integrity of that someone" (85).

The again, Schechtman's issue is not to address the question of a person's identity by singling out a unique, intrinsic type of relationship in virtue of which an individual can literally be said to be the same over time. For "[i]f we must have a single unified entity that is the target of the full range of person-related practices," then there does not exist a single relation that can be taken as the target of all of our practical concerns (84). But if, on the other hand, the multiplicity of relationships constituting an individual's life do not compromise our experience of person as a multifaceted being that, still, is identical to himself, then, according to Schechtman, maybe we should "give up on the idea that the target of our practical interactions and judgments must be intrinsically suited for being so" (84). If our business is instead to point out, from an external perspective, how diverse types of practical considerations and concerns are linked to form a complex unity, it follows that what matters when individuating persons is not a single relationship:

[p]erhaps all we need is *an* entity that we are able to individuate and track over time, and which can be designated as the individual about which we ask practical

questions, make practical judgments, and otherwise engage in person-related interactions. Of course we have such an entity ready to hand in the form of the human organism. (84)

The challenge of an individual unity involved in problem of multiplicity is thus met by understanding the identity of a person in terms of different relations making him an appropriate locus of the full range of person-related concerns even though these concerns can come apart, so that a person is understood, at any given time, as a unified target of a variety of distinct practical concerns.

In order to explain how Schechtman describes the way these diverse relationships constitute personal identity, let us now examine her understanding of the different aspects of a person's ordinary life.

### **The Paradigmatic Structure of a Person Life**

Remember that Schechtman uses 'human being' and 'person' in their ordinary sense which follows from her adoption of Wittgenstein's phraseology (see 114). Particularly, she employs the notion of a 'person' in an ordinary sense in her discussion of paradigmatic forms of human life. She refers to "beings like *us*—you who are reading a book and I who am writing it" when articulating a model of a paradigmatic or standard person life (114). In turn, she avoids the challenge to individual unity by defining personal identity in terms of the unity of the *life* of a person, referring thus to a single yet multi-faceted 'entity' (109). In general, she conceives of a 'person life' as something "held together by the form of its unfolding" structure and not, say, by the existence of a definite human animal (109). That here is such a thing as the form of a person life is clear from a holistic perspective, this is, understanding a human life as a structured,

ongoing whole. Diachronically, a person is constituted by an *entire* life, and not just by the attributes that can be ascribed to him at any given stage of it:

[i]t is a structural whole that has, by its very nature, attributes that apply to it as a whole which do not necessarily apply to each individual portion. We can thus say that the mature person is the same person as the infant or (in unlucky cases) dementia patient because there is a single life course that starts (roughly) with infancy, develops into maturity, and devolves (possibly) into dementia. The person is defined by the unfolding of the pattern in which these stages all play their part. (108)

The *form* of the complete diachronically structured unity described by the unfolding life of a person accounts for the singularity of his life (108).

Then again, how does she exactly conceive of the structure of a person life? Schechtman advances the Person Life View whereby we generally define persons in terms of the “characteristic lives they lead” (110). Being a person amounts to having or living a ‘person life’: “persons are individuated by individuating person lives; and the duration of a single person is determined by the duration of a single person life” (110). She explains what it is to be a person by accounting for the basic structure of a typical person life, implying that peoples’ lives share a distinctive and standard structure, although not a stringent one—in the end, what counts as a ‘standard person life’ varies from culture to culture. She appeals to paradigmatic cases of persons’ lives by pointing to “typical enculturated humans” (111), so that paradigmatic exemplars of human beings exhibit the standard structure of a person life. It is, then, an appeal to a typical/atypical distinction between forms of person life that brings forward practical considerations meant to provide the elements required for a proper definition of personal identity.

### II. 3. A Property Cluster Model of a Person Life

Now that we have seen what the paradigmatic structure of an ordinary human life consists of, we will explain in what way Schechtman's account of personal identity is practical in character. This can be seen in the fact that she assumes an externalist approach, which ends up being more persuasive than competing positions such as animalism because she does not rely on an intrinsic attribute of human beings like the biological property of being an animal to define his identity. This way, she avoids formulating an essentialist account of personal identity that would not in the end satisfy us. This biological property together with the psychological and social aspects of human beings are rather subsumed under her view of persons, as she gives them a place in her practical approach. Therefore, her account is 'practical' as she thinks of the human being in the context of his everyday life, where all of these aspects contribute to his personal identity. Particularly, her approach to the 'person life' of this individual is practical as it involves his regular activities and interactions of with other human beings.

There is, of course, a way in which it is trivially true that there is a human being out there with a life of his own. With the intention of rendering her conception of a person life informative, Schechtman maintains that the characteristic developmental trajectory which we recognize as a standard person life is constituted by "three interconnected levels: the level of [individual] capabilities and attributes, the level of activities and interaction, and the level of social infrastructure" (138). First, we find a typical encultured human being with biological and psychological capacities and attributes serving as a paradigmatic example. This is the dominion of properties normally attributed to an ordinary person. Secondly, we find the particular interactions in a daily life of a person with other human beings and the activities he engages in. Finally, there is a cultural and social set of "institutions and practices that grow out of social organization of

beings who ... set the norms that govern interactions among persons” (138). She thinks of the previous level as forming a “person-space” (138) wherein the daily life on a person occurs. In this third level –which comprises the other two– we find practices, customs, and institutions that offer the background within which we judge the daily activities and interactions of particular persons (112).

In this way, Schechtman advances a picture of a typical mature person in terms of the three interconnected levels. Hierocles similarly thought that “each one of us is, as it were, entirely encompassed by many circles, some smaller, others larger” (qtd. in Martin and Barresi 26). The individual human being

has drawn as though around a center, his own mind ... the body and anything taken for the sake of the body; for it is a circle of virtually minimal radius, and almost touches the center itself ... further removed from the center, but enclosing the first circle [are] parents, siblings, wife, and children ... [and in the] outermost and largest circle [is] the whole human race. (26)

Schechtman notices how social, psychological, and biological properties and functions belong to different levels in a person life, and they reciprocate one another in a way that a distinct life of a human being emerges. Because of such reciprocity, an individual can develop a personal identity:

[w]e have already seen the way in which [the sociocultural] infrastructure shapes the kinds of daily activities, relationships, and interactions a person engages in by setting the parameters within which these take place and providing the background institutions and practices they require. But the infrastructure is also constrained by the physical and psychological attributes of the individuals who reside in the person-space it defines. (115)

What is more, the property of ‘being alive’ is attributed holistically to the human individual, and not ascribed to any of his parts. What is true of the whole person in the context of his life and within the parameters of a sociocultural infrastructure is not true of any of his dimensions.

Likewise, being ‘one and the same’ is not a property that applies to any given dimension of the person (whether it is the psychological, moral, or biological) but to the person itself relative to his

life. Being someone, thereby, would not be reduced to being a moral agent, a rational animal, or a Homo sapiens. It would further involve engaging with others and performing activities that constitute a person life in the wider context of a given sociocultural infrastructure. Since we apply holistically a host of biological, psychological, and social attributes to ordinary persons, such distinctions among categories of functions and properties can mislead us into thinking that an individual human being is made up of “a biological or psychological or social life” (115). Yet, when we speak of the life of a person we rather refer to particular sorts of activities “within a person life” involving interactions with other human beings (115). Then, the particular way in which a life unfolds would explain how a person persists over time as the same individual, as we ascribe to the human being physical and psychological properties and capacities but, moreover, social qualities and functions.

It is important to further notice that Schechtman has only offered a picture of a human being to whom a cluster of properties applies in a given context. But the division shown between the levels mentioned might be somewhat artificial (115), given that the typical psychological and biological attributes of the individual, his daily life, and the sociocultural infrastructure wherein such a life takes place complement, reinforce, and support one another. Such differentiation of levels, however, is still helpful insofar as it provides guidance in grasping the ways in which the elements pertaining to the different categories relate to one other:

The development on the one hand of cognitive and agential capacities and on the other increasingly complex and self-directed interpersonal relationships and interactions should not be seen as distinct processes, but rather as two sides of a single coin. In order to develop psychologically and physically as human persons typically do, it is necessary to mature in an environment that provides the proper scaffolding and social support for such development. By the same token, there are particular psychological capacities that are required if one is to engage in the more sophisticated kinds of interpersonal interactions found in a standard in a standard person life ... Without the ability to develop these internal resources active participation in a person life would be severely limited. (112)

A given sociocultural infrastructure is necessary for there to be a person life, and this infrastructure presupposes, in turn, an individual with psychological and physical properties to ever live a person life, as “the infrastructure could not exist ... unless those who are part of person-space have the necessary capacities and attributes to create and maintain it” (112). Thereby, such individual capacities and properties constitute a necessary condition both for a person life to exist and for there to be a person-space wherein the activities of such a life can take place, since the institutions and customs constituting a sociocultural infrastructure depend on the existence of individual capacities and properties of persons. Indeed, according to this picture, “[t]he development of institutions and norms of the sort that define person lives (e.g., prisons, or systems of punishment, economies, theologies, art) requires beings who have certain kinds of memory systems, reflective self-consciousness, rationality, and related cognitive and affective abilities” (116).

Meanwhile, the individual capacities of persons depend both on sociocultural institutions and on the activities and interactions constituting persons’ lives (116). Without the framework offered by a sociocultural infrastructure, there would be no place for a person’s life to acquire a form of its own, in the absence of which it would not make sense in turn to speak of a person’s identity. In effect, our psychological and physical capacities “depend upon the existence of a social infrastructure and engagement in characteristic lives” (116). In the absence of these two levels, individual capacities would not develop, at least not to the extent and manner we would associate with the qualities of a typical mature person. When we search for the traits of a standard mature person in a human life form within the context of a given community, it is clear that the “sophisticated and agential capacities of human persons depend upon social scaffold to develop,” so that, for example, if they are not exposed to language or the appropriate kinds of

developmental stimuli, infants will “not develop the kind of cognitive, social, and affective capabilities that are found in mature persons” (116).

Hence, Schechtman’s Person Life View is a practically-based account of a standard person life (118). This is clear from the fact that “a person life is made up of the kinds of practical interactions peculiar to persons, and occupying a place in person-space just is to be a locus of the practical interests and concerns that apply to beings like us” (118). An implication of this view is that having a personal identity presupposes leading a particular form of life comparable in *some* way to the paradigmatic structure of a person life. This aspect of Schechtman’s view is further elaborated on the next chapter.

### **The Sociocultural Infrastructure as a Form of Life of Personhood**

In this section, we will provide elements that are relevant for the articulation of a ‘solution’ to the personal identity issue in the next chapter. We lay here the groundwork for then pointing to similarities between Schechtman’s Person Life View and Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘forms of life’.

According to Schechtman, a particular form of life of a human individual amounts to an exemplar of the general form of life of a community. For living a person life entails more than being a suitable object of ascription of a cluster of physical, psychological, and social properties in the context of the activities and interactions making up one’s daily life. If it is going to count as such, a person life should aim to be a model of the general standard of a typical human life. But, in order to be a model, there must be a fixed background of assumptions against which the accordance or deviation of a given life can be judged. This background, Schechtman argues, sets the parameters within which our person life unfolds, informing us of the *type* of person that we are (113). Moreover, the social roles we engage in when interacting with others are validated



externally, i.e., by the standard of a community: “[i]n the case of human persons, for instance, other humans play a particular prescribed role that is set by social and cultural institutions and not accorded on an individual basis” (113). Therefore, what counts as being a particular person with a typical life sets the bar for what a community of speakers would accept as such.

One could object to the Person Life View that it leads to conventionalism. A ‘typical’ developmental trajectory of human exemplars is presumably going to be whatever a given community of speakers takes as ‘typical’. Schechtman replies by pointing out the fact that we have not explicitly agreed to adopt the sociocultural infrastructure wherein our lives develop. This ‘person-space’ afforded by living in a sociocultural infrastructure “is not simply something we choose or make up, but rather something that evolves with us and is responsive to and constrained by facts about us and about the world” (119). This does not yet imply that there is something like a sociocultural macrostructure composed of the general forms of life of existing communities: “[o]f course,” she claims, “not every culture must contain all of ... [the same] elements, and the details of such institutions will vary over time and place” (119). The sociocultural infrastructure, though, is “absolutely central” inasmuch as it is required for the existence of personhood:

[t]here would be no persons without person-space, and to be living a person life is to be accorded a place in person-space, to live as and be treated as a unified locus of the sorts of practical concerns and interactions that typify the life of those who generate and maintain the social/cultural infrastructure within which these lives take place. (119)

Furthermore, what is accepted as a person or human being is not a matter of belief or opinion. Schechtman argues that to treat someone as a human being is to make him a focus of our practical concern, as we are instinctively prone to form an attitude towards him. Reacting to others as if they were human beings shows our commitment to ascribe to them “automatically ... a place in person-space,” this is, as long as they have a life of their own, since “a person is constituted by a

person life” (188). Following Wittgenstein (*Philosophical Investigations* II, IV, § 22), Schechtman suggests that the background of ‘assumptions’ composing the sociocultural infrastructure we live in is not merely *believed in* (114). It is not as if we simply *think* that others are persons because of the attributes they display and, under that assumption, we are willing to interact with them expecting some given set of responses in return. Instead, the diverse ways we instinctively react and respond to others signal a deep commitment to their humanity:

We do not, when we encounter animate things in daily life, make an assessment of their attributes and capabilities before deciding whether they should be viewed and treated as fellow persons. When we encounter other humans we automatically see them as persons and interact with them as such. (113)

In other words, we do not get to choose who we will regard as a fellow human being: our reactions give away the fact that we naturally see them as such. Thus, treating ‘others’ as particular forms of human life involves having a basic attitude or orientation towards the humanity in others. Such an attitude is not restricted to a rigid set of dispositions. Treating others as members of the world of life roughly involves being disposed to see them as if they were part of a larger community of persons than those included in a given sociocultural infrastructure (114).

### **Unity of Life and Personal Identity**

From the perspective of the Person Life View, what makes up for a person’s identity depends on how a person life is individuated, so that the persistence of a person is tantamount to the continuation of a person life. Schechtman maintains that persons are individuated in terms of their lives, i.e., their daily interactions and activities (139). This is possible given her conception of a ‘person life’ as a term connoting a cluster of psychological, biological, and social properties which are holistically assigned to an ordinary person.

Nevertheless, it is not as if any given (type of) property constitutes a necessary or sufficient condition for a person to persist. As long as there is a person life to be continued, it will be possible to say of a corresponding human being that it is the same person. Following Chiong (141-85), Schechtman suggests that the persistence conditions of a person life are not bound by the limits of the continuation of any given element in a person. Actually, no element is necessary or sufficient for a person life to continue and, hence, for a person to be the same. Chiong maintains that 'being alive' is a property that connotes "a cluster of characteristics—none of which is in itself necessary and sufficient for an organism to be alive, but all of which contribute to an organism's being alive," as the properties applicable to ordinary human beings tend to support and constrain one another in paradigmatic instances (Schechtman 138). Thus, as all of the different properties and functions that are ascribed holistically to a person contribute to the persistence of his life, Schechtman claims that no element is indispensable for one to validly speak of a person as persevering in existence (138).

We can give up on the project of defining the personal identity of an individual in terms of the continuation of *some* set of properties as, for example, his biological traits, since "[l]ives are ... such complicated and multi-faceted things that providing a single list of necessary and sufficient conditions for one to continue would be hopeless" (138). When speaking of the continuation of a person life, Schechtman recommends that we look for the persistence of a cluster of properties and functions without looking for any specific property or function to subsist (145). Given a series of characteristics taken as paradigm cases of person lives, Schechtman accounts for the continuation of a person life as the perpetuation of the support, constrain and dependency of biological, psychological, and social capacities and functions on one another (147). Such relations among properties integrate a particular human being into his own life form,

resulting in a practical unity responsible for the continuation of the person. In effect, it is due to the interaction of the different types of properties and functions that a life continues, and not because of the specific persistence of any given property or function that the person remains the same. The persistence conditions for an individual are thereby explained in terms of the continuation of a whole entity regardless of whether any of his parts stay the same over time.

To illustrate this point, Schechtman employs Olson's analogy between the life of a human organism and the life of a storm. Under normal circumstances, we can decide

whether the storm that hit Cuba yesterday and the storm that brought floods to Alabama today are the same storm or different ones; and our ability to know this doesn't involve any judgments about the persistence of material objects. We don't first need to find out whether the material object composed of all and only those particles caught in the Cuban storm is the same as, or different from, the material object composed of those particles caught in the Alabama storm. There may not even be any such material objects. (139-40)

Schechtman contends that we can obviously identify a storm at different times without having any independent way of verifying whether "all and only the matter that is caught up in it" has remained (141). Similarly, in the case of person, "we are in principle able to identify and reidentify salient loci of interaction by a string of events rather than through the reidentification of material substance" (141.). The central point is that, when it comes to individualizing a person life, our criteria is not merely grounded on bodily continuity. Instead, "[a]ll that is necessary" when it comes to identifying and reidentifying human lives "is to be able to follow the series of activities that makes up an event of the appropriate kind—a life or a storm" (141). It is then a mistake to try and define personal identity solely as the continuation of a bodily substance, when, after all, there is no such material organism existing independently of the structure of a person life. As in the "case of the storm, in which there is no presumption that there *is* any independent

object ... identity conditions are clearly set by the activities” happening in the daily lives of the person (141).

### III. IN CONSTANT RETURN TO THE WORLD OF LIFE

The aim of this chapter is to propose and evaluate the viability of a ‘solution’ or ‘treatment’ for the issue of personal identity. The intention is to further justify our practical approach to this topic. Indeed, if personal identity were understood as a practical issue, it could actually be solved in the context of daily activities and exchanges with others. A person would not be said then to *have* by default an identity regardless of the concrete life he leads and the sociocultural framework wherein such a life unfolds (Schechtman 113). Instead, a person would obtain for practical purposes an identity as the result of gaining a considerable degree of unity or integrity with his own life, so that his life would be ‘in agreement’ with the typical way human beings live and interact with each other in society.

Now, if we view the issue of personal identity from a practical standpoint, it is clear that the only persons requiring such a ‘remedy’ would be the ones who, having departed from ordinary ways of living, have become distanced from their own lives. In a way, they no longer form a “practical unity” (73) with these. Having become alienated or dissociated from regular ways of relating to others, these individuals could value suggestions meant to help them in readjusting to what a given community deems as a ‘standard’ form of person life. This readjustment would involve the accommodation of a person life to a given sociocultural infrastructure or ‘person-space’ (114). Then, as our lives acquire unity in function of how well we assimilate to society, the “issue” with someone’s personal identity or lack thereof would consist of the gradual deterioration of patterns of behavior that we conventionally associate with the ways of life of ordinary human beings. It can be argued, thus, that this problem is treatable insofar as an estranged person manages to recover and embody many of the patterns of behavior of full-blown, typical individuals.

The task here is to explain the details of how such a ‘readjustment’ is supposed to take place and the way it is meant to serve those who are alienated from ordinary forms of living. In this respect, it will be useful to examine some aspects of Wittgenstein’s early and later philosophy, for he conceived of the transformation of one’s form of life as the ultimate objective of his philosophy. Moreover, I suggest that this is precisely the type of change that dissociated individuals should undergo in order to adjust to a ‘standard’ way of living. It will be necessary, though, to consider why Wittgenstein thinks that this vital transformation is not possible if one’s time is consumed with trying to go beyond meaningful speech so to articulate ‘the purpose’ of life, say, with the intention of ultimately understanding why one might not be fulfilling it. This further demands an explanation of the attitude that Wittgenstein suggests we adopt towards ordinary uses of language, as his goal is to assist us in resisting the temptation to go past meaningful uses of language to diagnose what is essentially ‘wrong’ with our life.

In the following section, I will propose a way of reading the *Tractatus* (1999) that will eventually serve us in formulating an answer to the problem of alienation. As we first explain Wittgenstein’s conception of language in the *Tractatus*, we will construe an interpretation of the ethical resonance of this work that will shed light on ways of overcoming alienation. The elements that will play a key role in this interpretation are Wittgenstein’s conception of the ‘willing subject’, the ‘proper attitude towards life’ that falls out from the relation of this subject and the world, and his notion of the ineffable, this is, ‘what cannot be said’. Thus, the problem of personal identity –which, from a practical standpoint, is understood as the issue of alienation– will be initially tackled by explaining the connection between the ‘willing subject’, his attitude towards life, and a type of change in his attitude that can serve him in overcoming alienation.

Moreover, his early philosophy will be interpreted in accordance with his later philosophy with some qualifications, particularly, with regard to the conception of ‘forms of life’ appearing in the *Investigations* (§ 241). In the second and last section, the idea is to offer the basis for a construal of Wittgenstein’s treatment of alienation that is compatible with Schechtman’s conception of a ‘person life’ (110-119). It will be clear that the ‘therapies’ Wittgenstein offers in order to surmount alienation go hand in hand with the framework of a person life provided by Schechtman. Thereby, against the backdrop offered by her, the ordinary human being would find a way of aligning his way of life with the forms of life of a community, such that his personal identity would gain the class of ‘practical unity’ (75-78) required for having a full-fledged personal identity (141), this is, as opposed to the watered-down identity common in alienated human forms of life.

### **III.1. Wittgenstein’s Early Transcendentalism: What Cannot Be Said**

Wittgenstein’s main objective in the *Tractatus* is to demarcate meaningful speech. He wants to “draw a limit to thinking, or rather—not to thinking, but to the expression of thought,” excluding in turn meaningless expressions, such that “what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense” (27). He believes that this limit cannot be drawn *in* thought, for otherwise, “in order to draw a limit to thinking we would have to think both sides of this limit,” which is impossible — that is, we would have to “be able to think what cannot be thought” (27). He wants indeed to set this boundary from within language.

