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Constituting Normativity: A Phenomenological Study of Agency

Nathan Liam Shannon

Abstract

In *The Sources of Normativity*, Christine Korsgaard gives an account of the force that various claims (e.g., obligations, demands) can possess for us. She continues this project, in later works, with a more explicit focus upon the nature of agency. Korsgaard defends the view that normativity is grounded in an ongoing process of 'self-constitution': we assume various 'practical identities' (e.g., teacher, parent) and the commitments these embody generate reasons, obligations, etc. As we negotiate these demands we refine our view of their authority over us and realize our identity more concretely. Taking this as the point of departure, I draw upon Heidegger's phenomenology (and, in a later section, Sartre's) to explore the relationship between agency, identity and normativity. My aim is to shed light not only upon the attitudes which sustain normativity, but also those which hold open the space of possibilities within which self-constitution unfolds. In this respect, what I offer is a broad phenomenology of agency.

The discussion has two parts. Part I addresses the 'personal' aspects of identity. Drawing upon Heidegger's account of everyday Being-in-the-world, I defend the claim that our practical identities involve a kind of pre-reflective self-understanding. This understanding is inextricable both from the way we find ourselves affectively attuned to the world and a form of self-interpretation. I also consider how this relates to practical reasoning. Part II focuses upon the 'anonymous' dimensions of identity. Rejecting Korsgaard's account of moral normativity, I argue that what she calls our 'human identity', plays a different but more pervasive role in our lives, akin to Heidegger's 'everydayness'. Distinguishing 'everydayness' from *das Man* understood as an *existentiale*, I identify a deeper anonymity, which I call our 'existential identity'. Finally, drawing upon Sartre's account of 'Being-for-Others', I characterise this as a way of being 'just someone' that is simultaneously a form of deep agential unity.

Constituting Normativity:

A Phenomenological Study of Agency

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Declaration

I confirm that no part of the material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for any degree in this or any other university. All the material is the author's own work, except for quotations and paraphrases which have been suitably indicated.

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without his prior written consent, and information derived from it should be acknowledged

Nathan L. Shannon

Abbreviations

BN Sartre, J., 2003. *Being and Nothingness*. (trans.) H. Barnes. London: Routledge.

BP Heidegger, M., 1988. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. (trans.) A. Hofstadter. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

BT Heidegger, M., 1962. *Being and Time* (trans.) J. Macquarrie & J. Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

CA Korsgaard, C., 2008. *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

SC Korsgaard, C., 2009. *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

SN Korsgaard, C., 1996. *The Sources of Normativity*. O. O'Neill (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

SZ Heidegger, M. 1967. *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.

Introduction

Aims and Motivation

In this thesis I offer a phenomenological account of agency, with a particular focus upon normativity. Recent moral philosophy has turned increasingly to the topic of normativity and its relation to other key notions (see, for example, the edited volume by Simon Robertson, 2009). It is my hope that the view I defend in this thesis has something distinctive to contribute to this discussion.

Norms, and other requirements, play a range of important roles in our lives. In the domain of practice, however, normativity is, as R. Jay Wallace observes, 'fundamentally about reasons for action, the considerations that count for and against actions' (2006: 1). In order to understand agency, I submit, it is crucial that we understand how we come to have a grip upon reasons (alternatively, how reasons take hold of us). This is a view that is shared by Christine Korsgaard, whose work on the sources of normativity and the nature of agency, serves as the point of departure for my own investigation.

Korsgaard's account of agency has two parts. She offers an account of practical normativity quite generally, and as a development of this, she offers an account of specifically moral normativity. Korsgaard maintains that practical normativity is grounded in an ongoing process of 'self-constitution'. There are two steps involved in this: (i) we assume various 'practical identities' (e.g., teacher, parent, etc.), and the commitments which we sustain through these generate reasons, duties, obligations, etc., and then (ii) as we negotiate the competing demands of these different standpoints we at once refine our view of their authority over us and realize our identity more concretely. Both of these things have analogues in Heidegger's account. Moral normativity, on Korsgaard's account, stems from a particular practical identity, but one of a special kind insofar as, she claims, it serves as a necessary precondition of our having any other identity. Both aspects of her account are ambitious. However, the issues with which she grapples are difficult ones, and therefore there remains a lot of room for further elucidating these.

Through the development of her position, Korsgaard is firm in the conviction that we must take seriously the first-person standpoint. An important part of the work that she undertakes, therefore, can be understood as an attempt to give, as Sharon Street has described it, 'a formal characterisation... of the standpoint of the agent' (sometimes called 'the practical standpoint'). Drawing upon Heidegger (and in a later chapter, upon Sartre), I develop my own phenomenological account of agency, by describing the structure of the practical standpoint, and the attitudes, broadly understood, which arise within it. Heidegger's own reflections upon the phenomenology of agency form part of a broader ontological project. But because Heidegger's ontology is an ontology of Dasein, and because Dasein is always an agent, there are considerable resources within his account for developing a much deeper descriptive ontology of agency than we find in Korsgaard.

One source of inspiration for this project has been Steven Crowell's work on normativity in the thought of Husserl and Heidegger. It was this which first prompted me to start thinking about Heidegger's phenomenology in relation to the topic of normativity. Of more specific bearing upon this thesis, however, is his paper 'Sorge and Selbstbewußtsein: Heidegger and Korsgaard on the Sources of Normativity'. Crowell offers a persuasive account of the relevance of Heidegger's ontology for an investigation into the sources of normativity. Moreover, he claims that Heidegger's account of the way in which reflection is contextualised within our basic ontological structure, avoids certain difficulties which Korsgaard faces owing to the fact that, on her account, reflection is given defining priority within that structure. I will have quite a bit to say about this in the early chapters of the thesis. However, as far as articulating Heidegger's possible contribution, Crowell's paper only touches the surface and there remains significant room to develop themes from Heidegger along similar lines.

The Structure of the Thesis

The discussion is organized into two parts. Part I addresses what we can think of as the 'personal' aspects of our identity. Drawing upon Heidegger's discussion of our everyday dealings with equipment, I defend the claim that our practical identities involve a kind of pre-reflective self-understanding. One area that has been

particularly neglected in some of the other works I consider (Crowell, Okrent, Smith) is the role played by the phenomenon Heidegger calls 'mood' [*Stimmung*]. There are strong grounds for thinking that mood will be important here and that we will have to consider in what way sensibility belongs to normatively structured being-in-the-world if we are to do justice to the foundation of ethics. According to Heidegger, it is only by means of mood that we are in the world in such a way that things can matters to us (and it is only once things are disclosed in this way that we can enter into intentional relationships with constituted entities). Considering mood, I argue that both our adoption of 'practical identities' and the more concrete process of self-constitution are, inextricably connected, at once, to the way we find ourselves affectively attuned to the world and to a form of self-interpretation, making them a complex (and often ambiguous) blend of the active and passive. I also offer an account of the relationship between explicit practical reasoning and the process of self-constitution so understood.

Part II focuses upon what I will characterise as the anonymous dimensions of our identity: the different ways in which each of us understands him or herself as 'just someone'. In this context I introduce Korsgaard's notion of our 'human identity', which she understands as a stance upon the reasons we have insofar as we are members of the party of humankind. She introduces this notion in order to support the claim that our practical commitments require the backing of morality if they are to survive our reflective scrutiny. I reject that specific claim, but argue that 'human identity' plays a much more pervasive role in our lives, akin to what Heidegger calls 'everydayness'. I argue that Heidegger's notion of *das Man* – understood as an essential structure of Being-in-the-world – points to a deeper form of anonymity, which I call our 'existential identity'. Drawing upon Sartre's account of 'Being-for-Others', I characterise this identity as a way of being just someone which is, at the same time, a form of deep agential unity which holds us together across even the most pronounced shifts in our practical identity.