To accomplish this, he first distinguishes between two classes of propositions. On the one side, there are *empirical judgments*, i.e., statements of fact, which are either true or false in virtue of accurately or inaccurately representing states of affairs. On the other side, there are *logical truths* and *falsehoods* that respectively amount to tautologous and self-contradictory statements. It



is said that the truth-value of the second class of propositions can be ascertained regardless of what is the case, whilst the truth-value of statements included in the first class can only be known after considering what the facts are. Assuming, then, that meaningful language is exhausted in these two classes of statements, any other type of proposition would have to be senseless. Propositions that are meant to state something other than matters of fact or else show logical connections between statements would lack meaning, because significant uses of language are classified in this way.

This explains why Wittgenstein regards philosophical, ethical, aesthetic, and religious statements as ‘nonsensical’. From this perspective, these propositions transgress the restrictions of significant discourse. Basically, people who articulate them fail to understand the logic of language, contravening restrictions presupposed in the very utterance of meaningful speech. As these propositions do not entail either assertions of fact or logical truths or falsehoods, they cannot express anything: our language is just not suited for expressing what lies beyond our ordinary experience or specialized knowledge.

In the interest of contextualizing his early views, it is worth considering why Wittgenstein distances himself from the way Ayer, Carnap, and other Logical Positivists interpret the status of philosophical propositions. Even though Wittgenstein agrees with Carnap, for example, in characterizing metaphysical propositions as “pseudo-statements” (Carnap 74), this expression does not mean the same for Wittgenstein. Carnap thinks of metaphysics as the “*expression of the general attitude of a person towards life*” (78). Metaphysical statements would thus relieve a concrete urge: they arise from “the need to give expression to a man’s attitude in life,” an attitude that would manifest itself “in everything a man does or says” (78) as it impresses “itself on his facial features, perhaps even on the character of his gait” (79). Meanwhile, Wittgenstein believes

that metaphysical statements cannot express anything, not even an attitude towards life. He rejects Carnap's emotivism as he goes on to make the stronger claim that philosophical propositions in general, together with ethical and religious statements, are literally meaningless. Expressing an 'attitude towards life' would somehow involve appreciating life as a whole; still, no fact or sum of facts can portray 'life as a whole', for this would require observing life from the *outside*, i.e., from a perspective external to language. In the end, it so happens that there is nothing to have a general attitude about in that regard. Metaphysical propositions rather intend to assert something about what lies beyond our regular experience of facts, so they cannot be true or false about anything.

To see exactly why he thinks that these uses of language express nothing, it is necessary to explain Wittgenstein's distinction between what can be said but not shown as opposed to what can be shown but not said.

### **The Sense of a Proposition: What Can Be Shown**

Wittgenstein argues that the sense of a proposition is *shown* in the way that states of affairs are represented or depicted in the context of a statement. For example, the fact that I am sitting down at the moment is shown with the help of a description, such that, in virtue of the correlation between elements in the description and objects in the fact, it can be said that the corresponding description is true. Even so, this fact "can be described but not *named*" (*Tractatus* § 3.144). Since the meaning of a proposition is precisely the description of an event, the state of affairs making up the event can be described. We can thus show with the help of descriptions *how* the 'world' is, which is defined as "the totality of facts, not of things" (§ 1.1). Still, we cannot *say* what the world is. Making an analogy, Wittgenstein claims that "[n]ames resemble points; propositions resemble arrows, they have sense" (§ 1.1). This means that an object can only be named if it

constitutes the meaning of a sign, just like we can name a person by using a proper name. In that way, the proposition in which the object is named refers to a fact containing the object in question. Such a reference is possible as we combine names of objects in the framework provided by elementary propositions (§ 2.01). Therefore, a description is meaningful insofar as it shows the configuration of objects in a fact, although it cannot “name the fact” itself, as it were; it only means to *show* how objects are related in a fact, given the reciprocal agreement of names with objects. Therefore, Wittgenstein maintains that “[o]nly the proposition has sense; only in the context of a proposition has a name meaning” (§ 3.3), which implies that the meaning of a proposition can merely be *shown* and not *said*. Propositions, then, solely reveal the organization of elements in facts, which is the way objects are organized in space and time.

The ‘fixed form’ of objects –which Wittgenstein regards as the fact that, for instance, a proper name can stand in a proposition for a specific person– is *shown* in the correct use of a name. But a proposition or representation cannot be placed outside its ‘form of representation’ – which is what is common to the structure of empirical propositions and the structure of the facts–, nor can it “represent its form of representation; it shows it forth” (§ 2.172). At most, logical truths show this ‘form of representation’ in that they are true in every possible state of affairs (Kenny *Wittgenstein* 51). Wittgenstein considers, though, logical truths as ‘pseudo-propositions’ because they do not say anything about what is the case (*Tractatus* § 6.1.). In effect, the truth-value of an empirical proposition can be verified by contrasting it with a certain fact it means to represent. A tautologous statement, on the contrary, says nothing about the world, although it reveals the structure of its symbols. For instance, in the case of the statement “It is raining, or it is not raining,” we need not know what actually happens in the world in order to determine that it is

true. Nevertheless, the truth-value is so determined because “It is raining” and “It is not raining” oppose one another (Kenny *Wittgenstein* 51).

For their part, philosophical, ethical, and religious propositions neither describe events in the actual world nor facts in any possible world. They do not even exhibit the type of connections among propositions that logical truths reveal. The question, then, is what they are meant to do and whether they accomplish it. Wittgenstein thinks that they intend to say what can only be shown. They try to describe the ‘form of representation’ of language, but this cannot be said *in* language. This form can rather be shown through the use of empirical statements. This is due to the fact that, in order to say something meaningful about the ‘form of representation’ of language, we would have to be able to ascribe meaning to our expressions by virtue of facts that have themselves to be represented in our propositions. Then again, to be able to do this, our propositions would have to share a common logical form with such facts, i.e., a structure capable of corresponding with a fact. But how can these applications of language be placed outside this ‘form of representation’ and simultaneously be meaningful if any meaningful use of language presupposes such a form? To successfully represent this form, one would have to articulate the logic of language without employing this logic, which is absurd. It would be like representing by its coordinates “a figure which contradicts the laws of space; or to give the coordinates of a point which does not exist” (*Tractatus* § 3.032). Wittgenstein claims, therefore, that *how* things are expressed in language cannot be expressed through language, as genuinely significant propositions –the ones that represent facts– only *show* the logical form of reality but this form cannot be itself put into words (Kenny *Wittgenstein* 51).

## Judgments of Absolute and Relative Value

By resorting to this ‘form of representation’ as a necessary condition for there to be meaningful propositions, Wittgenstein distinguishes between what can be said and what can be shown so as to demarcate the limits of meaningful speech. In particular, he contends that ethical propositions have nothing to make sense of. Indeed, ethics’ subject—which can be expressed differently by saying “what really matters,” “the meaning of life,” or “what makes life worth living” (see Wittgenstein “A Conference on Ethics” 34-35)—is something that “must lie outside the world” together with “[t]he sense of the world” (*Tractatus* § 6.41). Since ethics is supposed to be about what is ‘good’ or ‘right’ *in itself*, ethical statements would have to express an absolute value. But again, “[i]n the world ... there is no [such] value—and if there were, it would be of no value” (§ 6.41). As everything in the world happens accidentally, this is, without being strictly necessitated, what *we* consider ‘valuable’ would have to be contingent as well; however, this would not be what we were looking for. By definition, an *absolute* value is supposed to be non-accidental. Thereby, if ethical propositions intend to express what is *higher*, what is ‘good’ or ‘right’ with logical necessity, there could be no ethical statements (§ 6.42). Meaningful speech cannot convey what would in principle reside above and beyond what is the case, because genuine propositions can only express factual matters. Since “facts are all as it were *on a level*,” what ethics tries to express would be something standing “above the level of the facts,” even as it cannot be a fact that something “stands out from the facts” (Diamond *The Realistic Spirit* 225).

It must be pointed out that, when Wittgenstein claims that “[a]ll propositions are of equal value,” this is meant quite literally so that, by implication, no propositions are “in any *absolute* sense ... *sublime, important, or trivial*” (Wittgenstein “A Conference on Ethics” 37). Since no fact stands out from the “dead level of all facts” (Diamond *The Realistic Spirit* 225), no empirical

proposition can have a remarkable or insignificant status, nor can it express anything ‘sublime’. Whatever it communicates can only be of relative value to us. In the end, what is of value *in itself* must not be conditioned by the contingent nature of our experience, so it cannot be captured by our statements. Consider, for example, the description of a homicide (Wittgenstein “A Conference on Ethics” 37). It will be meaningful to the extent that it comprises details of the event in question. But the reprehensive feature of the act of killing a human being could not be conveyed through the description, for the latter can only communicate facts about the homicide (37). And, in any case, if this feature were communicated, it would only be because it was formulated as yet another fact (37). Ethical judgments would ultimately be meaningless because what they propose involves running against the boundaries of language (43). Thus, since what ethical statements try to express is something that cannot be articulated in language, we are better off without uttering them.

Wittgenstein still grants that we can formulate relative judgments of value such as “This is the *correct* road” in relation to a given goal, say, as we are trying to arrive to a given destination in the least amount of time (34). Likewise, if someone was terrible at tennis, we could tell whether he was playing *badly* but only in relation to the rules of tennis, the average performance of players, etc. (34). Such a person would be relatively judged as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ at tennis in function of his performance. Absolute ethical judgments, in contrast, are supposed to hold regardless of what the details of the case are. It would be as if there was an “absolutely correct road” to take in order to reach a given destination; namely, one we would feel logically compelled to follow (35). But if we understand ethical judgments in an absolute sense, what are they supposed to be correct or incorrect about? Since we have no independent criteria to determine what counts as an absolutely correct route towards a given location or an absolute good

performance in a game regardless of the parameters and objectives of the game in question, there is nothing ethical statements can be correct about. This entails that there would be no matter of fact we could appeal to in order to censure someone's behavior (35). A judgment of absolute value such as "You *ought* to want to behave better" applied to an outright liar (35), for instance, would have to be meaningless as there is no fact or collection of parameters or rules in terms of which it could be corrected. In other words, there would be no "ethical facts" in contrast to which we could evaluate such a judgment, for we can solely express relative claims of value.

### **Whistling What Cannot Be Said**

In sum, the *Tractatus* does not propose or assume an ethical theory. Ironically, though, it has been argued that what is left unsaid in it is taken to be precisely what bears the greatest importance to Wittgenstein. In D. Z. Phillips' view, it is as if Wittgenstein was reserving a 'higher' place for the ethical, for he indirectly posited objective values that could not be touched by other propositions (357). That is why many commentators usually think of the *Tractatus* as an ethical book.

According to these interpreters, this work points to something that cannot be said, which can be conceived as the 'right' way of living (Wittgenstein "A Conference on Ethics" 35). In Phillips' interpretation, even as Wittgenstein's claim is that the topic of ethics lies outside the region of what can be expressed, he still identifies an 'external region' residing outside our limited, human comprehension. This is the region of "the mystical," a place wherein objective values would have to dwell if they were to count as such. Therefore, although this region cannot be described, its existence would nonetheless be inferred. From one point of view, it seems that Wittgenstein said what presumably could only be shown, particularly, when he claimed that "[t]here is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical" (*Tractatus* § 6.522). This assertion would

involve Wittgenstein's distinction between what can be said and what can be shown as two mutually exclusive categories. What is 'mystical' or 'transcendental' would thereby not be articulated in language or thought, since we could not view our world from the outside; however, it would somehow exist beyond our world.

Accordingly, it has been pointed out that Wittgenstein's claims in the *Tractatus* are themselves neither empirical nor tautologous, which would seem to defeat its purpose. As Ramsey noticed, Wittgenstein's statement that there is the "inexpressible," i.e., "the mystical" (§ 6.522), is self-refuting: in the end, "[i]f you can't say it, you can't say it—and you can't whistle it either" (qtd. in Monk *Ludwig Wittgenstein* 111). Wittgenstein's efforts to separate meaningful language from nonsense had to be misguided, given that he transgressed the limits he had placed on language (Wittgenstein *Tractatus* 27). In effect, the question is how can Wittgenstein "tell what are the boundaries beyond which the human understanding may not venture, unless he succeeds in passing them himself" (Ayer 34). Since the *Tractatus* contains philosophical propositions about the structure of reality, language, and what ethics is supposed to be about (i.e., 'the mystical'), it presumably could not have achieved its objectives. In this vein, interpreters such as Peter Hacker and David Pears along with Phillips have taken Wittgenstein to recognize "a realm of ineffable fact-like quasi-truths, such as the fact-like quasi-truth that language and world share a common logical form" (Kremer 61). These "quasi-truths" could not be articulated in language, although they would be "shown" in its proper application (61). Consequently, even though the statements made in the *Tractatus* would have to strictly speaking be nonsensical, they would still "serve a useful purpose by directing our attention to the ineffable features of reality and language that undergird all our meaningful discourse. In this way, they enable us to 'see the world rightly'" (61).



## Demonstrating What Cannot Be Said

Commentators such as Cora Diamond and Michael Kremer have rejected the previous line of interpretation, for it is clear that Wittgenstein has to condemn such a way of speaking of an ‘external region’ of language as nonsensical. Indeed, he *does* say that the propositions of the *Tractatus* are “senseless,” despite the fact that in another way they are “elucidatory” (*Tractatus* § 6.54). It would then be a mistake to take at face value his talk about the ‘limits’ of language and the world, together with his claims about the “mystical” and the “inexpressible.” Kremer agrees with Diamond in that the act of distinguishing such a putative ‘external region’ of language including “quasi-truths” would be equivalent to “chickening out” (61). It would amount to “a refusal to take seriously Wittgenstein’s claim that his propositions are nonsense” (61) for, in effect, “to take the propositions of the *Tractatus* to gesture at ineffable quasi-facts underlying all factual language is to continue to image necessity as a fact” (62). The problem with this image, Kremer says, is that it would lead us “to the nonsense of formulating as propositions that which is said to be inexpressible” (62). Deep down, Phillips and Hacker’s reading of the *Tractatus* is “incoherent” given the “methodical purpose of the *Tractatus*,” which is “to bring us to see that philosophical theorizing, conceived as offering us a source of grounding or justification for logic, language or life, will, in the end, produce nothing but such nonsense” (62).

In order to avoid this incoherent reading of the *Tractatus*, Kremer suggests that this work in its outlook is not so far from Wittgenstein’s later philosophy — with some qualifications. According to him, the ‘senselessness’ Wittgenstein attributed to the propositions of the *Tractatus* does not yet make them entirely irredeemable:

[t]here is a sense that can be given to some of these uses of ‘showing’ which does not degenerate into the incoherence of envisaging in the form of a fact that which

we declare not to be a fact. We should *not* read talk of ‘showing’, and correlatively of ‘perceiving’, ‘seeing’ and ‘recognizing’ that which is shown on the model of a *relation* between a subject and some ineffable fact-like entity (‘that  $p$  is shown to  $S$ ’, ‘ $S$  perceives that  $p$ ’). This form of the idea of showing is exactly what the *Tractatus* wants to teach us to abandon. Rather, we should read talk of ‘showing’, and correlatively ‘seeing’, on the model of the demonstration of a technique and the uptake required to understand the demonstration. (62)

In this way, Kremer finds a common ground between the notion of ‘showing’ as employed in the *Tractatus* and the notion of ‘following a rule’ appearing in the *Philosophical Investigations*. In the latter, Wittgenstein conceives of the notion of ‘following a rule’ as a “practice” (*Philosophical Investigations* § 202) insofar as “[t]o follow a rule” is a custom (§ 199). Roughly, since using language properly involves following rules, it follows that “[t]o understand a language means to have mastered a technique” (§ 202). In this sense, Kremer interprets Wittgenstein’s use of ‘showing’ in the *Tractatus* along the lines of understanding or demonstrating a practice. For our purposes, Kremer’s interpretation can serve us in avoiding the confusions that drove us into thinking of the *Tractatus* as refuting itself:

In essence, my suggestion is that one who ‘sees’ that which is shown, is simply one who ‘knows how to go on’. On this reading, phrases such as ‘the logical form of the world’ have no independent meaning; it is only the larger contexts – ‘showing the logical form of the world’, ‘seeing the logical form of the world’ and so on – which have a meaningful use. These phrases are like ‘dancing the waltz’, which should be understood simply as ‘waltzing’ rather than as involving a relation between a dancer and a particular ‘dance’ (the waltz). It is significant that the introduction of the terminology of ‘showing’ at TLP 4.022 (‘A proposition shows its sense’) is embedded in a discussion of *understanding*. To understand a proposition is to ‘know what is the case, if it is true’ (TLP 4.024). However this should not be seen as an instance of ‘knowledge-that’. To understand a proposition  $p$  is not to know another proposition of the form ‘ $p$  is true if and only if  $q$ ’. Clearly knowing such a proposition presupposes understanding  $p$  and cannot explain it. Rather, understanding is a form of ‘knowledge-how’. One understands a proposition by knowing how to use it – when to assert it and when to deny it. (Kremer 62)

The upshot of this interpretation about the context in which ‘showing’ appears in the *Tractatus* is that such a notion has more than one use. Depending on the use that is attributed to it, a different

reading of the *Tractatus* originates: “[o]n the one hand, talk of showing can tempt us into the nonsensical illusion that we grasp a realm of super-facts beyond the reach of language ... [while] [o]n the other hand, talk of showing can ... direct us to the practical abilities and masteries that are part of our ongoing talking, thinking and living” (63). Assuming the latter use of ‘showing’, we can thereby reinterpret Wittgenstein’s conception of the ‘ineffable’ in the redeeming fashion proposed by Kremer. Particularly, it would involve a different understanding of the sort of “ineffable truth” that the *Tractatus* is supposed to convey:

it is also possible to redeem talk in the *Tractatus* of the communication of a ‘truth’ which is other than propositional. But, again, we should not be drawn into the nonsensical illusion of a realm of ineffable proposition-like ‘truths’ which we can yet, mysteriously, grasp. There is another sense of ‘truth’ which we can appeal to here ... ‘Truth’ as something which one can *do* ... is, rather, a way to be followed, a ‘path’ for life. Insofar as the *Tractatus* communicates a ‘truth’ it is by demonstrating to us, in practice, how to follow such a path. (63)

Kremer thus reads Wittgenstein as *showing* us something that is ‘inexpressible’ to the extent that it “cannot be communicated through a set of principles, but must be demonstrated in practice” (63). Assuming Kremer’s interpretation of the concept of ‘showing’ as involving the demonstration of a practice, let us now explore how such a practice could be construed in Wittgenstein’s terms according to a ‘proper attitude’ towards life. In the final section of this chapter, such a ‘proper attitude’ will be shown to be consistent with a type of ‘conversion’ that Wittgenstein recommends in his later philosophy so as to overcome alienation.

### **The Way of Life of the Happy**

A way of explaining away the internal inconsistency attributed to Wittgenstein’s early philosophy is thus to appreciate the resonance of his ethical stance according to its practical attributes and benefits. This would require tracking the value of ethics in practice itself as something to be

shown or demonstrated in *how* we live. Instead of providing an account of what an ‘ethical’ way of living would be, the value of ethics would be noticeable in the *form* of our action.

Correspondently, Wittgenstein believes that while “ethics has nothing to do with punishment and reward in the ordinary sense,” it is clear however that “there must be ... some sort of ethical reward and ethical punishment, but this must lie in the action itself” (*Tractatus* § 6.422).

Wittgenstein focuses on the will as the subject matter of ethics, although it is not something we can discuss (§ 6.43); still, it can be construed as something shown in our behavior and action. He defines “[t]he will ... [as] an attitude of the subject to the world” (*Notebooks* 87e). In this sense, we can think of our acts as displaying either good or bad will, and of our will as something we have some power over — even if we cannot control anything else. Because while it is clear that we cannot change at will the world (i.e., what the facts are), we can nonetheless change our will, and with this transformation we can bring a “change [to] the limits of the world” (87e). Wittgenstein speaks of a change in our will by means of which we would enter in contact with the world from a different place. Adopting good will would lead to a difference in our way of living, so that “the world must thereby become quite another. It must so to speak wax or wane as a whole” (*Tractatus* § 6.423). We have some power over our own will because the facts are independent of it (*Notebooks* 73e), of what we would want the world to look like, such that we are left only with the possibility of changing our general disposition or attitude towards the facts. Thereby, even though “I cannot bend the happenings of the world to my will,” it is yet true that “I can ... make myself independent of the world” (73e) through a change of will. Indeed, we can transform our will, despite the fact that this would be the only thing we can do: “[i]f good or evil willing affects the world it can only affect the boundaries of the world, not the facts” (*Tractatus* § 6.43). Eventually, with a change of will we can *enter* the world, so to speak, seeing life from a

different angle (i.e., from ‘the inside’). It can thus be argued that Wittgenstein recommends a change of will in order to perceive life differently.

Going back to Kremer’s reading of the *Tractatus*, he claims in this respect that “the will can affect the limits of the world because the willing subject simply *is* that limit” (73). In effect, if the subject constitutes the limits of the world, the world can only change to the extent that the subject’s will has influenced these limits, even though his will could not affect what occurs within them. Therefore, insofar as the will of the subject constitutes an “attitude towards the world” (Wittgenstein *Notebooks* 87e), Kremer claims that happiness resides in our readiness to not will that such-and-such be the case: “[m]y unhappiness stems from a lack of co-ordination between my antecedent *wants* and the contingent facts which I find in the world; I can then make myself happy by *renouncing* all such wants, counting them as nothing, and adopting an *attitude* of acceptance towards whatever happens” (73.).

We can now follow Kremer and avoid the problematic discussion about the ‘limits’ of language and the world by renouncing the talk about such limits altogether, throwing away the ladder so as to see the world aright (*Tractatus* § 6.54). Here is, then, a way in which we can look at the *Tractatus* for our philosophical purposes. We can interpret Wittgenstein as saying that we should take the world as it is without trying to influence it whatsoever. That is, we should *just* take the world and not the limits of the world, since by adopting a good will we are already affecting these ‘limits’ without explicitly trying to change them. From this perspective, we can accommodate the ethical resonance of the *Tractatus* that Kremer regards as its “quasi-mystical” afterthought in terms of accepting an everyday proper attitude towards life. A noteworthy result from this reading of Wittgenstein is that we lose the problematic frames through which we see life, as we no longer aspire to distinguish ‘the limits’ of the world. And, without this aspiration,

the recalcitrant problem of the ‘meaning’ or ‘purpose’ of life would no longer trouble us. This is why for Wittgenstein such a change of will “must make the world a wholly different one” (§ 6.43), as the ‘boundaries’ of the world would disappear “[a]s if by accession ... of meaning” (*Notebooks* 73e) in our lives. The idea is to not presuppose ‘limits’ to meaningful language and the world, given that this way we would not feel the need to account for “the meaning” of life. Since we would not look anymore for these boundaries, there would be nothing about which we would want to express such “meaning.”

Moreover, in his *Notebooks* Wittgenstein thinks of the problematic conception that someone might have of his purpose in life as an issue that can be remedied by undergoing a change of will. For we cannot search for ‘the meaning’ of our life *in* the world, as this, being an absolute value, cannot “lie in it but outside it” (73e). However, to the degree that our will is somehow “connected to the meaning of the world,” by adopting good will we can alter how we see and lead our life (73e). Conversely, having ill will would affect negatively our life, in that we would not be able to show what is *meaningful* about life in our actions. From this perspective, Wittgenstein can be read as suggesting that the *sense* or *purpose* of life is found in living in good faith, as this way we would be (capable of being) happy, which in the end constitutes the purpose of life: “the man who is happy is fulfilling the purpose of existence” (73e). The ‘solution’ or ‘remedy’ to the problem of not finding meaning in our life is to lead the type of unworried life involved in having an overall good disposition: “[i]n order to live happily I must be in agreement with the world. And that is what “being happy” *means*” (75e). In effect, it is not a wild idea that when we live in good faith we are disposed to living happily so that, by living happily, we live in accordance with the world (75e). And when we live this way, the question about the purpose of our life does not surface, or at least it does not affect us as it would, that is, had we lived with bad

will. Hence, not being in agreement with the world would entail that one is living an unhappy life, as the grounds for our ‘happiness’ would reside in the absence of the type of existential perplexity that is common in persons who cannot move beyond a problematic conception of life. The remedy, once again, is to have good will, for he who lives with such a disposition does not see any longer life as an issue: “we could say that the man is fulfilling the purpose of existence who no longer needs to have any purpose except to live. That is to say, who is content” (73e). Thus, what we consider as a ‘problem’ in our general perception of life is something that can vanish by living happily. Ultimately, as “[t]he solution of the problem of life is seen in the disappearance of this problem” (74e), a change in our attitude can help relieve us from this existential doubt.

Subsequently, after we experience a transformation in our basic disposition towards life, the resistance we oppose to it begins to lose its hold. It may be that those who practice a benevolent way of living find the ethical reward considered by Wittgenstein, perhaps as it entails attaining a class of peace of mind with which one lives in the present, in the day-to-day, not bothered anymore by questions about the meaning or sense of life (74e). Our sense of purpose is then no longer something to worry about, as we stop indulging in our desire to raise existential questions about the meaning of life.

### **III. 2. Wittgenstein’s Later Transcendentalism**

In the remaining sections, I will propose an interpretation of the later Wittgenstein that can help us to think about the question of persons’ lives in a way that responds to the problem of alienation, which would constitute a practical account of the issue of personal identity. Now, having seen how Wittgenstein’ early philosophy distinguishes what can be said from what can be shown, it is worth explaining in this section his late views on transcendentalism.

Remember that Wittgenstein came in the *Tractatus* to the conclusion that there could be no philosophical propositions because they intend to trespass the boundaries of meaningful speech. As we saw, according to one line of interpretation he sought to overcome these limits, not just by enunciating philosophical propositions, but, what is more, by referring to an ineffable, metaphysical realm whose logical structure would be revealed through correct uses of language. Although we have distanced ourselves from this interpretation, it can still be said that the *propositions* expressing his putative metaphysics could not themselves be genuine statements, since they are not either empirical or logical truths. This was acknowledged by him in the *Tractatus*, when he claimed that the propositions appearing in this book would only be helpful as long as we recognize them as “senseless,” having “climbed out through them, on them, over them” (*Philosophical Investigations* § 6.54). This means, though, that from this perspective the *Tractatus* failed to an extent, namely, in its effort to distinguish meaningful uses of language from senseless speech, since it assumed that language had a rigid or ‘fixed form’ which senseless speech would attempt to vulnerate. Thus, it can at least be said that the criteria used there for drawing such a distinction relied on a stringent and incomplete view of how language works in everyday life, which gave rise to a determined picture of the ‘structure’ of reality.

Giving up on his old conception of the logic or ‘nature’ of language, the ‘general form’ of any proposition, and the ‘structure’ of reality, Wittgenstein no longer thinks in the *Investigations* that there is anything that cannot be said, for, in truth, there is nothing past the limits of meaning other than nonsense (Hacker *Wittgenstein’s Place* 111). As in the *Tractatus*, he now aspires to solve philosophical problems completely. However, he thinks that everything that can be said could be expressed clearly, such that there is no need to say or even imply the existence of something that could not be expressed: “the clarity we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity.



But this simply means that philosophical problems should *completely disappear*” (*Philosophical Investigations* § 133). He does not believe that general norms about the limits of meaning should be established if the propositions prescribing those norms attempt to overcome themselves the margins of meaningful language. Therefore, as far as his new philosophical method is concerned, it cannot consist of a system of statements offering criteria for deciding in the abstract which propositions are meaningful. For the most part, this system would not be useful for diagnosing *the* source of philosophical error. For the later Wittgenstein, philosophical problems do not have a single origin. By appealing to the *use* that is actually given to words in the context of ‘language games’, he holds that philosophical puzzlement arises when words are deprived from their common, ordinary employments. The perplexity we tend to associate with matters that transcend our ordinary concerns and interests depends on concrete misunderstandings about how words operate in regular contexts of utterance.

### **What Can be Said**

It appears that, after having substituted his old philosophy of language with a pragmatic conception of meaning, Wittgenstein’s conception of ‘what can be said’ changed significantly. Religious and ethical propositions, for example, are no longer thought of as meaningless. Wittgenstein thinks that words like ‘God’ and ‘good’ have legitimate uses in ordinary games of language, but that, even so, they cannot properly become the object of philosophical scrutiny. Philosophy cannot prove the existence of God, because, in this case, a proof is not part of any linguistic game in which this word is usually employed. For him, the attempt to provide this type of evidence is absurd as it entails a deep “misunderstanding” of the role that religious beliefs and other classes of statements “about God, the soul and eternal life” have in the forms of life of those

who use them (see Hacker *Wittgenstein's Place* 302). In effect, in ordinary language 'God' does not automatically presuppose philosophical doctrines in the absence of which its use would not make sense. It can rather be argued that when this word is abstracted from the role it plays in concrete linguistic practices where it has a legitimate use and then subjected to philosophical reflections, its content can perplex us.

On the other hand, the subject matter of ethics' is expressible. Ethical claims are value judgments that prescribe rules of conduct. They provide rules for the use of 'good', 'evil', 'right', and the like, in the set of linguistic games. These words can serve further purposes, this is, insofar as they constitute "moves" in language games, becoming thus significant in virtue of having functions in the speakers' forms of life. Thereby, although ethical propositions are not factual, this does not imply that they are meant to express something "higher." On the contrary, ethical statements express grammatical rules that norm the uses of 'good' and 'right', e.g., in particular games and prescribe ways of conduct in corresponding circumstances.

### **What Should Not be Said**

For their part, philosophical statements are not mere "pseudo-propositions" as it was alleged in the *Tractatus*. According to Wittgenstein, many of these statements that had been considered as nonsense are rather similar in kind to 'grammatical propositions', because they serve as guidelines for the use of their constituent words. To explain this, Wittgenstein distinguishes between *empirical* and *grammatical* statements (*Philosophical Investigations* § 102). The first are statements whose truth-value is 'contingent' on some given matter of fact. For instance, "It is raining," "It is October," and "Water quenches fire" are examples of empirical propositions. Meanwhile, the second class includes sentences like "Everything that goes up goes down,"

“Sometimes you lose and sometimes you win,” and “Every bar has a length” (§ 102). Unlike empirical statements, grammatical propositions *show* how to use their component words; in our examples, they prescribe the use of ‘up’, ‘length’, and so forth. One of the main obstacles that can obscure the way a grammatical proposition works is that it is impossible to imagine the opposite of what they assert (§ 251), and also, the assumption that, because it cannot be thought of any other way, such proposition must express a ‘necessary truth’. It happens that, because grammatical statements involve rules for the use of words, what is thought of as contrary to them is inconceivable. But this is due to the fact that the negation of a grammatical proposition is not a false grammatical proposition but rather nonsense (Hacker *Wittgenstein’s Place* 115). In contrast, the negation of a true empirical statement is always a false factual proposition, which is something imaginable. Wittgenstein thus compares philosophical statements to grammatical propositions, seeing them largely as prescriptions for modes of speech. They regulate the employment of expressions, even though they have the disorienting appearance of factual statements. He suggests that one of the main sources of confusion in philosophy is that we think that philosophical propositions should say something about the facts, but, in reality, they do not.

Furthermore, he thinks of meaningful speech as occurring in the context of customs and institutions of human forms of life. Using language in meaningful ways involves following rules; this is, engaging in practices requiring the surroundings provided by the customs and habits of a community. Language is supposed to be a way of living, and the common rules we follow when employing language are supposed to help us understand each other. But the notions proposed by philosophical propositions are not in agreement with *our* ways of life. To be sure, these concepts take something from our ordinary uses of words but ultimately deviate from them, rejecting something of them. Philosophical statements significantly contravene how language is regularly

used, even though their departure from ordinary discourse is not always obvious — after all, their constituent expressions retain their usual meaning to some degree. Even as philosophers do not seem to be aware of how their formulations are recommending a change in our notation, they still distort the way we normally speak. What is problematic about philosophical statements, then, is that they do not show us how words are used in any game in which there are already known rules, but instead are themselves norms for the use of expressions.

### **Reconsidering the Character of Philosophical Problems**

Yet again, for the later Wittgenstein philosophical statements can be interpreted as the expression of genuine issues. They are engrained worries we want to give expression to as we reflect on different linguistic structures. The analogy between these structures bewilders the intellect in a way that it leads it to *aporia*: “[t]he problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language have the character of *depth*. They are deep disquietudes; they are as deeply rooted in us as the forms of our language, and their significance is as great as the importance of language” (*Philosophical Investigations* § 111). Our urge to deviate from regular uses of language, to go beyond the limits of meaningful speech, is a testament to a human tendency that defines us (Cf. “A Conference on Ethics” 43), for we have an irresistible, at times compulsory, desire to somehow escape our ordinary ways of speaking and living.

Philosophical problems, thereby, cannot be solved by using language improperly, which is to say, without attending to how their constituent expressions are usually employed in our linguistic games. They can only be overcome by employing language in conformity with the forms of life of a community. Then, according to Wittgenstein, the way to address philosophical problems is, on the one side, to say what *can* be said so that nonsense is consequently excluded. An appeal to

grammar can indeed help the philosopher remember how the expressions with which he articulates his problems are ordinarily used (see McGinn 14-19). On the other side, philosophy proceeds by deconstructing philosophical problems, making the emptiness of their constituent statements evident. It is thus that philosophical problems end up being rejected as ill-founded. In general, he tries to dissuade us from engaging in philosophical discourse, as he shows time and again why we are misled in different opportunities into assuming that philosophical problems have a “profound” character (Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* § 111).

Lastly, let us examine the type of change in our form of life that Wittgenstein recommends in his later philosophy to overcome alienation by appeal to the notion of a ‘person life’ provided by Schechtman.

### **III. 3. What Can Be Shown: Adopting a Proper Attitude Towards Life**

We can think of the relationship between a person life and what is taken as a ‘standard’ person life (Schechtman 113-115) in terms of the relationship between a microclimate and a climate, correspondingly. Even though the temperature in our residence might be different from the one outside, at the same time it is conditioned and influenced by it. Similarly, even as we ‘construct’ in a sense our own life depending on the choices we make, our daily activities and exchanges with others are determined by the ‘person-space’ (115) we occupy in life, which is a place in a sociocultural infrastructure (114). Therefore, it is in the context provided by a ‘person-space’ that someone’s life can acquire a distinguishable human shape, although this does not mean that his life is necessarily determined by what society dictates. In any event, it can be argued that when his life is adequately situated in a ‘person-space’, this results in a “practical unity” (75-77).

Meanwhile, a person is alienated when his life fails to adjust to or agree with some human “form of life” (Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* § 241), which, in Schechtman’s terms, would amount to some or another ‘paradigmatic’ form of person life (2014 111-115). When we are alienated, it is as if our life unfolded within our own “microclimate,” seemingly living in isolation from the conditions and circumstances of the world; as if we lived in a microclimate that could have any given temperature we desired regardless of the circumstances of the outside world. But inasmuch as any microclimate largely depends on the temperature of the outside world, by the same token, each person’s life is largely impacted by what society conceives as “standard” ways of human life. The point is that our life cannot acquire the type of ‘practical unity’ Schechtman considers if we live secluded from the currency of daily affairs. For we do not get to decide, regardless of what are the ‘paradigmatic’ forms of human life, what type of life we are living any more than we can alter the climate by changing the temperature of our domicile. In the long run, it is in terms of society’s standards, customs, and habits that the identity of our lives is fixed (147). Since having a person life that resembles what is considered as a ‘typical’ human life is necessary for obtaining a personal identity, our identity becomes blurred insofar as we depart from basic, ordinary forms of living. Indeed, this is a sign that we are failing to adjust to the world.

In general, our lives do not unfold as isolated phenomena; we are social individuals, living in agreement with *some* life form. It is not as if each human being inhabited a miniscule region of space, that is, a microclimate that each helped create, such that our lives did not impact one another. Quite the contrary, our lives affect and interfere with each other in several ways: they are organized around each other at the outset. Precisely because our life is already in constant contact with the lives of other human beings, it is in the course of our daily activities and exchanges that

it develops. The point is that we cannot evaluate human lives in isolation from the sociocultural infrastructure in which they are already situated. With this infrastructure serving as the background, we normally assess how well someone's life has been, and this evaluation provides the materials needed for specifying *who* he is. Thus, several factors contribute to our personal identity so that, in order to provide a complete account of who we are, we need to assume a holistic approach that includes our entire life. In this regard, Schechtman's model of a person life is useful for our purposes, when she argues that "being a person ... involves conceiving of our lives in this holistic way, experiencing them as ongoing wholes" (100). For her, the practical unity of our life requires understanding it "not just in terms of relations between individual moments, but also in terms of the overall structure in which those moments play a role" (103). In effect, when we assess someone's life, we judge it "as a whole" (107) for it is the "person as a whole [that] can be an appropriate target" of our judgments (108). Furthermore, this holistic picture of a person life would only make sense when appreciated in contrast to the habits and customs giving rise to the sociocultural infrastructure in which a determined person's life develops.

Assuming this holistic approach to a person life, we can interpret Wittgenstein as suggesting that, in order to overcome alienation, we should live by playing the language games of some given forms of life, acting in agreement with them by playing diverse functions in the vast network of interpersonal relationships that structure what are taken as 'standard' ways of life. Specifically, he speaks of a class of 'conversion' through which general disaffection towards the ordinary could recede as a person is able to reorient his life towards the tracks of a 'typical' way of existing. It is by fulfilling our social roles and ordinary tasks in a committed fashion that we can see ourselves returning to the world of life. That is, by familiarizing ourselves with how life is

‘normally’ supposed to proceed, we can assimilate our alienated ways of behaving to ordinary forms so that the problematic appearance of our life vanishes. According to Wittgenstein,

[t]he solution to the problems you see in your life is to live in a way that what is problematic disappears.

Saying that life is problematic means that your life does not adjust to the form of life. In consequence, you must change your life and, if it adapts to the form, what is problematic disappears. (*Aforismos* § 149)

As we place ourselves in a ‘person-space’ (Schechtman 2014 115), we play an active role in the world of life such that we situate ourselves in linguistic games where we can adapt to the forms of life of a community. We thus start to live again in direct contact with some typical way of being human, for we conceive of ourselves in terms of those around us, playing different roles through which we associate with other human beings. While thus interacting with them, our life enacts many of the habits and customs that give shape to the community wherein we reside. The ‘conversion’ Wittgenstein speaks of can be seen as a ‘window’ into a world that we already inhabit but have somehow lost touch with.

Through this conversion, Wittgenstein *shows* a way of providing one’s life with a ‘standard’ framework or structure. To see what such a ‘standard’ trajectory would actually look like, let us recall how Schechtman speaks of a ‘typical’ person life:

[i]t is a structural whole that has, by its very nature, attributes that apply to it as a whole which do not necessarily apply to each individual portion. We can thus say that the mature person is the same person as the infant or (in unlucky cases) dementia patient because there is a single life course that starts (roughly) with infancy, develops into maturity, and devolves (possibly) into dementia. The person is defined by the unfolding of the pattern in which these stages all play their part. (108)

In spite of this, an alienated person could problematize such a ‘typical’ development, perceiving the very fact that ordinary persons go through (most of) these different transitions as an issue. Evidently, it is not the case that he would not experience many of these changes by resisting or



problematizing them. The point, though, is that by adopting an ‘improper attitude’ towards these natural transitions, he is not able to see his own life in a way that he can identify with it, thereby becoming alienated. Since he perceives life in general in this way, he ends up dissociating himself from his own life and its ordinariness to the degree that, even as he suffers these changes while going through the different stages of a typical life, he does not necessarily perceive himself as the one undergoing them. It is as if it was someone else suffering such alterations, or as if, despite the passage of time, *he* still remained deep down ‘the same’ through all of the mutations of an ordinary person contingently associated to him. A gap between ‘himself’ and ‘his person’ would then appear to open, which he must in turn bridge to surpass alienation.

Therefore, by not having a proper attitude in front of these changes he would grow dissatisfied with the reality of his life, expanding more and more the gulf he has created between what he sees as ‘himself’ and his ordinary life. Perhaps, as he cannot successfully define ‘himself’ in terms of any one phase of his life, he fails to associate himself with the entire, ongoing life of the ordinary person he is and with all of the roles he plays in it. In consequence, the problem he has with his life can be seen as a practical issue he has with his identity, for as he cannot see himself as an everyday person existing in a given stage of life, he assumes the wrong attitude towards his life.

But the identity of a person is not defined solely based on any one phase or aspect of his life (Cf. II.3) anymore than it can be characterized by selecting any given role a person plays in ordinary life (e.g., being a father, son, husband, citizen, etc.). From Schechtman’s holistic interpretation of a person life, “in constructing an account of personal identity” we do not “start with person-parts that must somehow be brought together into a single entity” (100). Instead, when we assess our own identity we address our entire ongoing life and not the various parts

separately, which “exist in the form they do only as abstractions from the whole, and so the whole is, in an important sense, prior to the parts” (100). Accordingly, as “the attributes of the whole ... do not apply to each of its individual parts” (107), it makes no sense to try and decide who we ‘really’ are by attending to any single phase of our life, since we cannot isolate this way who we ‘truly’ are at our core. Alternatively, it can be said that we are not defined as any specific social role we play in ordinary life but, as George Mead puts it, as a ‘constellation of roles’ (see 1972 145-157). Thereby, by adopting a holistic stance on persons’ lives, we can avoid selecting any particular role we have in ordinary life so to define our personal identity. The reason is that, when we try to understand *who* we are, our perspective has to include a much broader range of factors, as we need to capture the form of our entire ongoing life.

Then again, assuming such an expanded perspective on our ordinary life in order to determine who we are is not going to help us overcome alienation if we fail to change the attitude we have towards such a life. It is further required the adoption of a (more) gracious attitude towards our life and its changes, so that we are able to see ourselves as forming a ‘unity’ with it. We can then identify ourselves with the constant flux that is our person life, accepting it for what it is, and so give up on the urge to escape such a vision of who we already are and have been so far. We would perceive the form of our life as a coherent, integral structure comparable in many ways to some ‘typical’ or ‘standard’ form of life, despite the many times we failed to clearly see this. After abandoning a way of perceiving human life in general that is inherently problematic –and, particularly, an ‘essentialist’ perspective on personal identity–, alienated human beings can encounter a path back to life in common. As they move away from what might be seen as a ‘peculiar’ form of acting and interacting with others, they can accomplish the conversion Wittgenstein speaks of, bending to how life in common is perceived.

## **The Bare Minimum for Conversion**

But how does such a “life in common” usually occur? That is, to which ‘common life’ are we supposed to adjust to overcome alienation? One might question the way ‘ordinary life’ is assumed to occur, thereby becoming skeptical as to whether an alienated person should adapt to ‘common ways of acting and interacting with others’ if ultimately it is not clear what would ‘life in common’ amount to. However, we need not settle here which is the type of life we need to convert to in order to surpass alienation, since the treatment of the problem of personal identity we are offering is not that ambitious. Even if we can question whether this or that form of life counts as a “common” or “standard” one, we are instead merely alluding to a bare minimum of ordinariness of human life that a person should be able to be in agreement with to avoid or surmount the fundamental class of alienation we have been considering. This requisite is a threshold human life forms must meet upon which they can begin to unfold in rough agreement with one another. Therefore, regardless of whether we are justified in criticizing the way “normal” people live, and even if this criticism is part of our ordinary life, I take Wittgenstein to be speaking of a more basic class of conversion that is necessary to acquire a *distinct* form of human life. The objective is to surmount a fundamental type of dissatisfaction with one’s life regardless of the details of how life in common ‘usually’ occurs. Then, although the question of exactly which life ‘in common’ we are speaking of would still be pertinent to our understanding of human life in general, we need not address it in order to appreciate the value of the class of conversion Wittgenstein considered. After all, the latter has to do only with overcoming a potential preliminary alienation from our own ordinary life in the absence of which we would not have a clear-cut personal identity expressed in a life form we would want to associate ourselves with.