Pursued across the thesis, then, are three broad phenomenological tasks. The first, is to find an answer to the question, which attitudes, very broadly understood, bring norms to life in how we think and what we feel and do?[1] I also consider how these

[1] I am borrowing this way of talking from Peter Railton (See Railton, 2006, p.13).

arise, and how they relate to one another. However, an account of the attitudes which breathe life into norms is only one aspect of what Heidegger has to offer, and turning to him, therefore, also affords an opportunity to push the descriptive enterprise a step further. The second task, then, is to give an account of the deeper attitudes which hold open the space of possibilities within which our identities (and with them our reasons) are constituted. In this respect, what I offer is not just an account of the sources of normativity, but more generally a phenomenology of agency. As well as characterising the attitudes that arise within the practical standpoint, however, a phenomenological approach can also address the question of how there can be a practical standpoint at all, and in the final chapter I turn to Sartre, and to the third task, which is to offer some reflections upon this question.

Summary of the Arguments

Chapter 1

As I explained, the thesis takes its point of departure from Christine Korsgaard's work on agency and the sources of normativity. In Chapter 1, therefore, I offer a detailed outline of her position. In doing this I place particular stress upon the notions of 'practical identity' and 'self-constitution' – notions which I explore in more depth in subsequent chapters. As it does not figure prominently in the discussion of the first half of the thesis, I postpone giving a detailed outline of her account of specifically moral normativity until a later chapter, limiting myself here to a brief outline.

My reading of Korsgaard differs in certain respects from the interpretation of her work found in some of her Heideggerian critics, such as Mark Okrent and Steven Crowell. The differences between my own view and Crowell's in particular are significant, and I will explain where our disagreements lie. Because Crowell wants to turn to Heidegger to address what he perceives to be the weaknesses of Korsgaard's account, this not only affords me an opportunity to clarify what I take to be Korsgaard's actual position, it also enables me to explain my reasons for turning to Heidegger. I suggest that one of the most pressing tasks is to get clear about what it

means to have a practical conception of my identity that enables me to confront the world as something which calls for certain responses from me. Having highlighted what I take to be some of the most underdeveloped aspects of Korsgaard's account, I am in a position to turn to Heidegger.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 marks the start of my engagement with Heidegger. I begin by turning to his account of understanding [*Verstehen*]. Korsgaard develops her account of practical identity in response to the question of how we are able to solve the problems which we face as reflectively self-conscious, deliberative beings. It is only subsequently that she qualifies this account in a way that enables her to extend the notion to our non-deliberative, unreflective actions. Heidegger's account of self-understanding, on the other hand, arises out of his focus upon our everyday absorbed engagement with the world, and in particular, the way in which things show up for us, as he puts it, 'proximally and for the most part', in the course of our dealings with them. Where the (self-confessed) 'sketchiness' of Korsgaard's account becomes most apparent, then, is precisely where Heidegger directs his attention. The discussion of Heidegger is initially guided by two questions, which Korsgaard's account leaves unanswered. Firstly, what does it mean to say that we have a conception of our identity that is 'internalized' in such a way that we do not have immediate reflective access to it? And secondly, how do our identities enable the world (or particular aspects of the world) to solicit responses from us? In this respect, parts of this chapter will be quite close in spirit to what Mark Okrent and Steven Crowell have already undertaken. Because I am concerned not only with practical identity, but also the broader context within which this is constituted, my approach in the second half of the chapter will be slightly different to those writers, and will draw upon aspects of Heidegger's account that they do not address in the context of their responses to Korsgaard.

Chapter 3

In several places in *Being and Time* Heidegger claims that understanding, as he conceives of it is somehow connected with the phenomenon which he calls 'mood' [*Stimmung*]. Understanding 'always has its mood' (BT 182), he says, it is 'never free-

floating, but always finds itself somehow attuned' [*sondern immer befindliches*] (BT 389, translation modified/ SZ 339).[2] In this chapter I want to defend this claim, and by doing so, to argue that there is an important affective dimension to what I continue to follow Korsgaard in calling our 'practical identity'. Crowell already gestures towards something close to this conclusion when he says that, 'without an ontology... in which sensibility already belongs to normatively structured being-in-the-world, a stand-off between the reflective [i.e. distinctively human] and the animal parts of my being', to which, he suggests, 'affect' belongs, 'is inevitable' (Crowell, 2007: 327). However, as I said above, he does not develop this idea.

This chapter does three things. Firstly, I outline Heidegger's account of mood. Secondly, I consider the relationship between mood (both generally speaking and in some of its various forms) and understanding. In doing this I engage with a recent paper by Matthew Ratcliffe that offers an interpretation of the relationship between these that contrasts with my own view. Finally, I explore an issue that arises in the first section, namely, how moods of different relative depths relate to one another. That also provides a test case for my interpretation of the relationship between mood and understanding. I conclude this chapter with the claim that practical identity corresponds to what Heidegger calls 'thrown projection'; in this respect it is both affect and understanding. I also describe the dynamic through which our commitments arise and can collapse. This concludes my account of the nature of practical identity.

Chapter 4

This chapter concludes the first part of the thesis, but before I turn to the next set of issues – which take their point of departure from Korsgaard's account of moral normativity, and cluster around her notion of 'human identity' – there are two things that I would like to do. Having offered a detailed characterisation of practical identity as an affectively attuned form of pre-reflective self-understanding, I begin by turning to an issue that was put aside at the end of Chapter 1. Korsgaard emphasises

[2] The original Macquarrie and Robinson translation reads '...but always goes with some state-of-mind' (389); Cf. Stambaugh, who renders it more simply, '...but always attuned' (324).

reflection, in order to do justice to the fact that not all agency is reflective, i.e., involves deliberation or explicit choice. This raises the question of where reflection fits into the account I have offered. I will offer some suggestions about where we might find a place for practical deliberation or reasoning in the account I have been offering. Without introducing too many new points I will only be able to do so in a fairly schematic way, but while it will, therefore, leave a lot of room for further research, I will try to say enough to make it a worthwhile inclusion.

The second thing that I want to do is to respond to Mark Okrent's view – which he sets up in opposition to an idea that Korsgaard and Heidegger converge upon – of our capacity for calling into question and otherwise distancing ourselves from our identities. Okrent's position is based, in part, upon his understanding of what it means to reflect upon the question of which identities we ought to adopt and which we should reject. Okrent also makes certain claims about what it means to disengage from an identity, and so I will also consider this. Ultimately, I will defend the view, in opposition to Okrent, that it *is* possible for us to disengage from every conception of what is worth doing for the sake of what, into the profound form of nihilism, which Korsgaard calls 'complete practical normative scepticism' and Heidegger describes in terms of 'anxiety' [*Angst*].

Chapter 5

The first half of the thesis considers practical normativity, emphasising, in particular, the relationship between the norms to which we are alive and the practical conceptions we form of ourselves. In responded to Korsgaard's account of practical normativity, and developing the notion of practical identity (by drawing upon Heidegger's phenomenology), I put aside the more specific issues surrounding moral norms and normativity. Chapter 5 opens the second half of the thesis. I begin it by introducing Korsgaard's position vis-a-vis moral normativity. I will then respond to this, suggesting that there are some serious flaws in the argument she offers in an attempt to establish the necessity of moral norms. This leads me to draw two related conclusions. Firstly, I will suggest that what Korsgaard calls our human or moral identity is, like every practical identity, ultimately contingent. This brings my position very close to the view that has been defended recently by Humean constructivists

like Sharon Street, Carla Bagnoli, and James Lenman. Secondly, I will claim that even when we identify ourselves as members of the party of humankind, i.e., assume our 'human identity', it is open to us to form almost any conception of what we thereby acquire reasons to do, and that, therefore, our human identity is only contingently a 'moral identity' in Korsgaard's sense of that term.