## Quieting Down the Problematic Undertone of Our Life

From our construal of Wittgenstein's treatment of alienation follows a certain kind of quietism that the alienated individual can adopt so as to not look at his person life in a way that leads him to philosophical perplexity. As the ordinary perspective he takes on his life helps him surpass its 'problematic' appearance, the philosophical problems that might otherwise come up are sidestepped since a large part of their incentive is silenced before they can disseminate. As a person overcomes alienation by adjusting his life to some 'paradigmatic' form of person life, he has the grounds for ignoring the origin of the appeal of an atypical way of seeing and leading life. What initially motivated a person to live as an 'outlier' fades away given that, from the perspective afforded *within* the context of an integral or unitary life, it makes no sense to lead an atypical, alienated life.

In this sense, by living in agreement with the life of an ordinary person within the background of a sociocultural infrastructure, the problems that led him to live an estranged life no longer affect him, at least not to the same degree. Against the backdrop offered by Schechtman, the ordinary human being would find a way of aligning his own life with the forms of life of a community, so that his person life would gain the class of practical 'unity' or 'integrity' needed for having a full-fleshed personal identity, as opposed to the watered-down identity found in alienated human lives. An indistinct, fragmented or dissociated way of life would thereby encounter the means to solidify his life, becoming part of the forms of life of a community. He could see himself represented in these forms of life, so that there would be no longer a gap between his life and such forms of life.

We can read Wittgenstein as proposing a quietist, therapeutic conception of philosophy with the intention of treating this class of alienation. The desired result of his 'treatments' or

‘therapies’ (*Philosophical Investigations* §133d) is to calm down the progression of our philosophical thought whenever we want to by rejecting, for instance, the tendency to problematize life as a whole, as if life was in itself ‘good’ or ‘bad’. Wittgenstein’s ‘treatments’ (§133d) could help us dissuade ourselves from persisting in erratic trains of thought. The general aim is to quiet down our thought when it digresses into speculations about the meaning of life, our purpose in the world, and so forth. The concerns we would subsequently be left with would be ordinary in character, as we abandon the strangeness in our lives produced by the puzzlement of questions about the ‘meaning’ or ‘sense’ of our lives. By giving up on the habits that support such a neurotic attitude, we could forget to an extent about the troubles that were obscuring our understanding of the place we already have in life. Thus, we can live in an uncomplicated way as we persist in this state of mind.

There is a sort of resignation involved in resisting such an estranged form of life, as we decide not to address anymore the question of whether life has a purpose. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein wants to pull us away from the notion that there is anything to grieve about. This ‘grief’ would have no place in the linguistic games in which we would operate; there would be no context for it to emerge while living in agreement with the forms of life of a community. As a consequence, Wittgenstein does not recommend making a substantial sacrifice, because we do not refrain from saying anything that could have meaning. This sacrifice is not intellectual, but one of will or feeling (see Kenny *The Wittgenstein Reader* 263.). It is about renouncing, among other things, to the feeling that there is something transcendental that can be said, precisely because in abandoning this feeling lies the exit we are looking for to overcome our philosophical problems. Particularly, this conversion represents an antidote to the urge to problematize life. Our purpose could thus be described as silencing our philosophical thought (or at least its expression), since

we rather understand philosophy as a disease. Again, Wittgenstein talks about a transformation in our lives that would change our way of seeing and using language, such that we could stop philosophizing whenever we want to (*Philosophical Investigations* §133). Our ‘life’ would not become an enigma, for this word would only be used significantly in diverse ordinary language games where it is not generally problematized. Accordingly, it is *in* our linguistic practices that this transformation must begin, as we go about quieting down or attuning our strange behavior and roughly adopt instead the habits and customs of those around us.

### **Wonder for the Mundane**

Lastly, it is worth pointing out that, to avoid alienation, a human being would have to adapt *constantly* to some paradigmatic form of person life, as he could not assume perpetually a ‘proper’ attitude towards life as a whole. In other words, there is no privileged stage of complete unity in life where he could render the possibility of returning to an alienated way of life obsolete. The individual that has acquired a level of practical unity in his life needs to persist in his engagement with others, familiarizing himself with the customs and habits of the forms of life of a community until these become his own. Mostly, he needs to practice the activities that such forms of life would organize as elements in the trajectory of a ‘typical’ person life.

Having said that, are such practices and activities already settled? And even if we can identify such practices and activities, how do we know to which community they pertain? It can be thus objected that it is not settled what the community’s practices involve, such that the alienated human being would have no guidelines to follow in returning to the world of life. Moreover, even if these practices exist, perhaps they do not exist uniformly, i.e., in the way he would require if he were to have a sense of what he needs to do in order to adapt to the form of life of a community. Maybe he is just different from the community in which he resides so that, if

there is no such fixed set of habits and customs, we could not ask him to adjust to them. From another perspective, perhaps he does not see the community he lives in as his own; he would not think that the community represents him. Thereby, even if he can recognize what the overall activities practiced by the members of this community are, this would not mean that the rules prescribing the activities of those individuals apply to him.

We can tackle these criticisms by pointing out once more that our treatment of the problem of personal identity is meant to apply exclusively to a *vital* class of alienation, where a bare minimum of normalcy in life is taken as the target. This entails that a person overcomes alienation by continuously adapting to ordinary behaviors shared by the vast majority of human beings. The ‘standard’ person life is to this extent flexible enough so as to capture habits and customs of forms of human life in general. A person prevails over alienation by associating with others in regular, instinctive ways that do not involve prior elucidation as to whether the activities he practices reflect who he *really* is. In the end, the dissociated individual abandons a *peculiar* way of life by integrating into *any* ‘standard’ form of person life. In this way, he commits himself to being a part of such forms of life only if it is a commitment to who he would naturally be had he not become alienated to begin with. It follows that merely becoming a member of a community would not suffice to overcome alienation — after all, there is a trivial sense in which he already is a member. The point is rather that surmounting alienation involves adopting a form of life that comes naturally to him regardless of the community in which he might actually be situated.

In any event, our urge to surpass meaningful language in order to grasp ‘the sense’ of our concrete life could be discouraged by remembering that we have abandoned an alienated form of life so as to constantly adjust to a ‘paradigmatic’ structure of a person life. In this sense, the problem of personal identity ceases to constitute an issue to us. The ‘sense’ or ‘purpose’ that

one's life could acquire would only amount to significant uses of language and modes of engagement with others, where our verbal behavior fits a role required by a language game presently played. Therefore, what is "problematic" about of our life –i.e., that which disturbs us and for which we say that there is no solution– is not the consequence of the discovery of an enigma for which we have to find an answer. Rather, that which can certainly amaze us becomes a 'problem' when we lose the focus of what is important; namely, our wonder for everyday life, which is something that at some point marveled us and that can surprise us again. But the lack of wonder leads to a false class of amazement, that of the 'philosophical problem', which instead of showing us what we have in plain sight –the everyday world with its complexities and ambiguities–, it offers us instead a 'shadow' of what we should be looking for. This is a simplification of our conceptual relations that can mislead us into producing conceptual entanglements making 'the problem' increasingly insoluble. Still, this is not irremediable, for if we can genuinely become amazed of ordinary life, the 'problematic' aspect of life should fade away although our restlessness might linger on.



Part Two

**Self-Conception**

#### IV. THE USE OF A NOTION OF ONESELF:

##### A Static Approach to the Puzzle of Self-Conception

We have set up in Chapter I ordinary human beings at the center of our discussion, after which we discerned in Chapter II criteria usually employed to speak of the personal identity of these individuals from a practical stance. We can now turn to the problem of the status of the notion of ‘self’ or, better still, to an analysis of the ways of life in which this concept is supposed to play a key role.

The issue to be addressed in this chapter and the next one can be phrased as follows: what is the use of a notion of oneself? Indeed, as we go about under the impression that each of us is an ordinary human being, what good is that impression for? It can be initially said that, under normal circumstances, we characterize the type of individual we are by considering our psychological and physical properties (see I.2), and, moreover, by assessing the kind of life we live (see II.3). We appear to have not just an instinctive, pre-theoretical understanding of the class of creatures we are, but also seem to possess a natural grasp of the identity of our own person. Roughly, then, this grasp would amount to a ‘self-conception’ arising from the handle we have on our own particular life. This handle would be *prima facie* indispensable from a practical perspective: without a self-conception, we would hardly comprehend our place in society and the range of opportunities available to us, which in turn could significantly complicate our existence.

Yet, this approach can be problematized by noticing how many are compelled to introspecting or looking *inwardly* to account for the uniqueness or singularity of the person they are. It is as if our ordinary lives unfolded in function of the persistence of who we *truly* are ‘on the inside’. We are prone to look beyond the concrete human being experienced in everyday life so as to isolate the source of our individuality. But why cannot we satisfy ourselves with the notion that

*we* ultimately amount to nothing more than mundane beings among corporeal objects in nature? In other words, why do we look for some property that would in principle separate us at our core not just from other species but, fundamentally, from all other persons? This tendency to search for a property that could explain our special place in the universe has been further institutionalized in the idea that, strictly speaking, we are ‘selves’ and not merely human beings. As a matter of fact, the belief that deep down we are ‘selves’ is shown in the attitudes we assume in our daily activities and interchanges with others, for we carry ourselves in ways that exhibit a special importance we give to ourselves. There are several ways in which this conviction is shown in the behavior of a person: “[o]ne could know he remains so convinced by listening to him talk about himself, his personal problems ... or by observing him act in everyday life as if he believed he had a self that he valued and insisted other people value” (Canfield 1990 129). It thus seems as if we could infer from people’s unreflective acts and utterances not just how they usually interact with others but, more importantly, how they see themselves (131).

Now, we have established that there is no single property that makes us *essentially* the concrete persons we are (Cf. II. 3). It is at least not clear why we need to appeal to ‘selves’ in order to explain the singularity of our person. A putative account of ‘the self’ would end up depending on the enumeration of attributes of a person associated to it — namely, of a person said to have a ‘self’. However, in this way our explanation would not be informative. A similar problem surfaces in the explanation of the uniqueness of persons in terms of ‘souls’ (Cf. Martin and Barresi 2006) since, by the same token, that account would not get us any further. Why then insist that *I*, an ordinary person, endure as the same individual throughout my life in virtue of the continuity of a ‘self’ associated to me? Despite the obvious fact that any person’s physical and

mental attributes and functions inevitably change and deteriorate in time, why should we identify ourselves with anything other than the ordinary person we know ourselves to be?

For the sake of clarity, we must differentiate at this stage between two general types of problems regarding the status of 'selves'. Following Canfield, we shall separate the phenomenological from the ontological formulation of the problem, thus recognizing two levels of issues surrounding the topic of the self. On the one side, "[t]here is a merely theoretical belief in or denial of self," which gives rise to the ontological problem of the status of the self, while "on the other hand there is gut-level or existential, belief or denial" of self, which calls for a phenomenological approach to the subject (1990 4). A consequence of drawing this distinction is that, for instance, a person who has theoretically discarded the existence of 'selves' may still be convinced of their existence, which is shown in the ways he interacts with others. "This person," Canfield suggests, "retains what I am calling a gut-level belief in the self. It might be named an existential form of belief ... to signify that the belief manifests itself in a person's life and actions in a strong, pervasive way, as merely theoretical beliefs do not" (130). The opposite case would be that of the Buddhist, who is not merely denying on theoretical grounds the reality of 'selves' (130). He further aspires to do away with the image he has of himself, since it involves the elementary, existential belief that he is a 'self'.

The issue to be examined here has primarily to do with our self-conception. We can center our attention on the status of existential beliefs about ourselves while disregarding the metaphysical issue, as these are separate problems. In effect, we can either believe or not believe that we are selves regardless of whether we have theoretically retained or eliminated these entities from the universe of speech. Thus, I will focus on the phenomenological problem, specifically, as it regards to the utility of self-conception. My approach in the second part of this project is

phenomenological insofar as it is limited to how we conceive of personhood and how this conception is formed from first-personal experience. For its part, the problem of the ontological status of ‘selves’ will not be addressed here; we need not ponder how idle the distinction between selves and human beings might be. We will restrict our inquiry henceforth to how ordinary persons appear to others and to themselves (3), as our problem involves questions about the individual conception persons have of themselves, how they have acquired them, and the role that these (might) play in their lives.

In order to tackle our main question about the use of a notion of oneself, it will be helpful to first address the problem of how did we ever acquire such a notion. This problem is expressed in the puzzle of self-conception, which is articulated by George Mead. Thus, after formulating this puzzle and specifying ways of responding to it, we would have laid the groundwork we require to assess the issue of the use of self-conception. There are two chief ways of addressing this puzzle. Firstly, there are *static* approaches, which I will present and evaluate in this chapter. Secondly, there are *dynamic* approaches; these will be examined in the next chapter together with a dynamic approach I will then propose. As an upshot, we will come up with two general classes of approximations to the same problem, such that there will be different ways of considering the phenomenological problem of the use of self-conception.

#### **IV. 1. Seeking Oneself: A Static Formulation of the Puzzle of Self-Conception**

At first glance, it seems that we need not know whether the first-personal pronoun actually refers to anything in order to establish the origin and utility of our self-conception. We can start by focusing on the notion we already have of ourselves and then ask whether it is formed from a potential impression of ourselves, given that such a focus does not necessarily presuppose

understanding how ‘I’ works. Then again, how could we ever directly perceive the person we are so as to attain an impression of ourselves? If I can only immediately perceive parts of my body, how can these fragmentary impressions be put together to form my own self-conception? Since the development of my self-conception in this way would follow parameters set by my prior sense of who I am, these parameters would not be useful — they would have to be as arbitrary as the conception I end up making of myself, which would beg the question of how could such an arbitrary and therefore inaccurate image of myself be of any service to me.

In *Mind, Self, and Society*, Mead formulates this puzzle in the following terms: “[h]ow can an individual get outside himself (experientially) in such a way as to become an object to himself?” (1972 139) He thinks of this as “the essential psychological problem of selfhood or of self-consciousness” (139). This is a fundamental problem with our capacity to ever form a self-conception, which leads to the question of how did we ever become self-conscious. Based on the assumption that “[w]e can distinguish very definitely between the self and the body” (136), the issue is how could we come up with a notion of ourselves, not of our bodies, since these are not equivalent. That they do not amount the same thing is clear from the fact that “[t]he body can be there and can operate in a very intelligent fashion without there being” a notion of oneself “involved in the experience” of our own body (136). Mead explains this as follows:

[i]t is perfectly true that the eye can see the foot, but it does not see the body as a whole. We cannot see our backs; we can feel certain portions of them, if we are agile, but we cannot get an experience of our whole body. There are, of course, experiences which are somewhat vague and difficult of location, but the bodily experiences are for us organized about a self. The foot and hand belong to the self. We can see our feet, especially if we look at them from the wrong end of an opera glass, as strange things which we have difficulty in recognizing as our own. The parts of the body are quite distinguishable from the self. We can lose parts of the body without any serious invasion of the self. The mere ability to experience different parts of the body is not different from the experience of a table. The table presents a different feel from what the hand does when one hand feels another, but it is an experience of something with which we come definitely into contact. The

body does not experience itself as a whole, in the sense in which the self in some way enters into the experience of the self. (136)

Notice that he formulates this puzzle from a 'static' perspective by pointing out how person seeking to *contemplate* directly his whole body would fail in achieving an awareness of 'himself'. Mead particularly emphasizes one side of this paradox, namely, the case of a person failing to become an immediate 'object' of his own awareness. The difficulty consists in the fact that a human being cannot completely and immediately perceive himself, or else enter in contact with himself, so as to acquire an image of *who* he is. Therefore, how can we have an operative conception of ourselves if we do not have enough resources for coming up with this notion, given that we cannot become objects of our own awareness? Assuming that a person becomes self-aware by perceiving parts of his body would beg the question, as he would apparently have no basis for inferring that these are parts of *himself* (136). It follows that "the self as an object does not enter [experience]" (137).

From another perspective, while a person is trying to directly and entirely perceive himself, he might infer that he exists from the fact that there must be someone doing the perceiving. But on what basis could he infer this? While a person perceives, he should not be able to perceive himself, such that there would be nothing in his own awareness from which he could suppose that there must be a corresponding perceiver. Indeed, there is no perceiving subject to be perceived; he cannot, so to speak, step back and see himself as a subject. Subsequently, the self as a subject cannot enter experience, either. The assumption that we can infer from our present experience that there must be an experiencing subject implies what Canfield refers to as the 'dual aspect' to consciousness: "there is the item we are aware of and, at the same time, an awareness of being aware" (1990 29). He claims that this dual aspect leads to an infinite regress, since there would have to be an infinite amount of perceivers in order to ground the awareness of the original

person attempting to perceive himself: “if there is self-awareness, then the self must be a part of consciousness, and that ... seems unacceptable,” because it “gives rise to an infinite chain of awareness of  $x$ , awareness of awareness of  $x$ , awareness of awareness of awareness of  $x$ , and so on” (31). Thus, since from this point of view a person would have to become self-aware by virtue of becoming a part of his own consciousness, self-awareness seems impossible.

As a result, since no one would ever be justified in taking himself either as an object or subject of his own awareness, it looks like we cannot explain our self-consciousness, let alone the properties of our self-conception. Still, we claim to know who we are and suppose to know how others see us. From what we have said, though, it rather appears that we do not know who we are, and that our self-conception does not fit us. All in all, if we have a notion of ourselves, it could hardly be an accurate one. Even if we have a self-conception to entertain, its utility could not be estimated because we have no independent grounds on which to determine its role.

One reason why this paradox arises is that, as a rule, any perception requires some type of mediation to occur. Some sense or another must be used for some experience to be obtained, so that *through* it we become aware of such-and-such. It is thus that, by default, immediately perceiving oneself would have to be excluded from the act of perceiving itself, just as our eye’s blind spot must be overlooked in order for us to observe an object. However, if the use of a notion of oneself is supposed to be explained in terms of a direct acquaintance with or immediate experience of the person one is at some point, it seems that we cannot ever come up with such a notion. Then, there would not be any self-conception to be explained, but this is absurd. Actually, we possess a self-conception insofar as we know ourselves to be this or that way, believe that we have such-and-such physical traits, personality, and so on. It can be further argued with Canfield that this conception plays a determinant role in how our lives unfold, as it largely impacts our



behavior and how we act and interact with others, insofar as the attitudes we assume show the deep conviction that we are not just human beings but, more importantly, ‘selves’. This is shown in the special importance we put on ourselves and demand from others (130).

As will be seen, Mead tackles the puzzle of self-conception by adopting a dynamic stance (see 1972 138). I will present his approach in the next chapter with the intention of grounding my own dynamic account of the purpose of self-conception. For now, the idea is to advance specific attempts to address this puzzle from a static perspective.

#### **IV. 2. Traditional Static Approaches to the Puzzle of Self-Conception**

*Purism* is a tradition that has paved the way for static approaches to the notion of ‘I’. This doctrine consists of “an appealing conception of I as purified of the demanding features and requirements which make other terms so complicated. A ‘simple rule’ gives its meaning. No identification is necessary in central cases. Each use is logically secured against failure” (de Gaynesford 2006 28). A classic exponent of this tradition is Descartes, for whom ‘I’ is a term whose referent is guaranteed against failure provided a simple rule for its use. It is thus that there cannot be a doubt without a doubter, a thought without a thinker (1997 36), from which one could infer one’s own existence (36). Accordingly, we could interpret his proof of the existence of the self (36) as implying that it would be practically impossible to conceive of a perception without a perceiver.

However, as we begin to look for what ‘I’ denotes, we stumble right away with the issue of whether this term refers at all, let alone to a person or a sub-personal entity. Lichtenberg claims that this term does not refer, arguing in turn that ‘the self’ must be a grammatical illusion arising from the assumption that ‘I’ has a substantive use (1971 412). We assume, in effect, a correlative

reference for 'I' in the world as we utter it in diverse contexts, and we call this reference 'myself' or 'the self'. Lichtenberg suggests, though, that the first person term does not refer at all because it works basically like 'it' as used in "It rains," which is a device of language not meant to denote in those cases an object (412). Yet, even if we do not postulate the existence of an object denoted with 'it' in order to make sense of that statement, we tend to think that 'I' has a referent in the world. To avoid misunderstandings, he recommends reformulating Descartes' proof of the existence of the self as follows: "[w]e should say, 'It thinks,' just as we say, 'It thunders.' Even to say *cogito* is too much if we translate it with 'I think.' To assume the 'I,' to postulate it, is a practical need" (412). Lichtenberg's suggestion is thus to interpret the necessity attributed to Descartes's proof of the self as practical, since we have to assume out of necessity a placeholder for 'I' given the way our language functions.

Then again, since we have limited the scope of our inquiry to a phenomenological approach to self-conception, we need not address the concern of whether the first person term actually points to an object in the universe in order to account for the utility of our self-conception. So far, we have achieved a preliminary basis for questioning the idea that 'I' always refers, which will later on serve us in loosening the grip that static approaches to the puzzle of self-conception tend to have in us. Keeping in mind this consideration, let us turn to an examination of particular attempts that have been offered to address this puzzle and show exactly why they have failed.

### **Hume's Quest for the Self as an Object**

Hume famously introspected in order to find a potential impression in his experience that could explain how he got his idea of 'I'. His intent was indeed to track down the origin of his idea of

himself. He can be seen attempting to perceive himself as an object by assuming a contemplative approach, as he inspects the current perceptions in his stream of consciousness without finding anything that he could properly call ‘myself’:

when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. (2005 165)

That his attempt was futile is not really surprising; after all, it is a given that there is no actual object we could adequately name “myself” which enters our immediate awareness in its entirety. There was no such impression in his experience or else a principle of association of ideas he could identify with himself — nor could there ever be one, for what would such an impression or principle have to look like if we are to properly call it ‘myself’? For the sake of argument, let us assume that ‘the self’ is something that could in principle be perceived –i.e., something that could impress our understanding one way or another–, whether it manifests itself as an impression or as a cluster of impressions. Still, what Hume showed is that we are only presently aware of a flux of impressions or perceptions of our own state of mind, and never experience ourselves as *complete* objects of our own awareness. We are only conscious of concomitant fragments or episodes that he calls ‘impressions’, but never experience these fragments together as a complete object we could think of as ‘the self’.

Furthermore, there is nothing we can *directly* perceive which is worth calling ‘the self’. Canfield explains that Hume’s endeavor “was to gain experiential awareness of his self. Only if he could have such a direct, immediate awareness would there be a source in experience for the idea of the self” (1990 32). But, since there is no such source, he had to conclude that there is no *I*. The point is that Hume could never have achieved his aim. The reason why this is not possible has to do with how we normally come into contact with objects in nature, which excludes the

possibility of encountering ourselves. It is part of how we normally experience objects or enter in contact with them in the world that we cannot experience ourselves the same way or else be ourselves objects to contact. By definition, our immediate experience cannot admit any object to be directly aware of in its entirety that we could properly conceive of as ‘ourselves’.

### **The Subject as a Condition for the Unity of Experience**

Meanwhile, there have been accounts meant to explain how we can conceive of ourselves as subjects of our own experience. For instance, Kant speaks of the ‘transcendental subject of experience’ as a condition implied in the acquisition of organized, coherent experience. Still, unlike Descartes, he does not assert the self’s existence in a substantive way, since he just infers its formal existence. For Kant, we have to assume the existence of a transcendental reference for ‘I’ even if this entity is never experienced, as it constitutes a condition for the possibility of experience (1984 163). The reference of ‘I’ –this is, the *noumenal* self– is ‘transcendental’ insofar as it has no referent in time and space, but it is conceived as a requirement for intelligible experience insofar as the idea of a ‘self’ must accompany all of our perceptions for these to be obtained (166-167). As a consequence, even if he regards in the end ‘the self’ as a transcendental illusion, the notion of ‘I’ still has a use to the extent that it accounts for how our experience is attained in a unified way.

However, Kant does not explain the way in which this notion of a transcendental subject helps synchronize the data we retrieve from our senses. And without having a function in organizing our experience, it looks like we have no reason to hold on to it. In this way, Canfield claims that “[t]he transcendental I is a trick” (1992 43). He argues that if this entity does not lie in space and time, it is not clear how the existence of this subject in a “transcendental” sphere, being “forever devoid of contact with things in real space,” can do any “explanatory work in how things

are organized” in space and time (43). In effect, after close examination it is not clear that this concept of ‘I’ does the work that Kant wants it to:

[t]he only thing it is called on explicitly to explain –the “unity of experience” – it cannot. The explanation is supposed to look something like this: “That this sight occurs simultaneously with this sound is explained by the fact that they are both experienced by a something-I-know-not-what which is itself forever beyond experience.” Such an explanation is only the appearance of one. (43)

Although we cannot find the thing itself in the world denoted with ‘I’, we still assume that we are aware of a phenomenological ‘I’, if only implicitly, as the consequence of having intelligible experience. Nevertheless, this supposition is unwarranted. Just as we cannot experience what is to be strictly speaking called ‘I’ because it lies outside space and time, we have no evidence of the workings of a phenomenological ‘I’, not even indirectly. It is true that we possess the idea of an ‘I’. But then, when we try to explain its origin, we arrive at a dead end: if the ‘I’ is supposed to synthesize our intuitions into organized experience, then it must be part of our world (that is, it must lie within space and time). Yet, if we cannot experience it, it should not show up in any way, not even implicitly as a condition for our experience. Thereby, if the reference to a subject beyond our world cannot explain what we think of as the unitary character of our experience, where can our self-conception acquire its content, and what would be its purpose?

In any case, from Kant’s static perspective it is not obvious how the phenomenon of a ‘self’ could ever emerge (even tactilely) so as to become a content to be asserted in propositions involving the use of ‘I’. The point is that, by restricting our approach to a contemplative inspection of the matter, the phenomenological ‘self’ escapes us time and again.

## Wittgenstein's Conception of the Metaphysical Subject

Wittgenstein's claims in the *Tractatus* about the self can be interpreted from a Kantian point of view, whereby in a way it makes sense to speak of the 'I' despite the fact that, whatever the use of this notion might be, its referent must not lie in the world. But unlike Kant, he does not give the concept of 'I' a role in synthesizing our experience: "[a]ll experience is world and does not need the subject" (*Notebooks* 89e). Meanwhile, he denies the notion according to which "[t]he I is ... an object" (80e), this is, something we could confront (89e). The interesting issue for him is rather why the 'philosophical I' or 'self' does not enter experience as a subject, although it is somehow implied in it:

[t]he philosophical I is not the human being, not the human body or the human soul with the psychological properties, but the metaphysical subject, the boundary (not a part) of the world. The human body, however, my body in particular, is a part of the world among others, among beasts, plants, stones, etc., etc. (82e)

But again, if the 'philosophical I' consists solely of the limits of the world, "[w]here in the world is a metaphysical subject to be found?" (80e) This question is senseless insofar as the metaphysical subject is not an entity to be encountered in the world. As a matter of fact, we cannot get acquainted with 'the self' –or, according to our interpretation, with the phenomenon of *who* we are – anymore than we can infer from observing something "in the visual field" that "it is seen from an eye" (80e). He thus argues that the self as a metaphysical subject cannot enter experience as an event, from which it follows that there is no phenomenon of a 'self' that can be perceived: "it is true that I do not see the subject" (86e).

Having said that, the notion of 'I' still plays a key role for Wittgenstein, because "the subject is not a part of the world but a presupposition of its existence" (79e). Thus, even though "there is no knowing subject" (86e), in another sense there *must* be a metaphysical subject. In

other words, the limits of the world can be shown in meaningful uses of language, despite the fact that we cannot state what these limits *are*. At the same time, these boundaries do not make up for a ‘thing’ we can rightly call ‘I’, since in the end it is reduced to an “extensionless point” (*Tractatus* § 5.64). As the metaphysical subject is not *in* the world but constitutes a precondition for its existence, it seems both true that “in an important sense there is no subject” (§ 5.631) while, in another sense, there has to be such a subject if the world is ever going to be experienced.

It can be argued that Wittgenstein adopts in the *Tractatus* a *static* approach to the issue of the self, which is inherently problematic. The question is whether we can properly characterize *our notion* of ‘I’ by appealing to a metaphysical subject, namely, something that is “not a part of our world” (§ 5.641). Indeed, how could something that presumably does not exist in space and time impact in any degree the way we see the world and how we conceive of ourselves (i.e., the human being) to the extent that, without it, there would be no world for us to experience? If the metaphysical subject amounts to the limits of the world but, still, we cannot *say* what such limits consists of, this characterization of ‘the self’ would beg the question as to the origins of our self-conception. That is, how could our self-conception obtain any content from a subject that does not exist in the realm of facts? At least in respect to the origins of our self-conception, it can be said that Wittgenstein’s concept of ‘the self’ as a metaphysical subject comes down to an unnecessary postulate, because it does not really explain how we have acquired the former — nor, to be sure, it is meant to explain this. Thereby, such an appeal to the metaphysical subject could not contribute to explaining the role of our self-conception. For even if we think of the *I* as the limits of our world, it is not clear that *that* is actually how we conceive of ourselves.

## The Lasting Present

It is worth specifying why exactly our interpretation of Wittgenstein's approach to the puzzle of self-conception would be classified as 'static'. This is shown in the line of reasoning that leads him to adhere to 'selfless realism'.

Wittgenstein thinks that, when carried out to its ultimate consequences, solipsism – the idea that “only I am real, for others would consist merely in my awareness of them” (Canfield 1990 44)– collapses into selfless realism: “solipsism ... coincides with pure realism. The I in solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and there remains the reality coordinated with it” (*Tractatus* § 5.64). His approach is static since he speaks of *contemplating* the world “as a limited whole” (§ 6.45). Instead of trying to see the world as a whole from the outside (something he claims we cannot do), he finds in the complete absorption in the present a way of contemplating ‘the self’, meaning, the limits of the world. He imagines an individual living perpetually immersed in the present in a way that he would not perceive the passage of time. Under those conditions, such a person could be said to live “eternally,” that is, “[i]f by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness” (§ 6.4311). Wittgenstein characterizes this form of selfless contemplation of the world as a limited whole as the “mystical feeling” (§ 6.45), which is not something that can be said but only shown (§ 6.522). He illustrates this idea in his

*Notebooks:*

As a thing among things, each thing is equally insignificant; as a world each one is equally significant.

If I have been contemplating the stove, and then am told: but know all you know is the stove, my result does indeed seem trivial. For this represents the matter as if I had studied the stove as one among the many things in the world. But if I was contemplating the stove *it* was my world, and everything colorless by contrast with it ....

(Something good about the whole, but bad in details.)



For it is equally possible to take the bare present image as the worthless momentary picture in the whole temporal world, and as the true world among shadows (*Notebooks* 83e).

Whenever we contemplate an item like a stove, for example, we can become absorbed in the moment in a way that we forget that the stove is being perceived by us, and that there is anything other than the stove in the world. Our total experience can be then contained in the moment, as it were, since we perceive the stove with enough attention that it becomes our entire world (Canfield 1999 47). For we are so immersed in the present that in a sense there appears to be no longer a perceiver. Thus, while that “timelessness” lasts, it is as if nothing existed outside ‘the world’ composed by the stove and what nearly surrounds it.

Subsequently, through sustained contemplation there seems no longer to be a dichotomy between the contemplative subject and the world. The previous example involves an *image* we can witness “as a limited whole” only when there is no longer a separation between subject and world. This explains why Wittgenstein ends up abandoning idealism, for he does not think that men are unique individuals to be singled out as opposed to the world. He is thus left with a selfless world:

This is the way I have travelled: Idealism singles men out from the world as unique, solipsism singles me alone out, and at last I see that I too belong with the rest of the world, and so on the one side *nothing* is left over, and on the other side, as unique, *the world*. In this way idealism leads to realism if it is strictly thought out. (*Notebooks* 85e)

This view can be problematized by considering what would happen if we could live completely absorbed in the present. There would be a basic phenomenological difficulty in our experience of the present, which is the only thing we could ever experience: “if consciousness is tied to the momentary present, and we imagine time as being finely divided, then there never seems to be enough time to be aware of anything changing” (Canfield 1990 30). From this perspective, all we

could ever be aware of is the state of affairs presently experienced, so that we could not ever experience the passage of time — there would be no ‘next’ moment, since conscious experience would be altogether contained in the present. If so, our consciousness would be reduced to consciousness of the present, namely, of *this* moment. Therefore, the problem would be that we would have no basis for inferring from our present awareness the existence of either the self as an object or a subject. For if the present moment is all we have, it looks like we cannot infer the existence of ourselves, say, by tracking our own deeds over time, which seems highly counterintuitive. This would further beg the question of how did we ever come up with a notion of ourselves. We would be stuck again without an explanation of the origin and utility our self-conception.

#### **IV. 3. The Basic Unviability of Static Approaches**

We have seen ways of undermining static responses to the puzzle of self-conception. Whether it is in respect to the ‘self’ considered as an object or a subject of experience, we cannot account for the origin and use of self-conception by appealing to an *immediate* perception of ourselves. I suggest that this puzzle is largely the product of how it was initially formulated. Specifically, I have argued that the paradox arises because we are trying to subvert a basic condition that must be satisfied for perception to ever occur: namely, it must be mediated. Perceiving the world through some channel (i.e., through a given sense) constitutes a ‘natural barrier’, so to speak, which is entailed in the very act of sensing. In effect, we must use some sense or another in order to become aware of anything. However, in order to contemplate ourselves directly and entirely we would have to exceed such a barrier, thus undermining the very possibility of experiencing anything. As a consequence, the puzzle of self-conception could not be solved with the use of a

static treatment anymore than we could, say, run over our own shadows. Becoming aware of oneself either as an object or a subject would have to be excluded from the very act of perceiving, given that this exclusion is precisely a necessary condition for the existence of any perception.

What is problematic about static approaches in general is that they address this puzzle from a perspective that is largely distanced from and unaffected by the world. Ironically, instead of finding in such 'distance' enough space to perceive ourselves either as objects or subjects, we end up missing the trees and the forest altogether. While we try to immediately perceive ourselves through a contemplative approach, we unwillingly insulate ourselves from the rest of world, from the activities and interactions that are part of people's ordinary lives, such that the origin of our self-conception becomes a mystery.

Moreover, by isolating ourselves from the context in which we are already situated, we are prone to think of consciousness as occurring in a private realm. We are lead to believe that our awareness is a phenomenon that only *we* could ever witness, thus implying that self-consciousness, too, is an essentially 'private' event. In this way, we make it impossible for us to explain how did we ever become self-aware, as this would require of an infinite amount of perceivers to explain our original awareness (Canfield 1990 29). We are then separating the person from his activities and interactions with other members of the community, despite the fact that, as will be argued in the next chapter, it is in terms of them that we come up with a self-conception. Of course, if we assume that we could only know who we are exclusively from what we discern from the first person perspective, the origin of our self-conception will remain an enigma. It seems that we need to change our general approach if the puzzle of self-conception is to be properly treated.

## **Changing the Approach to the Puzzle of Self-Conception**

I argue that a satisfactory way to tackle this puzzle is to adopt a dynamic approach. From a static point of view, the puzzle is intractable insofar as a contemplative human being has no way of becoming an object of his own awareness or else a subject to be accurately described as “aware” of himself. On the other hand, from a dynamic standpoint a person is already conceived as situated in a given sociocultural context, engaging in ordinary activities and interacting with other members of a community. In this sense, the individual is not insulated from his ordinary life: he is not in a privileged, neutral position from where he can judge what occurs in the world with the dispassionate attitude a contemplating human being. Adopting a dynamic stance would thus involve rejecting the idea of a contemplative subject who has an absolutely freestanding perspective. Rather, he always sees some aspect of the world and environment from a specific angle; this is, with a set of interests and necessities in mind. This means that a person cannot just passively contemplate the world from an unbiased viewpoint so as to pick out the source of his self-conception by pointing to some potential cluster of impressions, ideas, or facts, or else fail in this attempt. On the contrary, from a dynamic stance a person’s self-conception is not necessarily understood as a cluster of visual images or impressions. Instead, it consists of diverse attitudes and beliefs he has about himself. From this point of view, the individual is not separated from the social interconnections that shape his ordinary life. He is seen as a constitutive part of the forms of life around him and not just a passive bystander, which further entails that he cannot be the sole author of the notion he has of himself. This notion is molded in function of how others see him depending on the roles he plays in society.

Hence, by considering our self-conception as originating and being shaped in the context of the cultural and social background in which we are already situated, we can avoid many

difficulties that are inherent to static approaches to the puzzle of self-conception. If we understand it this way, the basis of our self-conception does not appear as perplexing because it arises in the course of exchanges with other human beings from which it acquires its content. The viability of this type of approach will be assessed in the next chapter.

## V. THE ROLE OF SELF-CONCEPTION:

### A Dynamic Approach

This final chapter proposes a dynamic approach to the puzzle of self-conception, so that an intractable problem from a static perspective may receive a satisfactory resolution. After studying some relevant accounts of this class of approach, I will advance what I shall identify as the Two-Moment View to account for the use of self-conception. I will end by complementing this account with Mead's conception of the 'self', which in turn will help us tackle the puzzle of self-conception.

#### V.1. Action, Deliberation, and Self-Conception or the Lack Thereof

A way of replying to Hume's static approach to the puzzle of self-conception consists of affirming that we become directly aware of ourselves when we willfully engage in action. James Cornman holds this view. He claims that "[w]hat Hume overlooked ... is that self-awareness comes primarily, if not exclusively, when I am active; it is not some object I find in introspection" (1970 178). He proposes a dynamic account whereby "[s]omeone is aware of himself when he is active, as in willing, just as surely as he is aware of any idea" (178). Though not exclusively, he argues that we become objects of our own experience as long as we behave in function of 'acts of will' (178). Then, the actions through which we become self-aware are those in which our intentions are consciously carried out, for it is thus that we become aware of ourselves as agents of those actions. Canfield explains this idea by saying that "to be aware of myself, I must do something; I will then be able to be aware of myself performing this or that act of will" (1990 33). Therefore, when we undergo these 'acts of will' we become *active* individuals as our behavior subsequently embodies our intentions.

But consider this: while we (willfully) run to catch a bus that is about to leave us behind, we seem not to be self-aware in the way Cornman suggests, or at least we do not possess a notion of ourselves by means of which our action unfolds and that is at stake in this activity (Cf Sartre 2005 48-49). Perhaps deliberating or thinking too much about what is happening at that moment could lead to hesitation, which can diminish our chances of getting on the bus. If we get distracted, say, because we are worrying about missing the bus and the consequences originating from this, we may slip and miss it nonetheless. In this case, it is not clear that we entertain or presuppose a notion of ourselves or that such a notion, presumably involved in the mentioned hypothesis, would be useful to our practical aim of catching the bus. Thus, if we suppose that a person's rushing to catch a bus is impacted by his act of will, the previous case would constitute a counterexample to the emergence or usefulness of a notion of oneself in the context of action.

Besides, what is the ontological status of these 'acts of will'? Indeed, "[w]here are the acts of will or instances of 'willing' Cornman alluded to?" (Canfield 1990 34) We are mainly looking here for the relative contribution of these 'acts of will' to the task of securing a self-conception. Yet, as Canfield argues, "[t]hey are invisible as the alleged self performing them; they, too, are mythological" (34). It is not obvious that a notion of oneself comes up primarily while acting consciously, since one has no corresponding experience of an 'act of will' as having any connection to how one behaves. Many times, in fact, it is enough to react instinctively to a bus leaving us behind to find ourselves already racing towards it, such that there is no conscious decision upon which we would perform this act. More importantly, our self-conception would not mediate the visual perception of the bus in motion and the act of running towards it, which implies that, even if the act of chasing the bus is charged with intentionality, it is not the result of a discrete 'act of will' connected to a notion of ourselves causing our behavior.

Therefore, if we are going to assess whether a notion of ourselves emerges in the context of action and whether there is any use to it, we will have to take a different route. For, as just seen, it is not clear that a concept of ourselves emerges and that it is operating while we are undoubtedly active, like when we are running to catch a bus. What is more, if there is a sense in which a person's self-conception plays a role in this context, it is not explained by appealing to a person's experience of himself as an agent, that is, if we only become agents when 'acts of will' are involved. It rather looks like we need not postulate a 'self' any more than we need to appeal to 'acts of will' to explain intentional action, since we can ordinarily and under regular circumstances successfully interpret human action without having to appeal to either one.

### **Performing Without a Sense of Oneself**

But then, if the way we see ourselves is not apparent while being active, to what extent can we say that appealing to a 'self' helps to account for the actions we undertake? Hubert Dreyfus has argued otherwise, claiming that many times the notion we have of ourselves does not play a role when we are absorbed coping with world and environment. Following Sartre (Cf. 2005 48-49), he suggests that when we are running to catch a bus, a deliberative subject is not present in our awareness whatsoever. An underlying notion of a 'self' motivating our actions would indeed not be found in this and many other instances, since it is precisely without such a notion that we excel when performing multiple tasks.

He proposes this view by arguing that, when experts optimally cope by immediately reacting to the incoming series of solicitations or, in other words, when they perform 'in the flow', a "thinking subject" neither appears in their awareness nor does it prescribe their action (Dreyfus 2007 358). He adduces the case of a pilot constantly guided by solicitations of the



aircraft and instantly responding to them. In such a case, Dreyfus contends that a ‘thinking subject’ is absent because the pilot is apparently not monitoring or reflecting on his behavior, such that the lack of concomitant thought processes on his part means that he is coping properly (358). It follows from this his idea that when acting in the flow one has no sense of oneself: “[w]hen one is bodily absorbed responding to solicitations there is no thinking subject” (358). As I interpret Dreyfus, the notion of a ‘thinking self’ that could otherwise interrupt our natural coping with the world disappears with the type of detached premeditation that it entails. This does not imply, though, that there is no longer an ordinary human being, for even if there is not an operative concept of a ‘thinking subject’ in this type of cases, there is still evidently a human being acting in the world of life. In Dreyfus’ view, it is rather the *thinking* subject that does not appear over and above the person. Therefore, as an awareness of a ‘thinking self’ loses its grip through the absorption of an ordinary person in his daily affairs (like when running to catch a bus) or in cases where experts such as a pilot perform at their best, it can be said that many times successful action does not demand a self-conception.

On the other hand, Dreyfus maintains that an awareness of this thinking or deliberative subject could interfere with our performance, potentially working in its detriment. Supposedly, what is not present in the consciousness of experts is a deliberating subject that could harm their action, assuming that they excel at them when acting in the flow. Because to get in the flow it would be necessary to lose a deliberative notion of ourselves when performing a given task, so that our reactions are immediately elicited based on which are the solicitations and affordances surfacing in each practice. In other words, we must abandon the perspective of an impartial bystander on a game we are currently playing and become a part of it, immersing ourselves

entirely in its unfolding without trying to analyze the quality of our performance in order to improve it.