Unlike previous chapters Heidegger will not feature in the immediate discussion. However, by the end of this chapter I hope to have sufficiently characterised the notion of a 'human identity', to enable me to consider, in the next chapter, something that Heidegger *is* concerned with, namely, the mode of being in which we immerse ourselves in a publicly interpreted world of anonymous norms, addressing us simply as 'one'.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 takes its point of departure from Korsgaard's notion of our 'human identity', i.e., the idea that at some level we understand ourselves as 'just someone'. In particular I will build upon three claims that I defended in the previous chapter. Firstly, that while our human identity *might* be a moral identity in Korsgaard's sense, it is quite conceivable that it is not such, and it is, therefore, only ever *possible* that the moral law will have force for us. Hence, not all agents are necessarily moral agents. Secondly, that our 'human identity' *may* provide part of the motive for adopting our other identities, but we do not require it in order to adopt other identities, and ultimately this identity is itself a contingent feature of our self-understanding. And finally, that we nevertheless have a very deep tendency to identify with a normative conception of our humanity, and why that is the case will hopefully become clear by the end of the this chapter.

Granting that our human identity is sometimes a moral identity and sometimes not, I will explore what else might be involved in having a normative conception of our humanity; for example, what kinds of accent, other than a moral accent, we might place upon the idea that there are certain things which we, as humans, ought to think and do. I also want to explore how this form of identity functions in our lives more generally. In order to do this I will turn to Heidegger's account of *das Man* and our

everyday mode of being-in-the-word, or 'everydayness' [*Alltäglichkeit*]. I will claim that what we find here is a phenomenological account of what I will continue to follow Korsgaard in calling our 'human identity'. I also want to consider more closely the idea that our human identity is itself contingent, and I will offer some suggestions about what it would mean for us to lose or to give up on this conception of ourselves – in particular, to lose or to give up on this identity while retaining other forms of practical identity.[3] The latter, I will suggest, is just what we do when we are 'authentic' [*eigentlich*] in Heidegger's sense of that term.

In the condition of authenticity, we take over an important insight from Heidegger's analysis of the condition which, in *Being and Time*, he will describe in terms of Anxiety [*Angst*], Death [*Tode*] and Conscience [*Gewissen*]: we appreciate that, because all of our identities are ultimately contingent, the only thing which we are essentially is a thrown potentiality or 'being-possible', or again, what Heidegger will sometimes call 'pure Dasein'. There are a number of things which I could say – and which other authors have said – about authenticity and the various notions which are closely related to it in Heidegger's thought, but I will limit myself to two points that I believe to be of particular importance. Firstly, that identifying ourselves as 'pure Dasein' we recognise that each of us enjoys a deep kind of agential unity (which I will consider in more detail in the next chapter), and secondly, in authenticity, we substitute our normative conception of humanity with what I will call a modal conception of humanity, i.e., a conception of the different modes through which we, as humans, can be attuned to or normatively oriented towards the world. It is with these two claims that I will end the present chapter.

Chapter 7

In the last chapter I claimed that there are at least two important 'anonymous' aspects of our identity; two ways in which we can understand ourselves as 'just someone'. A distinction between these two forms of identity can be found in Heidegger's account of *das Man*. And drawing upon that account I characterized

[3] Korsgaard accepts that there is at least one condition – complete practical normative scepticism – in which we do not identify ourselves in this way, but that is because it is characterised by the collapse of every form of practical identity, and not just our human identity.

them, respectively, as a normative and a modal conception of our identity as 'just someone'. The first of these is a kind of practical identity, which I have followed Korsgaard in calling our 'human identity', and this has now been explored in some detail. There is, I think, quite a bit more that can be said about the second, which I am calling our 'existential identity'. It is the aim of this chapter is to elaborate and to defend this notion.

The discussion is divided into two parts. The first explores our existential identity by offering an account of normative conversion. To help set this account out I will draw upon two philosophers whose views place them in the neighbourhood of the positions we have considered so far, namely, Sharon Street and Jean-Paul Sartre. The conclusion towards which I build in this section is that any account of agency must do justice to the deep unity – i.e., the existential dimension of who we are – which enables us to undergo pronounced shifts in our practical identity. The second part of this chapter will address a much more difficult question: 'how does this dimension of our identity (i.e., our deep unity) arise and upon what does it depend?' In order to answer *this* question what is needed, I believe, is an account of the constitution of our existential identity. I will argue that Sartre's account of 'Being-for-Others' [*L'etre-pour-autrui*] – although on the face of it concerned with something quite different – provides the materials for such an account. Drawing upon Sartre's discussion of shame, and emphasising the distinction he draws between mundane and 'original' shame, I argue that it is only in the context of the latter that we are unified across shifts in our practical identity, including the shift we would undergo if our identity collapsed, as Heidegger believes it does in 'Anxiety' [*Angst*] and Korsgaard in 'complete practical normative scepticism'.

– Part I –

Chapter 1

Korsgaard on the Sources of Normativity

1.0. Introduction

In *The Sources of Normativity* (1996, hereafter *SN*) and some of her later works, *The Constitution of Agency* (2008, hereafter *CA*) and *Self-Constitution* (2009, hereafter *SC*), Christine Korsgaard offers an account of agency and of the sources or foundations of practical normativity, i.e., the force which reasons for or against particular actions have for us. Building upon these, she also offers an account of specifically moral normativity. As I explained in the Introduction, I will respond to both aspects of her thought, with Part I (chapters 1-4) focusing primarily upon Korsgaard's general position, and Part II (chapters 5-7) taking its point of departure from the more specific discussion of morality.

In this chapter I want to do three things. Firstly, I offer a detailed outline of Korsgaard's account of practical normativity. In doing this, I place particular emphasis upon the closely related notions of 'reflective endorsement,' 'practical identity,' and 'self-constitution', all of which play an important role in the account of agency that I will defend. Korsgaard's views on moral normativity will be treated at length chapter 5, and I limit myself here to a brief outline which aims to indicate how these fit into the broader framework of her position.

Secondly, I explain how, in my view, some of her Heideggerian commentators, e.g. Mark Okrent and Steven Crowell, have misunderstood her position. There are several other points in the thesis where I engage with these authors, however, in the present chapter I only do so insofar as this allows me to clarify and/or defend the interpretation of Korsgaard's account that will serve as the starting point for the subsequent discussion.

Finally, I explain what it is about Korsgaard's account that motivates my own turn to Heidegger, and what I hope to achieve by doing this. With the aims of this chapter explained, let me turn now to Korsgaard.

1.1. Korsgaard's Account of Agency

1.1.1 The Structure of Human Minds

In *The Sources of Normativity*, Korsgaard frames her account of agency with the abstract, and on the face of it, somewhat cryptic claim that, as human beings, we are self-conscious in the sense that our minds have a 'reflective structure' (99). It is the 'reflective structure of our minds,' she suggests, which distinguishes us from most, if not all, non-human animals. In her later work *Self-Constitution*, Korsgaard draws a similar contrast, by invoking Aristotle's threefold distinction (outlined in his *De Anima*) between the life characterised by reason and choice that is distinctive, at least as far as we know, of human beings, the sensible and locomotive form of life that we share with non-human animals, and the nutritive life that is common to both animals and plants.