Dreyfus thus thinks that once we become competent in the diverse tasks we come across, we have the freedom of choosing to immerse ourselves in them in a way that involves renouncing to another human freedom, namely, the ability to occasionally step back and reflect on our behavior to understand what is off about it and how we can enhance it. Importantly, he thinks that what differentiates the expert from the merely competent or the beginner is that the former *voluntarily* submerges in the current of responses and reactions to solicitations (355), even though this entails giving up on reflection: “[f]ollowing Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, I claim that the freedom intermittently to step back and reflect presupposes a truly pervasive human freedom. Unlike mere animals, we have a freedom not to exercise our freedom to step back but rather to let ourselves be involved” (355). Experts constantly self-reflecting as they perform suggests that a rather widespread ability of being voluntarily absorbed in a given task has been fractured to some degree. Nevertheless, such a prevalent human freedom of being ‘voluntary immersed’ can be reacquired when we abandon our distanced reflections and choose instead to immediately respond to the solicitations of the world.

### **The Second Nature of Self-Awareness: Acting With a Sense of Oneself**

An opposite position to Dreyfus’ can be maintained by arguing that a concept of oneself is always involved in action, assuming that action is conceptually charged in its entirety. A prominent exponent of this view is John McDowell, who, by inserting himself in the Aristotelian and Kantian tradition, conceives of rationality and deliberation as the human freedom *per excellence* and, thus, as its specific difference. In effect, he presupposes an Aristotelian notion of the human

being as he conceives this individual as a rational and speaking animal (*Mind and World* 88-89). Meanwhile, he adopts a Kantian approach insofar as he finds in the notion we have of ourselves a precondition for deliberate action. This view follows from his idea that mindedness is pervasive in the world in that it goes ‘all the way down’. Even in the context of constantly coping with the world, he believes that there is always rationality involved since we must deliberate our way about in the world. The pervasive nature of conceptuality in experience is thus shown in that “... thinking does not stop short of facts. The world is embraceable in thought,” as the latter “constitutes a background without which the special way in which experience takes hold of the world would not be intelligible” (33). Therefore, he follows Kant in his maxim whereby “[t]houghts without content are empty, [whereas] intuitions without concepts are blind” (Kant qtd. in McDowell *Mind and World* 87).

Additionally, rationality is always involved in action inasmuch as human nature “is largely second nature” (87), given that “the way our lives are shaped by reason is natural” (88). Thereby, he reinterprets Kant’s maxim from a dynamic stance applying it to action, as he goes on to say that “intentions without overt activity are idle, and movements of limbs without concepts are mere happenings, not extensions of agency” (89). In order to convey this point, he introduces the notion of education (*Bildung*) as actualizing “... potentialities we are born with” (88). He thus wants to “accommodate” Kant’s maxim by further claiming that, insofar as “experiences are actualizations of our sentient nature in which conceptual capacities are inextricably implicated,” then, “intentional bodily actions are actualizations of our active nature in which conceptual capacities are inextricably implicated” (90). This involves, though, distancing to an extent from Kant as he rather sees in the Aristotelian definition of the human being as a rational animal a source of reasonability:

we can return to sanity if we recapture the Aristotelian idea that a normal mature human being is a rational animal, with its rationality part of its animal, and so natural, being, not a mysterious foothold in another [interior] realm. The way to do that is to realize that our nature is largely second nature. (91)

The importance McDowell gives to the social aspect of rationality is seen in the way he characterizes his naturalism by appeal to Wittgenstein (95), who thinks of “[g]iving orders, asking questions, telling stories, having a chat ... as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing” (*Philosophical Investigations* § 25). McDowell thus conceives of his view as aligned with what Wittgenstein calls “our natural history,” namely, “the natural history of creatures whose nature is largely second nature. Human life, our natural way of being, is already shaped by meaning” (*Mind and World* 95).

With this set of assumptions as a backdrop, McDowell characterizes his notion of ‘self’ by equipping Kant’s ‘Transcendental Subject’ with the concept of a second nature (99), thereby redefining it in a way closer to Aristotle’s concept of the human being. Notice that he still holds on to Kant’s claim that there would be no experience without a notion of oneself, although this experience would now be contextualized in terms of a second nature. With Kant’s Transcendental Subject in mind as “accompanying all my representations” (see Kant 1984 162), McDowell thinks of ‘self-consciousness’ as something that “can hold together, in a single survey, states and occurrences that are temporally separated; they are conceived as belonging to the career of a continuant, a thinking thing” (*Mind and World* 100). Significantly, this is possible without assuming that self-consciousness conforms to “a criterion of identity” (100), for the literal persistence of a substance to be named with ‘I’ is not presupposed when employing this expression: “[t]o put the point in Kant’s terms: in the “I think” that can “accompany all my representations”, the reference of the “I” is understood as reaching into the past and the future” without there having to be a “persistent referent for the “I” in the “I think”” (100). Therefore, for

McDowell self-awareness does not imply a thorough account of personal identity because an individual need not keep track of the literal persistence of a substance picked out with 'I' in order to successfully conceive of the career of the human being he is: "[c]ontinuity of "consciousness" involves no analogue to ... keeping track of the persisting self that nevertheless seems to figure in its content" (100).

Still, unlike Kant, he does not describe the notion of 'self' in an exclusively formal and subjective way: "[w]e can say that the continuity of "consciousness" is intelligible only as a subjective take on something that has more to it than "consciousness" itself contains: on the career of an objective continuant, with which the subject of a continuous "consciousness" can identify itself" (101). For McDowell the concept that an individual has of himself has also an objective value capable of being appreciated from a third-person perspective, in the context of which the path of a person becomes intelligible from his first-person point of view. Indeed,

[e]ven "from within", the subjective take is understood as situated in a wider context; so there can be more content to the idea of persistence it embodies. The wider context makes it possible to understand that the first person, the continuing referent of the "I" in the "I think" that can "accompany all my representations", is also a third person, something whose career is a substantial continuity in the objective world: something such that other modes of continuing thought about it would indeed require keeping track of it ... I think something on these lines is the right frame for the Kantian thought that self-awareness and awareness of the world are interdependent. (102)

It is thus that, whilst distancing himself from Kant's formalistic conception, McDowell nevertheless characterizes his notion of the 'self' as an essentially conscious/self-conscious animal. The problem he sees with Kant's Transcendental Subject is that an appeal to "subjective continuity ... as part of what it is for experience to bear on objective reality, cannot be equated with the continuing life of a perceiving animal," for it ends up shrinking the continuity of this life to "a mere point of view: something that need not have anything to do with a body, so far as the

claim of interdependence is concerned” (102). But then, as a consequence of reinterpreting Kant’s notion, he understands this ‘self-conscious animal’ as the ordinary self:

[i]f Kant’s connection between self-awareness and awareness of the world is to leave it open to us to regain the idea that the subjects of our experience are ordinary selves, then the merely formal persistence of the I, in the “I think” that can “accompany all my representations”, had better be only an abstraction from the ordinary substantial persistence of the living subject of experience. It had better not be something free-standing, which we might hope to build on in reconstructing the persistence of the ordinary self. (103)

In this sense, we can take McDowell as contextualizing Kant’s notion of the ‘self’ in the ordinary experience of living persons. This is clear from the fact that he understands the ‘self’ as taking part in the world and not merely as an entity causing a body to act in diverse ways: “I think the way certain bodily goings-on *are* our spontaneity in action, not just effects of it, is central to a proper understanding of the self as a bodily presence in the world” (91 footnote).

Accordingly, the notion we have of ourselves cannot be a free-standing idea, as Kant would have it. On the contrary, it is relative to a living human being that one’s self-conception would be properly typified: “[t]he idea of a subjectively continuous series of “representations” could [not] ... stand alone, independent of the idea of a living thing in whose life these events occur” (103). The issue, then, with Kant’s proposal is that it lacks of “a serious notion of second nature,” in the absence of which it is impossible to integrate the subject with the concept of life (104). In the end, he thinks that Kant gets to the “very brink of success” but fails because he does not localize his concept of ‘self’ in everyday life, which would include an external perspective from which it could also be pondered: “Kant’s insight would be able to take satisfactory shape only if he could accommodate the fact that a thinking and intending subject is a living animal” (104.).

Let us now survey Dreyfus and McDowell's disagreement about the role of self-conception in action so as to advance a response to the problem of the utility of self-conception. This way, we will lay the groundwork for later on addressing the puzzle of self-conception from a dynamic standpoint.

## **V.2. The Partial Use of Self-Conception in Action**

It might seem clear that Dreyfus and McDowell think differently of the role of self-conception and rationality in human life. However, the exact way in which their views are opposed on this subject is not quite obvious.

As we have seen, according to Dreyfus our conceptual capacities are instruments that can potentially interfere with our constant coping, which rather entails being absorbed in everyday life so as to immediately respond to solicitations of the world and environment, given the available affordances (2007 355). This explains Dreyfus' hostility to McDowell's all-embracing conception of language and mindedness, as he further accuses him of being subject to the so-called "myth of the pervasiveness of the mental" (355). Especially, he is not attracted to the Gadamerian terminology used by McDowell to refer to rationality as a "free, distanced orientation" (354). Dreyfus indicates that rationality thus viewed leads to poor engagement, as "we are no longer able to act in the world" (354). Nonetheless, he concedes to McDowell that reflection in this detached fashion is a sort of human freedom. But he does not see this as our most relevant freedom since, although it is presumably found only amongst humans, he argues that reflection is not traced among human *experts* when successfully performing tasks: "I agree with McDowell that we have a freedom to step back and reflect that nonhuman animals lack, but I don't think this is our most pervasive and important kind of freedom" (354). According to him, when human

experts perform in their prime they need not reflect on their actions as they take form, and ultimately it is not through an appeal to such reflection that they account for the success of their performances. Thus, since they do not step back and revise their own capacities while they act, reflection becomes unrequired to proper functioning.

Even more, we noticed that Dreyfus claims not only that reflection understood as a ‘distanced orientation’ is unnecessary to action but also that it can work in its detriment due to the fact that reflection can decrease the level of experts’ performances to mere competence: “when we are absorbed in everyday skillful coping, we have the capacity to step back and reflect but ... we cannot exercise that capacity without disrupting our coping” (354). His negative evaluation of reflection and deliberation comes from the idea that we are *always* coping with the world, or, in Heidegger’s terminology, we are always beings-in-the-world (i.e., *Dasein*). This thought is expressed differently by saying that we are ordinary human beings living in direct contact with the world, such that we instantly react to it in a way that we need not step back and monitor on our action to adequately respond to the world (355). Dreyfus’ problem with reflection is that it can affect negatively the quality of our performance, assuming that in normal circumstances we successfully cope without having to reflect on how this coping takes place.

But reflecting on one’s behavior while engaging in a given task is not *always* an activity that lacks of any kind of benefit. Dreyfus acknowledges that, when learning a new skill, monitoring the way the body is exercised is invaluable to the degree that it empowers apprentices with the skills required to become competent. Yet, once expertise is secured, he argues that monitoring one’s performance while engaging in a given activity can be harmful to it. Despite this, even when disrupted by reflection, the ability to competently cope is still operating in the backdrop (354). This explains how, for instance, a trained driver could reflect on his skills while



driving a car without crashing it, for although thus monitoring his behavior involves risking to an extent the quality of his performance, ultimately it does not compromise his aptitude.

On the other hand, McDowell targets the cases proposed by Dreyfus in which individuals act ‘in the flow’ in order to say that even in those instances the individuals’ actions entail a notion of themselves. He starts by saying that if experience in general is to obtain, our conceptual capacities “must be operative in the experience itself” (“The Myth of the Mind as Detached” 42). This means that our conceptual capacities do not become operative “only when someone decides what to think on the basis of experience, with experience conceived as something she enjoys anyway, independently of any involvement of conceptual capacities” (42). Instead, he suggests in a Kantian vein that experience does not exist independently of the subject’s articulation of it: “That things are a certain way can be there for a subject to know, in her experience, whether or not she has the resources for explicitly judging (or saying) that they are that way” (43). Indeed, experience must be readily available for our conceptual capacities to embrace it such that, in the end, whenever an individual makes the content of his experience “explicit – even if the subject first has to acquire means to do that – [that] does not make the content newly conceptual in any sense relevant to my claim. It was conceptual already” (43). There would not be successful deployment of our abilities (even while acting in the flow) without these being conceptual — after all, as human nature “is largely second nature” (*Mind and World* 87), these skills, being part of our nature, must be shaped by reason (87). Thereby, “[i]f a rational subject does not have yet the means to make explicit some way her experience ... it is always possible for her to equip herself with such means,” because there cannot be a subject of experience wondering how to cope with a reality that is not conceptualized (“The Myth of the Mind as Detached” 43).

Next, in reference to the role of a ‘thinking subject’ involved in the deployment of these conceptual capacities, McDowell objects to Dreyfus’ claim that he is subject to the Myth of the Mind as Detached (44): “[n]ow Dreyfus thinks the very idea of conceptual capacities ... brings into my picture of experience a detached self, standing over against and contemplatively oriented towards an independent reality. But this has no basis in the way the idea of conceptual practices figures in my picture” (42). He rejects the notion that “we are always distanced from the world of our experience,” further emphasizing that mindedness does not bring about the type of detachedness of the ‘self’ from the world that Dreyfus alleges (45). It is of particular interest that his picture of the pervasiveness of the mental accommodates Dreyfus’ notion of ‘acting in flow’, since in his view the ‘self’ is not detached as a “rational agent” who “is always at least marginally monitoring what she is doing, standing ready to intervene with full-blown monitoring if need be” (45). For even as Dreyfus claims that his model leaves no room for experts to perform with “total absorption,” McDowell still agrees that “[t]his supposed connection of rationality with detachment is particularly damaging in the case of action” (45). His point is rather that such detachment does not follow from his view precisely because a notion of oneself is already present in the *form* of one’s actions:

[s]elf-awareness in action is practical, not theoretical. It is a matter of an “I do” rather than “I think.” And the “I do” is not a representation added to representations, as Kant’s “I think” is. Conceiving action in terms of the “I do” is a way of registering the essentially first-person character of the realization of practical rational capacities that acting is. The presence of “I do” ... marks the distinctive *form* of a kind of phenomenon, like the presence of the “I think,” as at least able to accompany representations, in Kant’s account of empirical consciousness. (“Response to Dreyfus” 367)

It is clear from this that ‘I’ is not a mere formal notion that McDowell takes to accompany all “*experience* of acting,” for it rather accompanies “acting itself” (“The Myth of the Mind as Detached” 45), which entails that there is no gap between the subject and the world. Indeed, “I

do” does not supplement the representation of our action but rather characterizes its very form (46).

For McDowell, then, “I do” describes the character of our action, whether we are “reflectively engaged or not” (46). Specifically, while acting in the flow the subject’s “absorption” does not prevent him from knowing “what he is doing in an instance of the self-knowledge that characterizes an agent,” even if such “self-knowledge goes unexpressed and even if he does not explicitly think its content” (46). He admits, though, that if an individual were acting in the flow, then by reflecting on what he is doing and verbalizing it he would interrupt this flow. Nevertheless, after verbalizing what he is doing, the subject would still give “expression to knowledge he already had when he was acting in flow” (46).

### **Two Types of Human Freedom**

Let us formulate Dreyfus and McDowell’s disagreement from a general perspective with the ulterior intention of pondering the role of self-conception in action.

As we have noticed, the philosophers diverge with regard to the type of freedom that is essential to human beings. For Dreyfus, the primary human freedom consists in the ability to voluntarily immerse ourselves in the tasks we perform in a way that there is no deliberative subject guiding our action. Meanwhile, for McDowell the chief human freedom is the capacity to deliberate or reason, such that a notion of ourselves is always entailed in our action as this involves the actualization of our conceptual capacities. Now, McDowell could object to Dreyfus’ assessment of which is the fundamental human freedom by saying that this ‘voluntary immersion’ is not a mark that we could discern in experts when they perform in their prime. From the behavioral signs they display, we have no criterion to account for how experts excel while performing tasks without having an operative, deliberative notion of themselves. It seems that

only through introspection *they* would be in the position to determine whether they are performing voluntarily immersed or rather reflecting on their own conduct as they go along. Indeed, if the way experts behave while acting in the flow is compatible with how they act when engaging in deliberated performances, it is not clear to what extent even they can tell when they are totally absorbed in their actions and when they are not. For if their behavior is one way or the other in accordance with the rules of the task they engage in, such ‘voluntary immersion’ could not ultimately be conceived as a complete departure from conceptuality.

In return, Dreyfus would respond by recounting how Chuck Knoblauch, a second baseman for the New York Yankees, got ‘out of touch’ with his skills as soon as he over-intellectualized the way he was playing (2007 354). Although his performance was still far better than that of a competent player, after he tried to figure out the mechanics of throwing the ball, he could not retrieve the high level of his past performances. It is as if Knoblauch could not immerse himself again in the game. It follows from this example that, even though Dreyfus’ voluntary absorption could not be positively taken as a trait of human experts, we can nevertheless tell indirectly, through noticing the counterproductive consequences appearing in its absence, that it is a relevant feature to human beings’ endeavors. Still, assuming that we are always coping with the world, such ‘voluntary immersion’ would only be an asset for those who divert towards reflection and thereby compromise their immediate reactions to the influx of solicitations of the world. In other words, if complete absorption is seen as the ability to avoid the temptation to step back and overanalyze one’s current actions, then it would only count as an ability to exploit for those whose performance has been harmed by the interference of excessive monitoring.

However, this implies that people normally do not require the capacity of immersing voluntarily since they involuntarily return to their instinctive responses to the world after

occasionally having monitored their own behavior, since they would not usually undergo the type of disassociation that experts like Knoblauch went through. Knoblauch's case would rather be a rare example in which an individual could not return to plain action because he lost the ability to naturally avoid monitoring his own behavior while performing. If this is correct, then the 'freedom' Dreyfus considers as fundamental has no pervasive, adaptive role in virtue of which we could properly distinguish human beings from nonhuman animals. For even though in some peculiar cases voluntary immersion can 'free' some individuals from their own thoughts and thus increment the quality of their performance, such immersion would not be a feature that could pass as the specific difference with respect to which we could properly separate humans from nonhuman animals.

In any case, depending on what we consider to be our essential 'freedom', we would come up with a different interpretation of the role of self-conception. If we suppose, following Dreyfus, that what makes us human does not essentially depend on engaging in deliberative processes, then we are not, at our core, 'thinking subjects'. From McDowell's perspective, though, there is always going to be self-awareness and conceptuality involved in action, so that experts cannot merely do without some degree of normativity ultimately guiding their behavior. They would not perform better by not reasoning through their actions, although, admittedly, by so reflecting they would not act 'in the flow'. Then, for the sake of argument, we can assume that Dreyfus and McDowell's dispute is verbal to the extent that it leads to a false dichotomy: this is, either we always presuppose an operative concept of ourselves while acting or else there are types of intense absorption when there is no thinking subject deliberating and guiding our action. We can think of their disagreement as not being substantive inasmuch as it arises from different interpretations of the role of our conceptual capacities while performing a given task we are fully

concentrated in, particularly, one in which we are not conscious of ourselves. Furthermore, if this is assumed, we can think of their views as complementing one another, thus providing a fuller picture of the matter that can help us in explaining the utility of self-conception. This is the strategy we will follow.

Before we do this, we are prepared to say that McDowell is right in respect to the fact that, while acting ‘in the flow’, an expert still has a notion of himself –or, in McDowell’s terms, a degree of self-awareness–, although this notion has been pushed to the background. For even if this notion does not seem operative, it is nonetheless implied in the *form* of his action (“Response to Dreyfus” 367). In effect, as he acts in the flow, he still knows himself as an agent, so we cannot agree with Dreyfus that while acting in the flow there is no conceptuality whatsoever in an experts’ performance.

### **The Two-Moment View**

We can now respond to the issue of the utility of self-conception by noting that there are two types of moments associated to the sorts of freedom referenced by Dreyfus and McDowell, respectively, such that, depending on which moment an individual finds himself in, there would be a use to his self-conception or there would not be. In general, sometimes there is a beneficial, useful notion of oneself while sometimes there is not, given that it has been pushed to the background as it can be detrimental to action. Yet, it has not absolutely disappeared.

Sometimes, like when we remember a series of events, engage in counterfactual thought or are planning what to do in the future, a phenomenon or notion of oneself appears to consciousness: we are the ones who felt such-and-such, did this and that, will be liable if we commit such-and-such actions, and will be participating in such-and-such events. For example, when thinking about the future a projected notion of ourselves displays anticipated characteristics

that we attribute to our ‘future selves’, and based on this anticipation, we can determine what would be the best course of action to take. We thus require a notion of ourselves to determine what will be the best way of moving forward. Moreover, when we presently interact with other persons, a notion of ourselves is implied in the form or character of our action, which embodies our agency, as McDowell argues. In these moments, there is a deliberative notion of ourselves which is indispensable in regulating our actions, as we are not only conscious of what we did, would do or will do, but further become self-conscious while attending to how our lives unfold from a present perspective — namely, as we reach into the past and the future (McDowell *Mind and World* 100). In these instances, a notion of ourselves steps indeed to the foreground and becomes useful in planning for what is to come, for learning from the past, or in order to attend to the present and decide how to conduct ourselves.

On the other side, there are moments when our self-conception does not have a useful role in our activities but, on the contrary, can prove harmful. For example, when the emergence of a deliberative notion of ourselves can potentially disrupt the activity we are engaging in, it is best to push it to the backdrop. In effect, if being absorbed in the current action would help a person become sensitive to the solicitations of the world, whereas a deliberative self-conception could hurt his interaction with the world, pushing his self-conception to the background would be best. In this case, for the sake of performing properly a given task, it would make no sense to track the consequences of the decisions reached in our actions by emphasizing a deliberative notion of our person. Another case would be the one where our self-conception turns against us, producing a high degree of anxiety in us, which ultimately does not let us see beyond how we see ourselves. Canfield points out instances in which we are stuck with recurring self-centered thoughts (1990 223) that in the end are impractical, since they do not help us in directing our attention outwards,

to the world of life, but rather bring us down. In these moments, it would be best to suspend these self-involved chains of thought to whatever extent is possible (225), say, by concentrating in practices that take our minds off of them.

It is worth remembering, still, that in the precedent cases a notion of ourselves still accompanies our actions; it is just not part of our immediate awareness. As McDowell indicates, while this notion does not emerge directly in our consciousness, we still know ourselves to be agents coping with the world. Nonetheless, the point is just that our self-conception in these instances has no practical benefit such that it should be pushed to the back of our minds in the interest of responding faster to the solicitations of the activities we are engaged in, or else with the purpose of decreasing the anxiety produced by self-centered thoughts. Either way, in these moments over-reflecting on our actions by bringing our self-conception to the foreground can become detrimental, so it is best to try and act without an explicit self-awareness.

It could still be objected on behalf of Dreyfus that the McDowellian type of “moment” in our self-conception would appear to him just the point he thinks is overintellectualized. If we always act with at least an implicit notion of ourselves, this notion can at some point interrupt the course of our action, especially when we act in the flow. For if we are precisely letting the notion we possess of ourselves go for the sake of improving our performance, what kind of control would we have over it? It rather seems that we could not prevent our self-conception from emerging all over again, so that it would consequently interrupt our action. Thereby, we can in this way unwillingly end up functioning as the type of ‘thinking subject’ that Dreyfus speaks of: our performance can become too mechanical, and, to that extent, we cannot enter ‘the flow’. Moreover, when we project ourselves into the future, we can overintellectualize our action, say, by thinking too much about what we have to do in order to achieve a given result. This way, we



can become anxious given the large number of things we have to do: although we may encounter several ways to achieve the desired result, the thought itself can overwhelm us and, in the midst of feeling anxious, we can become paralyzed as we do not know which course of action to pursue. Likewise, if we use too much time remembering what we have done to learn from our mistakes, we can unintentionally reinforce a potentially noxious self-conception we already possess, trapping us in the type of self-involved chains of thought Canfield refers to, so that anxiety would again take over and work in detriment of our action.

However, it is clear that this is not that not what McDowell intends. He recognizes that if, while performing in the flow, we monitor and reflect on our action to the point that we verbalize what we are doing, this can in fact disrupt its 'flow' ("The Myth of the Mind as Detached" 46). Thus, he concedes that in times like this overintellectualizing our action can hinder it, particularly when acting in the flow, which is a class of moment in which suspending a conscious awareness of ourselves can be advantageous to our action. Thus, it would not be times like this which would be included in the McDowellian "moment," as he seems to make a different point: that even while performing in the flow, we do not absolutely lose a sense of who we are, this is, that we still know ourselves, even if only implicitly, to be acting as agents. He insists that the knowledge a person acting in flow gains after verbalizing his own behavior is not *new* in any substantive way. It is not as if the skills he was deploying were non-conceptual but then became conceptualized after he reflected on his behavior. Quite contrary, as this individual makes the content of his experience "explicit – even if the subject first has to acquire means to do that – [that] does not make the content newly conceptual in any sense relevant to my claim. It was conceptual already" (46). Therefore, the knowledge he attained by reflecting on how to act in the flow while thus acting was all along there ready to be embraced by his conceptual capacities, which means that, after

verbalizing what he was doing, the subject only gave “expression to knowledge he already had when he was acting in flow” (46). And even if we are not acting in the flow, McDowell’s point is not that we cannot overintellectualize our regular action in a way that is harmful to it. He just points out that there is always an operative concept of ourselves working while we act, which is as much a part of our nature, which is mostly second nature, as walking and drinking water. To suggest then that by saying this he is overintellectualizing action is either to deny that our nature is largely second nature or else miss his point. But as we are not ready to concede the former, it follows that Dreyfus is misinterpreting McDowell’s picture of the pervasiveness of the mental, as he takes McDowell’s concept of the self to be a formal, disengaged notion accompanying all “*experience of acting,*” when it actually accompanies “acting itself” (45). Hence, there would not be enough distance between the subject and his regular action for him to constantly overintellectualize it.

Meanwhile, it is true that spending too much time planning what to do or remembering what we have done can be overwhelming and potentially paralyze us. This is, however, not what McDowell intends to do. We do not regularly and under normal circumstances overthink our future plans, as we just picture what we have to do while admitting that we might not even get the chance to do such-and-such, so that we put a stop to a rabbit hole that could lead us to anxiety as soon as we realize that these are mere plans and several conditions must be in place for any of these to be pursued. Similarly, even if we can spend a lot of time remembering what we have done, there comes a point when we normally understand that there is no use to this and that we have to move on from our self-involved thought. In these cases, we usually turn to the second class of moment: we return to our current, practical affairs that require our attention not just because we do not want to be trapped by noxious self-involved chains of thought. Instead, it is

because these affairs in fact demand our full attention that we naturally center our awareness in them, so that our self-awareness is in turn instinctively pushed to the back of our minds.

The particular disagreement in the Dreyfus-McDowell debate regarding the role of self-conception can thus be explained away by asserting that both are right depending on which type of moment a person is presently in and what are his practical interests and needs. However, in another sense both are wrong insofar as we cannot exclude once and for all either type of moment, assuming then an inflexible attitude towards the role of self-conception, as if it involved an absolute benefit or cost regardless of what are the interests and needs of a concrete human being under specific circumstances. It follows that both types of moments constitute two modes of being a person, none of which can be sacrificed at the expense of the other.

A way to further alleviate the tension between Dreyfus and McDowell in this aspect can be brought about the following way. First, there is the concern of whether we can perform successfully in a given activity without following or conforming to a rule — which is something we cannot do for, presumably, we can subsume any action under *some* rule (see Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* § 201). Following Wittgenstein, Alva Noë stresses that our actions always presuppose rules (i.e., a normative component), even in the case of experts excelling in their performances, since “[w]hat mastery (or understanding) of rules enables is for one’s actions to involve the rules without needing to think about them in any explicit, deliberative way” (2007 181). Secondly, assuming that conformity to rules is not the issue here, the question on behalf of Dreyfus is whether overthinking (i.e., monitoring in excess) decreases the quality of experts’ actions. But then, the relevant problem for him could not be the presence of thought while acting in the flow; because understanding what it is to excel in a given practice and doing so involves some expectation on the part of the expert, that is, of what *should* be done, which entails a

previous acquaintance with the rules of a concrete activity. Thereby, the issue is whether overintellectualizing an action can disrupt it in any significant way. It is true that ‘overthinking’ understood as hesitation or doubt in the face of solicitations that demand instant, opportune reactions can be disadvantageous. Yet, this does not imply that experts’ actions are not rule-governed, although it constitutes a fair warning on their potential propensity to monitor in excess their behavior while performing.

Thereby, while conceding to McDowell that at a proficient level experts always operate with concepts –meaning, categories or rules with which they guide their actions (though not in a stringent, determinate way)–, it could be said on the other hand that a weaker interpretation of the implications of Dreyfus’ notion of ‘voluntary immersion’ can be taken as an asset for successful performance. For if there is good reason to think that experts *choose* to be immersed in the class of uninterrupted state of spontaneous reactions to solicitations so as to remain sensible to unforeseen factors, avoiding reflection seems to be a useful guideline to expertise. Such susceptibility to the context arguably requires that one should not think too much, that is, that one should not reflect on one’s role and the expectations of such a role, etc. Once more, this does not mean that experts in their prime do not follow rules at least unconsciously or implicitly (181). Rules are internalized indeed through practice to avoid having to review them time and again, especially while performing a task that requires an elevated degree of focus. Practice makes rules eventually unspoken, and perhaps such silence is the type of indication of success Dreyfus alludes to when speaking of experts, as in the case of professional pilots who can flight flawlessly but cannot provide the rules that explain their success (Cf. 2007 358). Nevertheless, following the weak interpretation of Dreyfus’ ‘voluntary immersion’, it can be argued that even if experts seem

many times not to follow any rule or do not to recall any such rule to account for their success, it is clear that they are still acting in accordance with rules that have already been internalized.

### **V. 3. The Self as a Social Construct: A Dynamic Response to the Puzzle of Self-Conception**

Finally, in order to tackle the puzzle of self-conception, it will be helpful to draw from Mead's concept of the 'self'. By employing this concept, the utility of self-conception will be further accounted for.

According to Mead, the 'self' comes down to a process of social control regulated by further social processes, so that a person acquires a notion of himself by internalizing social practices (1972 158). One has a 'self' in accordance with the multiplicity of roles one plays in society, such as being a father, a husband, a lawyer, etc. This way, he proposes a view of the self that takes its resources from the outside, namely, relative to the roles undertaken by other members of society: "[t]he individual has, as it were, gotten outside of his limited world by taking the roles of others" (xxix). Insofar as one has several social roles, one obtains a 'self' by coordinating these functions in consciousness, from which it can be said that 'the self' is formed by a constellation of roles (xxix.). 'The self', then, is a mechanism of social control (158), given that the roles people play are structured by the functions of other people in a community.

A person has a notion of himself in virtue of putting himself in the place of others, namely, by interiorizing and appropriating himself with their behavior, referring their conduct to his own person and life. Thereby, a notion of ourselves enters our experience to the extent that we become objects to ourselves, which is not possible in an immediate manner:

[t]he individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs. For he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or

immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved. (138)

We obtain a self-conception by assuming the perspectives of others on us, that is to say, by adopting the beliefs and attitudes that others have towards us, as we thereby become indirect objects of our own experience. The notion or image we have of ourselves is derived from how others see us, so that we only attain a grasp of who we are through interacting with other persons in the multiple activities that make up for the customary or habitual manner in which people conduct themselves, that is, according to the forms of life of a community. Consequently, we would not acquire a self-conception through introspection –as Hume intended–, regardless of which are the attitudes that those around us have towards us. Quite the opposite, we obtain it due to our participation in the customs and habits of the forms of life of a community (see Consigni 2001 124). Indeed, we acquire knowledge of the particular human being we are only as we participate in the ways of life of a community, living amongst other human beings. Therefore, to the degree that we share the forms of lives of others we discover who we are, so that our self-conception would amount to a compound perspective on ourselves afforded by the standpoints that those around us possess about us (Mead 1972 138). It follows that there can be no “privileged standpoint” from which we may observe who we ‘truly are’, this is, independently of the forms of life of a community in which we reside, since our self-conception is rather the product of our engagement with others (see Consigni 2001 124).

### **The Sense in which the Self Is a Social Construct**

It is worth observing that there is a use to our self-conception as we adopt the attitudes that others have towards us, thereby becoming objects of our own awareness. Mead’s notion of the ‘self’ as a

mechanism of social control illustrates a further use of self-conception, as it serves to organize in our “field of direct experience” the roles we play in society (1972 158), regulating our action based on social processes in which we participate. In these cases, a notion of ourselves emerges and plays a crucial function given our present needs and interests, having thus a practical value as it coordinates a person’s life relative to his being a member of a community. Hence, we can think of our self-conception in terms of the practices in which it serves a purpose. It will be seen in the last section of this chapter the way in which Mead’s concept of the ‘self’ as a mechanism of social control constitutes a counterpart to McDowell’s considerations of self-conception.

Now, as each of us “has a persistent, gut-level belief in the reality of the self” (Canfield 1990 129), this conviction can be shown to play a role in the formation of the social beings we are. Since we can deny the existence of the ‘self’ without thereby abandoning our existential belief in it, the issue is whether the notion we form of ourselves exhibits any properties in function of which we could explain why we treat ourselves the way we do. According to Canfield, the practical impact of our self-conception is traced in our particular “manner of walking, gesturing, style of dress, and so on” (218), which he regards as a sort of ‘accent’ or ‘fine behavior’ that speaks to the specific life we lead, for it involves a series of attitudes we have towards it. Then, given that from Mead’s perspective the phenomenon of the ‘self’ ultimately amounts to a social construct, the question is whether the notion we possess of ourselves plays a significant enough role to render it necessary in the organization of our interpersonal practices.

The usefulness of our self-conception can be specified if we qualify it as a ‘necessary fiction’, as it is a social figment we require to properly navigate the world. Insofar as this notion is needed to see ourselves the way others see us, its fictitious aspect roughly resides in that there is no matter of fact about what should our idiosyncratic behavior comprising our particular gestures,

ways of speaking and carrying ourselves actually be. Following Mead, Canfield characterizes the ‘self’ as a “figment of the social imagination” (129) as opposed to something ‘real’, i.e., a substantive entity. He maintains that our self-conception reflects a ‘persona’, which is “the object or target of acts of self-characterization” (143). A ‘persona’ would be the leading character in the stories we narrate to ourselves about the lives we live –this is, our autobiographical narratives–, which we have in part invented: “[i]n a natural, untutored way, we cast ourselves as central figures in stories we supply characterization and narrative structure. We are the protagonists” (134). In other words, the persona is the “believed-in self, the I a person holds so dear” (134).

The persona depicted by our self-conception reflects the self-conceptions of other characters in our autobiographical narratives, which correspond to other persons in our lives: “[o]ur sense of the other players also often involves some view we hold about ourselves. She as unfair aggressor, for instance, mirrors me as a victim” (134). This shows how a person adopts a self-conception by mirroring the way others see him, given the social roles he has in life, which work around the roles that others have. Self- and other-characterization are then codependent as they inform one another: “[o]ne’s (pretheoretical) self-beliefs, and those other-beliefs which reflect oneself, make up a self-image” (134). However, one’s self-image is not equivalent to the person one is, though it is directly related to it: “[t]he person is what the self-image images; the self-image is like a picture, and the persona, what it portrays. In terms of belief, it is what self-beliefs are about” (134).

Yet again, even though our self-conception is as real as the set of beliefs we have of the person we are, what our self-conception pictures is fictional (134). Indeed, the person “has beliefs about himself; but the object of the self-image, the persona, is not” real (134). Canfield claims that the persona is at least partly fictional or ‘quasi-real’ (134): “[t]o some significant degree the



persona is freely created or ... invented. Invention enters at two points. First, when the persona is—if only implicitly—pictured as existing, and, second, during self-characterization, when its properties are elaborated” (134). Therefore, after we assume our persona to exist, we further chisel it by ascribing to the person we are a larger host of properties (135). But in what sense is one’s persona fictional? Canfield argues that the boundary between what counts as ‘creating’ one’s persona and describing the person one is happens not to be sharply delimited. He claims that a persona is like a character in a partly fictional historical novel (143). Thereby, the beliefs we hold about our persona are governed both by fictional and empirical criteria:

I say these part-fictions partially model the persona in order to emphasize the two different criteria governing self-ascriptions. One sort has to do with objective fact. A person’s belief about where he is, how tall he is, whether he is married, what his name in social life is, and countless similar sorts of beliefs are all governed by criteria concerned with how things are ... [but] there are also self-ascriptions where the person is free to make up truths about himself ... we are free to create and maintain certain aspects of our personae, including some of our beliefs about why we do things. (146)

The point of making this analogy is that, in this class of novel, historical truths about a person are told although there is room for fiction to enter with respect to the thoughts of the person in question, the content of the conversations he had, and the reasons for many of his actions (145). However, the analogy breaks inasmuch as partly fictional historical novels will not be revised if historical facts that came to light contradicted the events narrated in them, whereas our self-conception is indeed subject to modification if these facts were to surface.

Then again, we are interested in the utility of the self-image of a person and not so much in the persona pictured by such an image. The persona, still, is pertinent to our inquiry inasmuch as it is the target of the self-beliefs constituting the notion we have of ourselves. Consequently, we need a clearer understanding of the role of one’s self-image relative to the persona depicted by

it, for we intend to determine in this chapter what is exactly the purpose to our self-image or self-conception.

We can say now that, whilst deliberating with ourselves about which is the best course of action to pursue in a given situation, the concept we have of ourselves plays a role as it helps us determine whether such a course of action is viable given the way others see us and what they find admissible. What we take ourselves to be appears to be relevant in this case even if our self-image does not accurately portray the attributes and thoughts of the person we are, this is, as long as others see us that way as well. In this class of moment, our self-conception has a practical import insofar as it guides us in the course of figuring out what we can do and what should be avoided. Additionally, our self-conception plays a role in the context of our autobiographical narrative. As the persona it depicts constitutes the protagonist of this narrative (143), the diverse roles performed by the persona in it depend on which traits our self-conception comprises. Importantly, autobiographical narratives need not be linguistically articulated, but can count as such as long as they amount to a tacit understanding of an unfolding, structural whole to be identified with the life of the person we are (see Schechtman 2014 99-102). Nonetheless, for these narratives to make sense or structure the course of our life, we must at least possess an implicit, pre-theoretical sense of what we call 'I' or 'me' — namely, of our persona. Our self-conception must therefore be useful because it entails an understanding of the trajectory of our life (100). Furthermore, the image we have of ourselves plays a distinct role as it affects not only how we perceive our life but also how we lead it: depending on how we conceive of it (i.e., how we recount it to ourselves), we will correspondently act in the world of life. It follows that self-conception plays a complementary role in the way a person's life unfolds to the extent that it

impacts to a meaningful degree its constitution through the way the existence of this life is understood by the person in question.

### **The Sense in which Our Self-Conception Is a Useful Fiction**

We can now explain exactly in what way our self-conception is a useful fiction by drawing on Canfield's considerations of a 'persona' as the target of our self-conception and Schechtman's discussion of autobiographical narratives relative to the function these play in how a person structures his life. We have accepted that anytime we act we operate with a given self-conception, even if this is unspoken, not linguistically articulated, or shoved to the back of our minds in order to act in the flow. Based on the implicit, holistic understanding of the life we are leading, we decide what to do, what to avoid, when to do such-and-such so that our life can in the best scenario unfold as we want it to. We are thus constantly conceiving of ourselves as agents in the world, undertaking actions and then many times evaluating their implications, while we instinctively react to how others treat us (Cf. I.1) based on what are the attitudes that others have towards us.

Even so, we cannot literally, immediately, and entirely observe the person we are when acting as agents. This is not, though, a deficiency that (strangely enough) we all share, as it would otherwise seem from a static standpoint (Cf. IV). On the contrary, not being able to do this is, among other things, what is implied in being a living person who engages with other persons in the context afforded by a 'person space' or 'sociocultural context', as Schechtman would call it. We will see in the final section of this chapter that our not being able to step outside of our awareness and view ourselves as persons just as we can see others is a necessary condition for our existence as individuals. All the same, we do have beliefs, attitudes, and opinions about the

person we are, which constitute our self-conception. But we have seen that not all of these reflect our actual attributes. As Canfield notes, there is enough space for us to make up many reasons for our actions and the content of our thoughts. As we are aware of who we are, our self-conception cannot then merely be limited to a list of the properties we could directly observe if we could step outside of ourselves and see us as others do. Therefore, as we make explicit to others and ourselves the content of our autobiographical narrative, we cannot refer to the person we are and select properties of ourselves we consider pertinent to who we are without having to fill in some gaps. Still, these ‘gaps’ are not the consequence of lacking the opportunity to literally observe who we are, but rather filling them is characteristic of how our autobiographical narrative is further elaborated in the course of our social interchanges. Many times, we must justify to others why we did *this* instead of *that*, although we might not remember why we acted that way, we may want to hide our real motives, or maybe we simply acted without a conscious reason guiding our behavior.

Other times, people might want to know what we are thinking, perhaps not only to make sense of our current behavior but to discern what are our patterns of reasoning. We might then want to say actually what we were thinking; however, if this might compromise us in our social exchange, we may need to substitute what our response would be for a harmless one. Even more, in some situations we might not actually be thinking anything relevant, but when asked to contribute to a discussion by saying what are we thinking about a subject matter, we may spontaneously have to come up with what might seem the current status of a train of thought. This way, by fitting in with the image others have of us (of what ‘we’ would say about such a topic), we may facilitate the continuation of a conversation that would otherwise be interrupted. It is thus as if when we fill those blanks we convey to others a fuller image of who we are, which boils

down to how we see ourselves, because normally we are not just interested in how other persons literally look but want to know more about why they act as they do, what they tend to think in given circumstances, and so forth. Our self-conception has in those instances a social role, for it supplements a member of a social group and of a given community not only with an image of how others see him, but, correspondently, it provides others with an image this member has of himself, which facilitates their social interchanges. In this sense, our self-conception is useful as it enables us to relate to one another by relying on how other see themselves and how we see ourselves: we can coordinate our action and discourse around the image a person has of himself, while others can regulate how they relate to us based on how we see ourselves, provided that they have a grasp on what our auto-biographical narrative is and that we understand what are their respective autobiographical stories. In consequence, self-conceptions would be useful as they help us navigate a world of people circumnavigating us.

From what we have seen, the ‘image’ a person has of himself does not accurately reflect the list of attributes of the person in question nor is it meant to. It also comprises beliefs and attitudes that the individual has of himself and which are recounted in his autobiographical narrative. Therefore, his self-conception is partly ‘fictitious’ to the degree that it is articulated in an autobiographical narrative, which comprises aspects that are not subject to factual verification such as the reasons for one’s actions and the content of one’s thoughts. The criteria governing how these ‘aspects’ feature in our autobiographical story are similar to those governing the main character of a partly fictional historical novel (Canfield 1990 143), so there is consistency to them in these narratives just as there is consistency to our patters of thought about a given subject matter. In these sense, our self-conception is a construct because it strings an autobiographical narrative we build to understand our place in the world in a dynamic fashion, this is, relative to

how others see us and what would they expect us to say or do if some conditions were met. This does not mean, however, that these aspects comprised in our self-conception are actually *false*, for this would entail that they could be ‘true’ by mischaracterizing actual traits of our person. As Canfield explains, since the limit between what counts as ‘creating’ our persona and describing our person are not severely delimited, there is space for us to invent parts of our narrative that would help us integrate into the autobiographical narratives of those around us.