The purpose of these claims is apparently two-fold. Non-human animals are also agents. They do things for reasons. For example, they eat because they are hungry, drink because they are thirsty, flee predators to avoid becoming their meal, etc. But in both instances Korsgaard wants not only to stress that what she is trying to describe is human agency and action, but also to draw attention to certain facts about what it is like to be human to which any account of such agency must do justice. Two claims, in particular, come to the foreground, and I will structure the discussion of the first half of this chapter around these claims.

Firstly, she suggests that our minds are such that we can 'turn our attention on to [for example] our perceptions and desires,' and more generally, 'on to our own mental activities' (SN 93), and that the ability to 'reflect' in *this* sense, i.e., to direct higher-order intentions towards our own first-order thoughts, desires, feelings, and so on, enables us to reflect in a more colloquial sense upon these things, i.e., to think and deliberate *about* them. And she adds that this, in turn, enables us to think and deliberate more generally, makes our distinctive kind of 'thoughtfulness' possible (SN 92). Secondly, she claims that the 'structure of our minds' is the source of a

pervasive form of self-consciousness, insofar as it necessitates that we form a practical conception of ourselves, of our identity and who we are as agents.[4]

I will explain both of these claims in due course. However, there are a few things that I believe it will be helpful to say before I do this. If we put aside how the various kinds of 'reflection' just mentioned relate to one another, we can, I think, grant that we do in fact possess (and exercise) the abilities which Korsgaard imputes us. If, as I will assume, Korsgaard's first claim *is*, therefore, uncontroversial, at least in its broadest features, her second claim – being, as we will see, much more complicated than the first – is much less obviously so. As well as unpacking this claim, therefore, I also try to explain why, once it is properly understood, we ought to accept it. In order to defend this, however, I will suggest that we need to draw a distinction between implicit or pre-reflective self-awareness and explicit or reflective self-awareness. This distinction will play an important role in the first half of the thesis. I also argue that Korsgaard herself tacitly invokes just such a distinction. In one sense that puts my interpretation of her position in agreement with Steven Crowell's reading of her work. Unlike Crowell, however, I suggest that she can maintain this distinction consistently, and that she does not, as he suggests, betray the insights which are guiding her when she does make allowances for such a distinction.

1.1.2. Reflection

Each of us is capable of reflection in the quite specific sense that we are able to turn our attention onto our own first-order mental acts, e.g., our thoughts, experiences, desires, and so on. When these things 'come into view' for us, we are also aware that they are aspects of our own mental lives, and yet, as Korsgaard observes, in relating to them in this way we are no longer simply the ones who are undergoing them; there is a sense in which we stand at a certain distance from them (*SN* 93). Within this 'space of reflective distance', as she will sometimes call it, a range of possibilities open up to us, we can think about our experiences, or form second-order desires which relate to our first-order desires (e.g., we might wish that we didn't crave the

[4] The claim also goes hand in hand with a number of others, which at this point will be even more opaque, e.g., that unity is not a natural condition for beings like us, but something we must achieve. I will explain these as and when it becomes appropriate to do so.

cigarettes we are trying to give up). But amongst the many ways in which we can intend the various aspects of our own mental lives, one possibility is, she thinks, particularly important: we are capable of uncovering the grounds (in some cases) or potential grounds (in others) of our beliefs and our actions. For example, we can become aware of the relationship between our experience as of a cat sat on the lawn, and our belief that there is in fact a cat sat on the lawn. Or between our fear that the cat will knock over the plant pot, and our shooing the cat or our impulses to shoo the cat. This is significant, Korsgaard thinks, because once we bring the grounds or potential grounds of our actions to light, we are also in a position to ask whether we should really think (or have thought) what our perceptions purport to show us, or do (or have done) what our fears or our desires (etc.) incline (or inclined) us to think and do. And that means that our thoughts and actions are capable of a level of sophistication of which they would not otherwise be capable.

Now because we are quite complex creatures, this is just a specific example of something much more general. Our beliefs do not *just* rely upon the testimony of our senses. We also rely upon that of our friends and peers, the scientific community, and certain branches of the press, to give just a few examples. Neither are we motivated to act simply by our fears and our desires, or other aspects of our own psychology traditionally conceived, but also, as Korsgaard herself puts it, by various conceptions of 'highbrow laws like those of moral obligation or theoretical and practical reasons', or the more everyday 'demands of professional obligation, filial obedience, sexual fidelity, personal loyalty, and everyday etiquette' (*SC* 2). So the more general point that Korsgaard is chasing here is that it is in reflection upon the things which we are inclined to believe or do – more specifically, in an awareness of 'the potential grounds of our [thoughts and] actions... *as potential grounds*' (SC 115) – that we can ask whether the authority that these things claim over our thought and our conduct is legitimate, whether they really give us a reasons to think this or do that. And from that, it follows that it is within the space of reflective distance that we confront normativity as a problem.[5]

[5] Korsgaard does have more to say about the relationship between reflective awareness and 'reflective deliberation', as she tends to call it, but I won't go into this here. I will, however, revisit it in Chapter 4.

1.1.3. Reflective Endorsement and Rejection

After noting that the problem of normativity arises in reflection, one might naturally assume that Korsgaard has a lot to say about how we solve those problems. What she in fact offers, however, is rather schematic. Whatever else goes on in reflection – and she will allow for various imaginative and creative processes – the real work of practical deliberation is to scrutinize the various impulses or 'incentives' (to use the Kantian language she tends to favour) to act that we find ourselves under. Whether the incentives arise independently of deliberation or as a result of our thinking, we do this, she suggests, by considering them from various different angles, allowing considerations to arise from different points of view, e.g., self-interest, benevolence or sympathy, morality, etc., which we then bring to bear upon the objects of our scrutiny. However things play out in deliberation, we arrive at a solution to our normative problems, Korsgaard thinks, when we determine which of our various impulses we can treat as giving us a reason. If upon reflection we decide that we can endorse the claims these make upon us, i.e., if they survive the test of 'reflective endorsement', then, Korsgaard says, we establish their normativity for ourselves (SN 93). When we find ourselves in possession of reasons, therefore, this represents a kind of 'reflective success' (SN 93). She also suggests that this 'is exactly the process of thought that, according to Kant, characterizes the deliberations of the autonomous moral agent' (SN 89), and I will come back to this point in a moment. However, before I consider her Kantianism further, it is worth pausing for a moment to explain what exactly Korsgaard is claiming here.

Constructivists, like Korsgaard, and others who appeal to reflective endorsement (Korsgaard suggests that Hume, Kant, and more recently Bernard Williams all do this), are sceptical of the idea that normativity can be understood independently of the practical standpoint, i.e., the standpoint inhabited by an agent. Reflective endorsement, then, is intended to provide an alternative to a broadly realist conception of what is required in order to establish the normativity of some claim. Realism in this context is understood roughly as the appeal to 'truths about reasons, which exist independently of the will' (*CA* 31). The problem with this view, Korsgaard thinks, is that the realist's putative truths are always apt to appear presumptive to the agent themselves. And realism itself has nothing to offer an agent

who sincerely questions whether these claims are justified; it 'refuses to answer the normative question. It is a way of saying that it cannot be done. Or rather, more commonly, it is a way of saying that it need not be done' (*SN* 39).

As an alternative to this, then, Korsgaard proposes what she describes as a 'negative' conception on which something *is* normative if 'there is *no intelligible challenge* that can be made to its claims.... [if] from every point of view, including its own [a given claim] earns its right to govern' (SN 66). This relates to the way in which constructivists regard normativity (and normative concepts) as bound up with the solutions to practical problems:

> 'what makes a conception correct will be that it solves the problem, not that it describes some piece of external reality... as the term "constructivism" suggests, our use of the concept when guided by the correct conception *constructs* an essential human reality... The truths that result describe the constructed reality' (CA 324).

This also contrasts with realism, Korsgaard thinks, because the practical conception stands in opposition to one that construes ethics as a matter of seeking theoretical answers. However, emphasis upon the practical, doesn't discount the fact that we may bring to light problems with any view we happen to take of what reasons we have in a given situation, particularly when we have some distance from the moment of decision itself. Indeed, Korsgaard suggests that the commitments our decisions embody only stand 'until [we] can find the resources for changing [our] mind[s]' (*SN* 228). Nevertheless, if we put pressure on the idea that our view can develop in something like this way, we might still feel some kind of pull towards a form of realism, at least, to admitting some independence of the standards of correctness for the proposed solutions to our practical problems, from a given agent's pronouncements upon truth. So we might worry that in order to do justice to the 'internalism requirement', she sacrifices normativity to the way in which norms happen as a matter of fact to come to grip us, how 'necessitation' occurs as a matter of psychological fact, and hence merely with how considerations come to *appear* to have normative force.

Nevertheless, my own sympathies lie with Korsgaard, and while I cannot offer a complete defence of the constructivist approach to normativity, I will offer some remarks in support of the idea that it is a fruitful way of pursuing things. If principles of action are theoretical rather than practical, then they must nevertheless be applied by agents when they act, and application has the structure of a practical problem. The question we face is roughly, how to bring the abstract, theoretical principles which we take seriously, to bear upon this concrete situation, and we have already considered an example from Korsgaard's account of how this happens when I mentioned the everyday and highbrow norms: these provide us with some impulse to act, generate some maxim, which we must then determine if we can regard as a law, if it is a solution to our practical problem. But then we are back in the territory of a reflective endorsement understanding of normativity.

1.1.4. Kant

Above, I noted that Korsgaard associates her own conception of 'reflective endorsement' with Kant's characterisation of the process of deliberation of rational agents. She also draws other things from Kant's account of agency, but let us start with deliberation.

According to Kant, 'as each impulse to action presents itself to us, we should subject it to the test of reflection, to see whether it really is a *reason* to act' (*SN* 89). This reflects one of the central tenets of his moral psychology: that we must regard the impulses which present various actions to us as candidates as separate from the reasons on which we ultimately choose to act (*SN* 242). Our impulses (or as Kant will also refer to them, 'incentives') to act in various ways, each generate what Kant calls a maxim; for instance, 'lie in order to gain some personal advantage'. Korsgaard herself stresses that our maxims *must* contain a 'whole action', by which she means both an act (lying) and the proposed purpose of this act (gaining some personal advantage). Once a maxim has been formulated, what we need to determine is whether we should act on it. If we endorse the maxim then we are taking a stand upon what we ourselves have reason to do. And when we adopt this kind of stance we determine, what Korsgaard calls, our principle of choice, i.e., 'the principle or law by which [we] determine [our] actions' (SN 100). As Korsgaard says

> If you choose to run in order to escape your predator, to stand your ground in order to protect your offspring, or to dance for the sheer joy of dancing, then those are your principles, your conception of what is worth doing for the sake of what (SC 127).

Korsgaard's talk of principles and laws here, reflects another Kantian idea, namely, that agents must act under the 'categorical imperative'. However, she diverges from Kant in an important way, by suggesting that this should be distinguished from the moral law. The categorical imperative, on Korsgaard's view, states only that for an action to be ours, it must be autonomous, and for it to be autonomous it must issue from a principle that we are able to regard as a law or as having law-like force. The claim she is making here is that, if we are to act, each of us must determine which laws will govern our conduct, by taking a stand upon what we have reason to do. The experience of necessitation that arises out of this, then, is one that we impose upon ourselves, is an act of 'self-legislation'. And from this it follows from this that it is our own autonomy that is the source of normativity, because the norms which are binding for us are ones we have made binding on ourselves. As well as offering an alternative to realism, Kant's notion of 'self-legislation' avoids the problems of traditional forms of voluntarism like, for example, Hobbes, because the one who legislates what we must do, in this instance, is someone whose right to govern us is something which we naturally concede, namely, ourselves.

Korsgaard's account of the way in which we solve the problems which arise for us in reflection has one final but important step. What is distinctive about her way of framing this idea is that the law which we are 'unto ourselves' stems from who we are, or more specifically from what she calls our 'practical identity'. This notion plays a number of roles, as we will see in a moment. It also connects her account to Kant's later work, in particular *Religion within the limits of Reason Alone*, and the discussion we find therein of *Gesinnung*, which Henry Alison describes as 'the enduring character or disposition of an agent which underlies and is reflected in particular choices' (1990, 136). Very broadly, the two related claims that Korsgaard wants to defend by introducing the notion of practical identity, these: (1) that there is an intimate connection between the things that matter to us and who we are, in particular, who

we are as agents, and (2) that when we act, and thereby take such a stand on what reasons we have, we are also constituting ourselves as persons of a certain kind.

1.1.5. Practical Identity

Korsgaard describes our practical identities in several related, but slightly different ways. It can refer to a conception of ourselves, of who we are, as agents. Or to a description under which we value ourselves, find life to be worth living and our actions worth undertaking (101). They include things like, being 'a human being, a woman or a man, an adherent of a certain religion, a member of an ethnic group, a member of a certain profession, someone's lover or friend, and so on' (SN 101). Our practical identity can also include things like, our familial status (e.g., being a parent, child, sibling, spouse), our relationships to other people (e.g., friend, lover, rival), our occupations (e.g., student, teacher, artist, philosopher), the fact that we are citizens of a certain nation, ethnic group, or religion. It can include ethical commitments like vegetarianism, or causes we identifies with, like conservationism, and also the ways of being an agent which arise from taking a view of what counts as a virtue (e.g., courageous, sensitivity, patience) (see SN and SC).
An agent's conception of themselves, then, is inevitably complex, because each of us has numerous practical identities, and as I will explain in a moment, that complexity itself gives rise to a challenge which we must meet.

We acquire our identities in various ways, as she says in *The Sources of Normativity*, they may be, 'to some extent, given to us – by our cultures, by our societies and their role structures, by the accidents of birth, and by our natural abilities' (SN 239) – for example, being a particular person's child or the citizen of a particular nation (SC 23). However, she continues, 'it is also clear that we enter into their construction' (SN 239), that we think about and come to decisions about the kind of person we want to be, the kind of projects we think it is worthwhile to pursue, and so 'some [practical identities] we adopt for reasons, like joining a profession that is worthwhile and suits your talents or devoting yourself to a cause in which you ardently believe' (SC23). Others, by contrast, may be adopted voluntarily, but 'without anything that is in more than a marginal sense a reason,' for example, rather than weighing up the value of entering a profession, we may drift into it by way of a summer job (SC23).

The identity at which we arrive in these, and perhaps other ways, is unavoidably practical because, as agents, it is in light of it that we must act. As she says, '[w]hen we adopt (or come to wholeheartedly inhabit) a conception of [our] practical identity, we also adopt a way of life' (239). This means that we must in some cases distinguish practical identities from the nominal sense in which we might have some identities. To have a practical identity is to do more than meet the criteria for inclusion within a category, e.g., being a person's child, or a nation's citizen. It only counts as one if it takes the form of a project, a kind of activity, at least, that one attaches import to these things, e.g., to 'being that person's child', not just in how one thinks about it, but in the way it shapes how you confront situations – for example, if one's arguments with a particular person are worth resolving *because they are your parent*, or if their failures to respond sensitively to your suffering feels like a betrayal, or if you take it that they owe you certain things. The reverse side of this point is that, as Korsgaard puts it,

> you can walk out even on a factually grounded identity like being a certain person's child or a certain nation's citizen, dismissing the reasons and obligations that it gives rise to, because you just don't identify yourself with that role. Then it's not a form of *practical* identity anymore: not a description under which you value yourself' (SC 23).