Hence, it is in this sense that the notion we use of ourselves goes beyond a construct from socially available materials: as we have room to create aspects of who we are through the elaboration of our autobiographical narrative, our self-conception is not reduced to a compilation of the standpoints that the persons around us have on us. It further includes properties we ascribe to ourselves –like beliefs about the content of our thought and the motives for our actions in different opportunities– which do not depend on what others gather from inspecting who we are.

### **Steps for Addressing the Puzzle of Self-Conception**

In order to address the puzzle of self-conception we must start by recognizing that, when we are to conceive of ‘ourselves’, we are not looking for an image of a ‘self’ or a ‘human body’. It is rather about conceiving an ordinary human being in the context of a concrete life. And, as we stated in the previous chapter, it makes no sense to look for an immediate perception of ourselves because any perception must be mediated to take place. Mead appreciates this when he says that the individual does not enter his own experience “directly or immediately” (1962 138).

But an immediate, entire perception of a particular human being is not really required in order to attain a self-conception, since we are not limiting the origin of our self-conception to a visual impression or image. Indeed, following Mead we have redefined our standards of ‘self-

conception' in terms adopting the standpoints of other persons by assuming the beliefs and attitudes that they have towards us. Moreover, as we have assumed a dynamic approach, we have conceived of the human being as situated in a community, playing certain roles, engaging with other individuals from which he has acquired the beliefs and attitudes that make up for his self-conception. Consequently, there is no fundamental mystery about the source of a person's self-conception, since he is not isolated from his surroundings in a way that he could only obtain a self-conception through a contemplative perspective, seeking thus an impossible visual impression of himself.

Next, we can attend to the specific issue of whether the individual enters his own experience as an *object* by appealing to Mead, as he believes that we become objects to ourselves as soon as we adopt the beliefs and attitudes of others towards us, seeing ourselves as others do and thus treating ourselves as an 'other'. We end up having a notion of the person we are by treating ourselves as objects of the attitudes that other human beings have towards us, taking their standpoints on ourselves. It follows that the ordinary human being indirectly enters his own experience as an object through the experience of others.

On the other hand, despite Mead's position (138) we can argue that a notion of ourselves as a *subject* enters our own experience although, again, indirectly. Even as we enter our own experience as objects of indirect awareness by assuming the attitudes that others have towards us, this does not exclude the possibility of simultaneously taking ourselves to be indirect subjects of our awareness while engaging in action. A notion of ourselves also becomes part of our own awareness to the extent that we take ourselves to be 'agents' from the first point of view. This is explained in the fact that our self-conception is entailed in the form of our actions, such that we have sense of who accompanies our actions as these occur (McDowell "Response to Dreyfus")

367). We are then subjects of our actions, beliefs and attitudes as these have real implications in the world. This way, it can be argued that the ordinary person we are becomes a part of our own awareness as a 'subject' by appeal to McDowell's concept of the 'self', which is not only implied from the first-person point of view but rather can be appreciated from a third-person perspective as an ordinary 'self' among persons. Then, from the first person perspective we can perceive the consequences of our actions even though we are not directly aware of ourselves. To put this differently: as we are the ones from which these actions emanate, we trace ourselves as their cause in a core sense. Even if we do not perceive ourselves while perceiving the world, from a dynamic perspective it can be said that we still assume that we are the ones acting, thus treating ourselves as subjects and not merely as objects. Therefore, while the notion we possess of ourselves plays the role of a mechanism of social control, it is nonetheless complemented by the sense we have of ourselves as a subject of action, in the absence of which we would not be able to attribute the actions we commit to the person we are from the first-person perspective. This 'sense' is in effect entailed in our action, as we can monitor our behavior from the first-person perspective — although, again, this would not be all that we require for attaining an altogether functional self-conception. We would still need to take ourselves as objects of our experience by assuming the attitudes of others towards us, thus being able to coordinate our action in relation to theirs by putting ourselves in their place.

The idea that we can indirectly become subjects of our experience would not give rise to an infinite regress (see IV. 1) because, as we have established that the origin of our self-conception is social, this conception need not be based on an ulterior awareness. Instead, it only needs to be grounded on our social practices, as it is articulated in terms of the roles a person plays in his daily life and the attitudes others have towards him. Our self-conception is useful in



showing us what our social roles are given the ways in which other social actors view us. Thus, a notion of ourselves enters experience indirectly, this is, through the mediation of language and behavior, because we adopt the beliefs and attitudes that others have towards us after the fact, this is, once we have actually engaged with others in the context of the activities and customs that constitute the forms of life of a community.

Finally, we cannot ‘step outside’ of ourselves and view ourselves ‘completely’ anymore than we can view other people ‘completely’. For how is this supposed to be accomplished? We can observe a person from several perspectives, but we cannot see him from *all* possible perspectives *at once*, which is what would have to be done, in a rigorous sense, to see someone ‘completely. Then again, if we cannot see anyone (or anything) from all possible angles at the same time, why would we need to see ourselves simultaneously from all possible points of view to acquire a self-conception? As this exigency seems out of place, this cannot be what it is meant when we say “completely,” so we could reinterpret this expression more charitably if we read it as meaning ‘as a whole’. In this sense, it is a matter of fact that we can see a *whole* person standing at a distance, and in virtue of that visual impression we can discern who he or she is, say, by recognizing the shape of that person. We can thus identify someone we have already acquaintance with. Yet, we cannot ever do the same in our own case. But why would we ever need to do this? We need not identify ourselves, from the first-person perspective, by recognizing our silhouette as we do need to in the case of others. Actually, from the first-person point of view, we need not ‘recognize’ who we are if this means obtaining a visual image of our whole person. Why then assume that we must fulfill such a requisite to ever come up with a notion of ourselves, this is, if we do not need to contemplate the person we are as a whole from the first-person perspective to form such a notion? This seems to be a confusion produced by adopting a static standpoint, since,

from a dynamic perspective, we are not looking for a direct visual image of our person as a whole to explain the acquisition of our self-conception. To do this, we must only pay attention to how we participate in the habitual activities and customs that give rise the forms of life of the community in which we reside, as our self-conception is rather based on how others see us given the ways we act and interact with them.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have assumed at the beginning of this proposal that self-conception does not imply personal identity. This is due to the notion that you can have a sense of who you are, be aware of the career of your life as you track yourself in the past and project yourself onto the future, without presupposing the literal existence of a substantive ‘self’ which you pick out with the use of “I” (McDowell *Mind and World* 100). On the other hand, we have stated that having a personal identity –which, from our perspective, roughly means living in agreement with a typical way of life– does not entail possessing a corresponding self-conception mirroring such a life. In the end, that is part of what it means to be ‘alienated’ in the sense implied in Chapter III: even though you lead a given person life, you do not see it as representing *who* you are. Maybe because you have a problematic idea of life in general, you problematize your own life in a way that ultimately you cannot identify with, hence becoming dissociated from it. And as you do not see your life the way others might see and evaluate its structure, you further become alienated by entertaining a different conception of who you are and what type of life you lead.

Still, even if having a determined self-conception does not necessarily entail the possession of a firm grasp of personal identity, whereas having a personal identity does not presuppose having a corresponding notion of the person one is and the life one has, the subjects of personal identity and self-conception intersect at diverse points. We can thus synthesize our practical and phenomenological approximations to the human being by fleshing out these points of intersection.

First, in order to obtain the class of ‘practical unity’ discussed by Schechtman with the intention of overcoming alienation, it is not sufficient to live in agreement with the forms of life of a community. It is further necessary to change how we perceive our own life in a way that its

problematic appearance can fade away to an extent. This would be possible if we could modify the tone of our autobiographical narratives, recounting our lives in accordance with the alienated life we have had, accepting it for what it was, to then embrace the vital changes we seek to undergo in order to adapt to the forms of life of a community. The ordinariness we would bring afloat would merge with our story without it seeming as an abrupt, artificial choice. The goal is to rephrase our autobiographical narrative in a way that we are not too hard on ourselves, such that we can encounter a tone, after going through the pertinent changes, with which to relate a story that is in accordance with the larger structure of our life, understanding our past alienation as a phase of it that does not significantly determine its overall path. If this is viable, the source of the problematic appearance of our life ingrained in our self-conception can begin to lose its grip on us, enabling us to see a life we can identify with, so we can see ourselves out of our dissociation. The reason is that our self-conception would not be confined to picturing an alienated life, as it would encapsulate a broader pathway in which such alienation is merely a period.

From this it is clear that the role that self-conception plays in autobiographical narratives is key. If we do not pay attention to what notion we have of ourselves and modify it if necessary, after we have gone through the mentioned vital changes it would be easier to revert to an alienated form of life. This is a point in which our two general approaches to the human being interconnect: in order to avoid alienation, a human being must change the way he sees himself to a degree in which he can assess the different phases or stages of his life as parts of his identity, and he must resist defining himself, accordingly, based on an alienated phase of it. Following Schechtman, he would see these different phases as parts of an ongoing whole, which is his person life (2014 108). Moreover, as he conceives of his life holistically, he would be able to reorient his life towards a typical class of development by modifying the narrative that constitutes

his understanding of himself. Since having a 'self-conception' would involve possessing some kind of orientation towards what we are doing based on an understanding of who we are, by remodeling how we conceive of ourselves in a more indulgent way we would be able to associate with typical aspects of our life that are already present in it; although they have been dismissed as irrelevant, actually through them we can reenter the world of life. The individual would then adopt an unproblematic perspective on his life by changing how he values himself, which could lead him to interact differently with others.

To put the point otherwise: after modifying the tone in which he recounts his autobiographical narrative, he would not see the different social roles he plays in life as a burden, as if there was a gap between himself and these roles such that his life could exist without them, but rather as integral aspects of his identity (Mead 1972 xxix). This is possible by reconceiving these roles holistically, seeing them as pieces which taken together give rise to who he is. By understanding this, he could motivate himself to perform them in a committed way since he would find precisely in that commitment a way of outlining who he is. Therefore, by graciously relating his life he would come to terms with it, comprehending that after all it has been worth living it. It would further help if the individual can tell himself a convincing autobiographical narrative, specifically, one that can help him persuade himself about the value of ordinary activities and interactions with others. It would also be of benefit if this story can dissuade him from continuing down a path that is disconnected from everyday life. Ultimately, with an affable self-conception it would be easier for him to assume the type of proper disposition that Wittgenstein recommends to overcome alienation (see III. 3).

Another point of junction is, accordingly, that changing the way we see our lives (this is, our self-conception) is not sufficient for surmounting alienation. It is also necessary to change the

way we behave and engage with others by leading an ordinary life; we would then be able to think of this life as our own, as something that represents who we are. Indeed, as someone modifies how he interacts with others and the type of activities he engages in, he can properly redescribe himself, thereby adopting a different self-conception than that of the alienated individual he was. He would approach the world of life differently in order to assess his place in it from another angle. By associating with others in a more ordinary fashion, he could reconceive the roles he plays in life such that he would be able to commit himself to them in the way previously specified. Therefore, as he is no longer dissociated from his social roles, he recognizes himself as the person playing them and can therefore gain the class of 'practical unity' with his life that Schechtman speaks of. Particularly, he would amend his self-conception by explicitly adopting the attitudes that others have towards him insofar as he engages with them differently, emphasizing his ordinary traits, such that there would be no longer an incompatibility between how he sees himself and how others see him. In the absence of this incompatibility, he would be able to exceed the fictitious boundaries he saw in his life, which apparently separated him from the lives of others and confined him to live in an alienated way: as he no longer perceives a gulf between his life and the lives of others, he can associate anew with the shared forms of life of a community.

As a result, if we understand the class of alienation we discussed here as a class of 'self-exile', to overcome it it is both important to change to a degree the form of our lives and the way we see life in general, so that we can modify in turn how we evaluate our own life. The idea is to restore our everyday comportment and self-conception by adopting the structure of a unitary individual's life and a similar undertone of his autobiographical narrative, respectively. A suggestion that can prove helpful to realize this is that, if we have departed from 'ourselves' at

some point by abandoning the exercise of a typical life, we can overcome alienation by having good will towards life in general and, importantly, by assuming a gracious attitude towards our own life (Cf. III.1, III.3). We can thus find the means to reconstruct a life story in which we actually find ourselves in as being involved with forms of life we belong to. It is not, though, as if such graciousness and good will constitute an antidote by themselves to surmount alienation. Nonetheless, it is a start for eventually attaining this, because without them we would not have the necessary resources for living a happy life, as Wittgenstein would put it, in the lack of which we could not live in agreement with the world. Therefore, having a good disposition towards our own life and good will towards the life of others is part of what must be in place for acquiring a discrete personal identity, as we thus can merge ourselves with our own life. It is further required, again, a change in the way we lead our life, as we want to reach a bare minimum of ordinariness that we have lost. Finally, a change in self-conception is needed, this is, a modification in how our autobiographical narrative takes shape; for if it is told in a way that we can identify ourselves with the main character it depicts, we can mitigate another source of alienation.

In respect specifically to the first part of this proposal, since the identity of a person depends on his agreement with the forms of life of a community, it follows that an individual avoids alienation by participating in the language games, customs and habitual ways of interaction of these forms of life. We can thus restate the conclusion of Part One by saying that an individual acquires a clearly defined personal identity through his engaging with typical ways of human life, particularly by playing the language games of a community and not merely being a spectator, which means that he must actually participate in their habitual activities. Further, this point would intersect with the discussion in Part Two, and it can be rephrased in that a person would do well in abandoning a static approach to his self-conception and adopt instead a dynamic

standpoint on his interactions with others, because it is in these terms that his self-conception would indeed acquire content. A person has to get involved with the members that share the forms of life of his community to develop a self-conception that can in turn be compatible with his life. Conversely, in the absence of this involvement he would not be able to properly assess his life in a way that is useful to overcome alienation, because he would only count with a notion of himself that is incompatible with his actual life, which cannot then be useful in redirecting him towards a typical way of life. Therefore, he must partake in the habitual activities of the forms of life of a community to develop a self-conception that is useful in regulating his interactions with others by adopting their attitudes towards him (Mead 1972 138). Moreover, he needs a self-conception that is in accordance with a life that is ordinary in character if he is going to value at a bare minimum the act of planning his future and if he is going to remember his past as his own. All of this involves, once more, adopting a holistic outlook on his life, so that he can understand its unfolding as being that of a class of life he finds worth living.

Meanwhile, with particular regard to the issue of the use of self-conception, the main conclusion of Part Two can be recapitulated by appeal to the Two-Moment View, which is a dynamic account meant to address it. There is indeed a partial use to our self-conception depending on the type of moment we find ourselves in. For example, as we adopt the beliefs and attitudes that others have towards us, we presently become an object of our own awareness by coordinating our action based on that of others (138). In addition, this notion has a use while deliberating with ourselves about what is the best course of action to undertake in the future, as we learn from past events by thinking of ourselves one way or the other in a given situation. Self-conception also has a purpose when employed in counterfactual thought, as we conceive of ourselves based on how others would see us, given how we extend the beliefs and attitudes of



others towards us in the actual world to possible worlds. In virtue of this extension, we fashion a notion of ourselves and of what we would do if certain conditions were met. Other times, however, our self-conception can be rather detrimental to action, as Dreyfus shows, specifically when we overanalyze our performance in ways that can deteriorate its quality while acting (2007 354). Canfield notes as well that if we become self-absorbed in the concept we have of ourselves to the extent that we cannot see past how we perceive our own life, this can produce a level of anxiety (1990 223) that can hardly help us engage with the world. This way, we could become paralyzed, thus not being able to participate in the world of life effectively, namely, in the way required for overcoming the sort of alienation discussed in Chapter III. Still, we have observed that even in these cases we cannot completely do away with the sense we have of ourselves, even while performing a task ‘in the flow’. In such moments, at best we get to push our self-conception to the back of our minds so that it does not interfere with our performance and engagement with others. The point is to not monitor excessively our behavior whenever this can lead us to dissociate ourselves from our action and interaction with other persons.

Generally speaking, another upshot worth stressing is that, inasmuch as an ordinary human being gains both a personal identity and a self-conception by participating in the customs and institutions of the forms of life of a community, he does not have an ‘essence’ or ‘nature’ that predates his contingent sociocultural interaction with other human forms of life. This is, he has no prior identity, or method of acquiring a self-conception, independently of what are his interactions with others; say, an inherent psychological faculty (e.g., the capacity of reasoning) or a biological property (such as being an animal) upon which he could determine what his personal identity or self-conception consists of. Quite the contrary, whether seen in respect to his practical or phenomenological dimension, a human being makes his personal identity and acquires a self-

conception in relation to other persons by partaking in their customs and activities. It follows that a human being has no essential, primitive trait upon which his identity is definable or his self-conception obtainable regardless of which is his concrete life, the roles he plays in it, and how others view him.

This implies that having a personal identity would be a rather difficult, fragmentary achievement to work out as it involves more than simply being a 'human being', whether we understand by this a *Homo sapiens*, a rational animal, or a member of the moral community (Cf. I.3). For we do not address the issue of personal identity by responding to the question "What am I?" which can instead be properly answered by presenting a locus of quantity, this is, by pointing to what we share and makes us alike: for example, our forms of life, which include our customs, institutions, and habits; our biological properties and functions; our psychological attributes and capacities such as the ability of reasoning; our moral dignity and worth, all of which could be argued to constitute our specific difference. Meanwhile, by addressing the question "Who am I?" we would tackle the problem of personal identity, as it asks for the singularity of our person, for what makes us a unique individual as opposed to a member of a biological or moral community. To satisfy this question, we would then have to offer a locus of quality in order to select what is unique to a high degree in the human being we are. But still, this would not be something essentially inner or intrinsic to our person such as an 'inner self' or 'soul'. It would have to do instead with how we qualify our particular form of life, singling out the aspects that give it distinctiveness as a concrete value, as opposed to what is found in the ordinary lives of other humans. For example, it would comprise a list of the social roles that we play in our lifetime, our physical appearance, the demeanor and way of speaking that is peculiar to us, our general

temperament and sense of humor, our life story, and other aspects that shape us into the unique persons we are.

Hence, the question demanding the reference of 'I' is ambiguous, since from one point of view it refers to a mundane human person with a concrete life, which is expressed by responding to the question of *who* am I, whereas from another standpoint it refers to a member of the class 'human being', whether this is taken as a biological or moral category, and it would involve responding to the question of *what* am I. Olson conveys this point nicely when he claims that the problem of personal identity suffers from an equivocation in its formulation (1997 42). He explains that if something individualizes any human being into a single thing capable of persevering over a lifetime, it would in principle exclude the attributes that we all (or most of us) share, given our common human nature. In effect, if something makes us the distinct people we apparently are, a substance concept such as 'human animal' or 'ordinary human being' would not be satisfactory. For if we are supposed to speak to the differences that give uniqueness or singularity to the beings we are despite our obviously recognizable physical and psychological disparities, then the aforementioned substance concepts would not exhaust aspects of our concrete humanity in a way that can help us specify what our personal identity consists of. Having a personal identity, as mentioned above, has instead to do with leading a particular person life in the context of the forms of life afforded by a community (Schechtman 2014 139), so that selecting a substance concept would not work.

To conclude, the importance of this proposal can be seen in how it is meant to ease the potential anxiety caused by the notion that there is no fundamental, compulsory 'track', if you will, to which our life must adjust in order to acquire 'sense' or 'purpose' or else be alienated in an absolute way. The preoccupation we may have about how our life unfolds or what it would

ultimately amount to could be attenuated in the realization that we have no ‘nature’ or ‘essence’ in virtue of which our personal identity could otherwise be specified or based on which we would acquire selfhood. Since the type of ‘correction’ of the way we live would not be based on an “agreement . . . in opinions, but rather in form of life” (Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* § 241), our existential problem about what grounds the judgments on how well we have lived would dissipate as long as we live in accordance with the forms of life of a community. For there are no grounds external to the agreement in our forms of life upon which these judgments are founded. Indeed, there would be no ‘correct’ way of living independently of what our agreements in life form entail, such that the necessity of our practices rests on nothing more than these.

This might still produce anxiety because we might not want that responsibility on us. Many would prefer the burden being on an external source based upon which the sense or purpose of human life would be a matter of fact. But why would the idea that the judgment on how our life unfolds ultimately depends on the contingency of our natural history make us anxious? If, after all, there can only be ‘human necessity’, so to speak, such that it could not be otherwise –which means that there could not have been an external, necessary ‘track’ our lives would adjust to–, why would this terrify us? For if there could not be transcendence grounding the sense or purpose of human life, our agreements in form of life, the necessity of our practices, and so on, it seems like we are merely longing for something that could not ever be. Our anxiety seems thus to be the product of craving for something to justify our practices when in fact they do not require of any such foundation.

From the phenomenological perspective, making an analogous point can help us appreciate the value of our inquiry. Even if the conception we have of life’s structure in general can worry us to the extent that we end up problematizing our own life, what terrifies us cannot be

the fact that life occurs the way it does. Just because there is no foundational sense or purpose to our life, this does not imply that our alienated life is 'good' as it stands. We are not more 'authentic' when we renounce to live a typical life because we have discovered that there is no *essentially* 'correct' paradigmatic way of life. For if there could not be a compulsory foundation external to our forms of life upon which our own life could be grounded, why would we think that we can find genuine 'sense' through living an alienated life? By understanding the 'purpose' of life in an alternative, distanced way, a person might dissociate himself from his ordinary life but would still not find a self-conception to conciliate with, for he would not have acquired that way a clear-cut personal identity to reflect in his self-conception. He would have thus watered down his identity, and as this is precisely partly the source of his anxiety, he can begin to mitigate it by living in agreement with an ordinary form of life. In consequence, as his self-conception would present him in this agreement with life, it would be of actual use to him insofar as it would at least not be any longer in conflict with how, roughly speaking, human life is normally conceived. This way, even if there would always be opportunities for his self-conception and person life to mismatch, he can encounter means to combat his anxiety by readapting to the forms of life of a community. This is possible as he modifies how he perceives life in general, for this would enable him to reconceive his own life in an unproblematic fashion.

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