Perhaps most importantly, however, is that insofar as each of our practical identities involves taking a stance upon what matters, they also provide a standpoint from which certain things can be regarded as reasons for acting, certain impulses to act endorsed. While Korsgaard tends to elaborate endorsement in relation to deliberation, this is because it emerges with particular clarity in this context, and not because it is limited to this. She is careful to stress that there needn't always be something like 'a deliberate two-step process [in which] ...the agent *first* notices the incentive and *then* decides whether to act on it by consciously applying the principle of choice' (SN 243). In many cases our principles of choice will be 'deeply internalized', such that, 'we may simply *recognize* the case as one falling under the principle, where that is a single experience' (SC 107). And this is something Korsgaard associates with our identities. From the standpoint of someone's friend,

for instance, the fact that they are in trouble may be a reason to help them, may be something which we will simply see, as she adds, '[p]rinciples ...play a role in structuring our perceived environment' (SC 107).

That is particularly important as reflective endorsement is supposed to explain how normativity is established, and normativity isn't just something that guides or concerns us in deliberation; we are constantly responding to norms in everything we do, and that includes non-deliberative, absorbed agency. This is something that any account of normativity or agency must be capable of doing justice, and in Korsgaard's account it is the notion of practical identity, that does so, by allowing her to move endorsement away from deliberation. One purpose this notion plays, then, is to allay the kind of worry that, for example, Peter Railton expresses, that starting with an agent exercising reflective choice', and so engaged in higher-order acts, might locate things too much in the domain of self-conscious, deliberative judgement (2006*,* 3-4). And it does this by accommodating the fact that, as Hubert Dreyfus observes, 'we are not normally thematically conscious of our ongoing everyday activity' (1995, 58). Practical identity, then, is the notion which bridges her account of the way we secure a grip upon reasons in reflective deliberation and how our unreflective lives can embody normative commitments, and be guided by norms.

It is worth stressing the implications of this for how Korsgaard conceives the endorsement and rejection of our incentives. This now needn't be thought to be something accompanied by or achieved in reflective awareness of these incentives. It is not reflective in that sense. In some instances we may only find ourselves in a position to endorse or reject certain incentives after we have engaged in a course of reflection, but these 'stances' are not always the fruit of our deliberative efforts, nor of choices made in light of other options explicitly arrayed before us. When Korsgaard says that every action involves a 'choice' or 'decision', she is not suggesting that we make these explicitly, as we do when we inhabit a deliberative standpoint. Rather, the 'choice', as she says, is 'embodied in the action'.

1.2. Crowell's Interpretation of Korsgaard

1.2.1. Crowell on Reflective Endorsement

In his 2007 paper, 'Sorge or Selbstbewußtsein: Heidegger and Korsgaard on the Sources of Normativity', Steven Crowell suggests that Korsgaard commits herself to the view that agency *always* involves reflection, or more specifically a reflective decision. And this, he suggests, not only distorts the phenomenology, but ultimately undermines a number of the most important and attractive aspects of her account. This is also one of the considerations which motivates Crowell to turn to Heidegger. To my mind, Crowell's view rests on an uncharitable and ultimately unsustainable reading of Korsgaard. I turn to it here, to address the possibility of a different interpretation of her view, and to distinguish my reasons for turning to Heidegger from Crowell's.

Although Korsgaard believes that many of the conceptions under which we value ourselves are ones into which circumstance has to a large extent ushered us – that they are, as she says, 'given to us - by our cultures, by our societies and their role structures, by the accidents of birth, and by our natural abilities (239), rather than explicitly chosen (see also SC 43) – reflection affords us the opportunity to enter in an active manner into the construction of our identities (SN 239) and thereby plays an important role in shaping our normative commitments.

However, there is another way in which Korsgaard's account of practical identity relies upon the notion of 'reflection'. For however we happen to come by our identities, the 'principle of choice' which these embody grounds the 'reflective' endorsement and rejection of the various incentives to which we are subject. As I have argued, reflective endorsement and rejection do not necessarily imply that we ourselves reflect, because as Korsgaard puts it elsewhere, 'acting on a rational principle need not involve any step-by-step process of reasoning, for when a principle is deeply internalized we may simply *recognize* the case as one falling under the principle, where that is a single experience (SC 107).[6] Nevertheless, since our

[6] While it might be somewhat misleading, then, to say, as Korsgaard sometimes will, that when we have a reason we see our incentives from a certain perspective, as if what this 'single experience' involved were consciousness of a state reified into a kind of mental item (to borrow Korsgaard's own description of a certain kind of reflective act, SC 121) – a point for which Blackburn (2000) criticises her – she is quite aware that there is a story to tell about the intentionality of such 'seeing', and

identification with a principle of choice always involves occupying a particular stance in relation to our incentives – involves, that is, a conception of ourselves which bears, whether explicitly or not, upon our incentives – both our identities and the endorsements they ground have a reflective structure. In this sense our stances frame our incentives. Crowell recognises that by allowing that our principles, and their application to our incentives, can remain 'deeply internalized', Korsgaard accommodates the application of her account to unreflective action, and that this move allows her to 'saves the phenomena' (328). However, he suggests, her ontology of human reflective self-consciousness cannot support this, and at times she is forced to 'treat such action as implicitly involving deliberation' (328). It is not the criticism *per se* that I'm interested in here, but the interpretation of her position that leads him to criticise her in this way.

Crowell summarizes his view as follows:

> Once they are no longer objects of specific choice, but rather sedimented produces of such choice, beliefs and desires I have 'activity arrived at' seem little different in their ontological (and hence motivational) status than any other element of my psychology (328)

If that is right, he thinks, then 'it remains a mystery how even the incorporated beliefs and desires can be *me'* (329) in the sense that Korsgaard believes is necessary if we are to constitute ourselves as the authors of our actions. Crowell's view finds some support in the following. Korsgaard writes that

> at the moment of action our practical identities and the impulses [240] that arise from them... are the incentives, the passively confronted material upon which the active will operates, and not the agent or active will itself (SN 241).

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that what is actually involved in these instances of, as she puts it, 'reflective success', is for our principles to 'play a role in structuring our perceived environments' (SC 107, my emphasis).

If, as this seems to suggest, Korsgaard is committed to the view that every one of our actions requires a renewed endorsement of (even our incorporated) practical identities in order to breathe` normative life back into them, then it appears that there is a tension in her account, because at certain crucial moments she illicitly smuggles reflection back into unreflective action. If that where the case, then one motive for turning to someone other than Korsgaard might be to find an ontology of agency that *can* accommodate this without such tensions.

Although Crowell rightly criticises this view, I want to suggest that he may have been overly hasty attributing it to Korsgaard, as there is another way to read the relevant passages of her work. While I believe that this alternative reading is more faithful, I shall not detain the discussion with this issue; rather, I want only to offer it as a plausible alternative, which in addition to insulating her view from Crowell's criticism, also brings out something important about the nature of our practical identities.

There are two points that I think Crowell overlooks. The first is an important consequence of the complexity of our identities. If it is part of my identity that I am your friend then, one of the things that this might entail is that if you are in trouble, I will see this as a reason to help you. However, given that I also have other identities, occupy a range of standpoints from which different considerations might appear as reasons, each identity may only give rise to a reason in T. M. Scanlon's sense, i.e., 'a consideration that counts in favour of [some] thing (1998, 17), or to use Shelly Kagan's term, a *pro tanto* reason (i.e., a reason with genuine weight but which may, nevertheless, be outweighed (or silenced) by other considerations) (1989, 17). It is in this sense that Korsgaard thinks that, at the moment of action, our particular practical identities are only the source of incentives to act; we must take a further stance to determine which is a reason *all things considered*.

Crowell also overlooks another important feature of Korsgaard's account. In *Self-Constitution*, Korsgaard appears to make a similar claim to the one that I quoted above (see SN 240-241). Whenever I act in accordance with a conception of myself, allow it to govern my will, she says, I endorse that conception, embrace it, make it my own and so affirm *once again* what I am (SC 43). But now she qualifies this claim.

The reason we need to affirm what we are, to ratify our identity (the reasons the active will must act upon even our internalized commitments) is not because when we loosen our reflective hold upon our endorsement of certain incentives, our commitment to their rational standing, they in turn cease to reflect what is genuinely ours. Rather, it is because 'to be a person is to be constantly engaged in making yourself into that person' (SC 43). There are two aspects to this. Firstly, to adopt a practical identity is not to arrest ourselves in a particular motivational state, but to engage in an ongoing, self-constitutive activity. We are constantly constituting our various practical identities through the stand we take upon which impulses can be endorsed – and hence, considered reasons – from the perspective of each of these identities. So, as Korsgaard says, our identities should not be considered states 'that we achieve from which actions then issue' (SC 44), nor fixed loci of agency, but rather, something we tenuously constitute in time, as our lives unfold.[7] Secondly, as each of our identities can only furnish us with *pro tanto* reasons, this first activity does not get us in a position to act, we must still take a stand upon which of the incentives arising from our various practical identities we can regard as reasons *all things considered*. This involves a more concrete kind of self-constitution, involves making ourselves into as a single, unified agent. And this activity is inseparable from the ongoing process of drawing a ground into operation as the basis for acting. It is in that sense, that Korsgaard will claim that 'self-constitution... it is action itself' (44).

So where Crowell sees an equivocation in Korsgaard's account of self-awareness, I see an important qualification of the nature of our practical identity and of the relation of these identities, as ground, to our actions. It is a qualification, moreover, in which, Korsgaard's Aristotelian commitments come to the fore, for what she is saying, I believe, is that being a certain kind of person, having a certain identity, is not a matter of having achieved something once and for all, but rather, that it is only in enacting our identities and their commitments that a person really *has* that identity. Reading Korsgaard in this way not only withdraws support for Crowell's view, it also leaves it open to her to claim that the endorsement and rejection of the incentives arising from our practical identities that is required at the moment of action, is just a

[7] I have borrowed this way of framing it from Judith Butler's discussion of gender as a kind of performance (1988, esp. 519). It seems to me that this has a great deal in common with Korsgaard's view of practical identity.

seeing one of those incentives as a reason, from the standpoint of a principle that represents who I am as a single, unified agent. And this makes it possible for her account to accommodate absorbed agency, because although we need to negotiate greater complexity to arrive at a view of what we have reason to do *all things considered*, doing this isn't fundamentally any different to taking a stand upon what we have reason to do insofar as we are, say, someone's friend.

1.2.2. Crowell on the Structure of our Minds:

At the beginning of this chapter I explained that Korsgaard makes a very general claim about what it is like to be an agent, which she frames in terms of the structure of our minds. As well as the criticism of her view that I have just considered, Crowell also suggests that there are problems with her account at this very general level, and I will consider his criticism here. Again, my main aim in doing this is to clarify Korsgaard's position as I understand it.

Let me briefly outline what Korsgaard says about the structure of our minds. Our minds, she begins, are essentially reflective (*SN* 92), they have a reflective structure, and this structure establishes a relation in which we stand to ourselves (SN 104). Whatever else this relation consists in, Korsgaard thinks, it 'is a source of 'self-consciousness' because it forces us to have a *conception* of ourselves' (SN 100). Note that it does not only *enable* us to identify with some conception of ourselves, so it is not simply a precondition of our practical identities but, as Okrent puts it, something which 'necessitates that every human agent has some self-conception' (46). It is an integral feature of her account of the sources of normativity then, because it is the structure that our minds possess which 'requires that you identify yourself with some law or principle [103] which will govern your choices' (104). So when Korsgaard says that we are 'self-conscious', the awareness in question is bound up with our practical identities, and with the activity of self-constitution. And as I have explained, this is a matter of taking a stand upon what we have reason to do, and thereby upon who we are, where this does *not* imply reflective self-awareness. Although Korsgaard does not use this term, the self-awareness involved in our identities, would therefore be better characterised as pre-reflective.

Crowell agrees that, understood as conceptions of ourselves (albeit practical rather than theoretical ones), our identities must involve some kind of self-awareness. But when he discusses this awareness, he follows Mark Okrent, who describes it as a kind of 'second-order intention' directed towards our first-order intentions (1999: 57). Although Korsgaard clearly associates this self-awareness with a structure of our minds which makes thinking and thoughtfulness possible (and so, one might think, something that cannot be characterised in the same terms as thinking itself), on Crowell's reading (and Okrent's), they assume that she must understand this structure itself 'in terms of *reflection*... where reflection is understood as our ability "to turn our attention onto our perceptions and desires themselves"...a specific higher-order act that 'reifies' our states into 'a kind of mental item" (Crowell, 2007: 320). This leads Crowell to conclude that Korsgaard is committed to what Dan Zahavi (1999) calls variously a 'higher-order' or 'reflection' theory of self-awareness (15). In challenging this view Crowell is in the company of a number of other thinkers, going back at least as far as those who Zahavi describes as the Heidelberg school - represented by Henrich, Frank, Pothast and Cramer – although Henrich (1982) himself credits the insight to an even earlier source, Johann Fichte. Similar worries are also found in Heidegger and again in Sartre. In the briefest terms, the criticism which each of these thinkers levels at the reflection theory of self-awareness is that reflection upon our own mental life seems itself to presuppose a prior acquaintance with ourselves in order for us to recognise ourselves as the object of this awareness. If reflection is the only way in which we can be acquainted with ourselves, each reflective act invokes another, and so the problem reiterates, giving rise to an infinite regress (Zahavi, 1999).

Again, I agree with Crowell that such a view would be problematic. But I cannot see where the pressure for attributing this view to Korsgaard is supposed to come from. Our minds have a 'reflective' structure in the sense that we are always relating to ourselves by having a conception of our identity, and by way of this conception, to our various impulses, as the objects of our endorsement or rejection. Nevertheless, Crowell's reading does highlight a problem in Korsgaard's work: her permissive use of the adjective 'reflective' and the adverb 'reflectively', and her failure to directly address the different inflections that she gives to these in different contexts.

1.3. Turning to Heidegger

Unlike Crowell (and Okrent, who I will consider more in later sections), then, I do not feel as much pressure to set the largely Heidegger-inspired account I wish to develop in this thesis in opposition to Korsgaard's position.[8] There are, however, a number of ways in which I believe Korsgaard's account remains underdeveloped (something that is relatively unsurprising given that she herself regards the account she offers – at least in *The Sources of Normativity* – as in some respects, 'sketchy, and sketchily argued' (SN 91)). Although she can accommodate unreflective action, she only gestures at what it means to apply an account of practical identity to such action, e.g., for our commitments to be deeply internalized, for our principle of choice to be applied without this process being explicit, and for our identities to structure our perceived environment. But if action requires a conception of ourselves and this can be 'deeply internalized', then despite its emphasis upon reflection, her account appears to invoke a kind of pre-reflective self-awareness, which she does not clarify phenomenologically. She also fails to specify the kind of structuring relationship that practical identity has to our experienced environment. These are two things upon which, I believe, Heidegger can help us to shed some light. His account, which I will consider in a moment, starts from a careful description of the way in which we encounter things in the context of our unreflective dealings with them. Whenever we do so, he suggests, we manifest at once a kind of practical understanding – a form of pre-reflective self-understanding, comparable to Korsgaard's notion of 'practical identity' – and what he describes as an 'understanding of being'. I will take up his analysis of understanding [*Verstehen*], encompassing each of these three dimensions, in the next chapter. Doing this not only provides an important supplement to Korsgaard's account, but also serves as an entry point into several other aspects of his philosophy which I will look at in this thesis (in particular the account of mood, which I will consider in chapter 3).

[8] There will be other places in the thesis where I suggest that her critics are overly hasty in attributing a particular position to Korsgaard, and in at least one place I will suggest that a view rightly attributed to Korsgaard is wrongly rejected (by Mark Okrent), and that it in fact sees her coming very close indeed to a claim Heidegger himself defended.

1.4. Moral Normativity

So far I have left out Korsgaard's account of moral normativity and moral identity, as this will be the focus of Chapter 6. However, before moving on to consider Heidegger's thought, I will briefly outline her position here. Whereas I am quite sympathetic to Korsgaard's general position, I will suggest that her account of moral normativity is problematic. The view I will defend coheres with Heidegger's view, and shares his general suspicion of a certain way of doing ethics, but it is not in any particularly interesting sense, Heideggerian. Nevertheless, I believe that Korsgaard identifies something important, when she characterises this identity as a 'human identity', a way of being 'just someone', and I use her insight as a springboard for introducing Heidegger's notion of *das Man*, and a more general exploration of the anonymous dimensions of identity, and the practical standpoint onto which our identities open us.

Korsgaard presents her account of practical identity – of how practical conceptions of ourselves gives us a 'principle of choice', a law that guides our conduct and provides a basis for endorsing and rejecting our various incentives – as a development of Kant's moral philosophy. Specifically, it is rooted in Kant's claim that human agents stand under the categorical imperative, that our choices must be guided by a principle or maxim that we can regard as a law. Unlike Kant, as I have explained, Korsgaard distinguishes between the categorical imperative and the moral law, conceiving the former as a weaker and more formal claim about the structure of the free will and so of autonomous agency (SN 98). If her account ended with practical identity, without as Geuss puts it, 'further specification of what this law which I give myself must be' (1996: 189), it would contain 'a deep element of relativism' (SN 113), or agent relativity, as Korsgaard herself is fully aware. It is in order to eliminate, or at least attenuate, this, and to complete the Kantian line of thought – 'that autonomous human agents stand not only under the categorical imperative but also under the moral law' (Geuss: 189) – which she wants to defend, that Korsgaard introduces the notion of 'moral identity'.

Although it serves the purpose of placing a constraint upon the practical conceptions we form of ourselves, moral identity is itself a form of practical identity, from which

our moral reasons and obligations stem. Korsgaard's account of moral normativity, therefore, is a development of her account of practical normativity more generally, and the basic thought behind this, that 'a view of what you ought to do is a view of who you are' (SN 117). To stand under a law, for Korsgaard, is, therefore, at the same time to be characterised in some particular way. More specifically, since our practical conceptions characterise us in more or less general terms, it involves being an instances of a given type, a teacher, say, or a parent, and it is this type that fixes the domain over which the law ranges (SN 99). However, Korsgaard says, 'it is only if the law ranges over every rational being that the resulting law will be the moral law' (SN 99). Correspondingly, she claims, moral identity involves conceiving of ourselves in a much more general way than in our ordinary practical identities; it involves identifying with our humanity.

Humanity, in this context, stands for that which we have in common with all other people. To identify ourselves in this way, therefore, means to regard ourselves as 'just someone', a member of 'the party of humankind' (SN 117), in Hume's phrase, or in Kantian terms, citizens of the Kingdom of Ends. We do this, at least tacitly, whenever we view a norm as ranging over all rational beings. Similarly, whenever we consider something to be good *per se*, we make a claim on behalf of all humanity and so adopt the perspective of 'just someone'. This is a 'moral' identity because to act morally, Korsgaard claims, 'is to act a certain way simply because you are human, to act as one who values her humanity should' (SN 129).

Moral identity, for Korsgaard, is not just one possible way of conceiving of ourselves. It has a certain a privileged status amongst our various practical conceptions of ourselves because while most of our identities are 'contingent or relative... moral identity is necessary' (122), and in a sense, 'inescapable' (130). This claim rests upon the thought that to be human is to be a certain kind of creature, to have certain features, among which Korsgaard singles out for particular attention, the fact that it necessary for us to act for a reason, i.e., that we are the kind of creatures who need reasons in order to live and to act. This in turn give rise to our need for practical identities, as these are what furnish us with our reasons. If we identify with some practical conception, Korsgaard thinks, it must, therefore, be because we are responding to this need, placing a value upon it, and thereby

identifying with our humanity. What she is claiming here is that if we endorse any particular practical conception of ourselves it must be because we endorse our nature as reflective animals, i.e., we find life to be worth living as the kind of animals we inescapably are. If we did not, then we would have no reason to adopt any practical identity, and this, Korsgaard suggests, means that the normativity of our practical identities derives in part from the normativity of our identity as rational human agents.

Of course Korsgaard is not claiming that we must always be reflectively aware of the dependence of practical identity upon moral identity, but only that if we reflect upon our identities, whatever they may be, if we ask why we ought to go on endorsing them, eventually, we will see that our reason for having them is, ultimately, that we need them in order to live and to act. As Bratman (1998) says

> [t]he continued application of the pressures of reflection lead[s]... to my endorsement of a conception of myself as a reflective being [and because] reflectiveness is a basic characteristic of normal human agents, this is an endorsement of my humanity (700).

What makes morality special, then, 'is that it springs from a form of identity which cannot be rejected unless we are prepared to reject practical normativity, or the existence of practical reasons, altogether' (125). This makes moral identity a foundational feature of our practical identities more generally.

Chapter 2

Heidegger, Practical Identity and Self-understanding

2.0. Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined Korsgaard's account of agency and the sources of normativity. As I explained, in developing this account, one of her primary aims is to explore how we are able to arrive at answers to the problems which we find ourselves tasked with solving in reflective deliberation. Although that is also the context in which she introduces the notion of 'practical identity', she insists that these can be – and in most cases are – 'deeply internalized'. She also acknowledges that, when that is the case, we exercise our agency by responding spontaneously to the solicitations of our environment, e.g., we see the fact that our friend is in trouble *as* a reason to help them (*SN* 243). On her view then, rational agency does not need to involve either a process of deliberation or an explicit, executive decision. And this enables her to accommodate the fact that non-deliberative, unreflective action is genuinely guided by norms. As I also explained, I find Crowell's suggestion, that she cannot consistently maintain this, unpersuasive. Nevertheless, Korsgaard does not do much to illuminate this kind of 'absorbed' agency, or the relationship between such agency and our identities. And related to this, I suggested, one thing that her position would benefit from is a more comprehensive account of the nature of our practical identities and the activity of self-constitution, laying particular stress upon what these must be like if they are to serve as the foundation of absorbed agency.

In contrast to Korsgaard's approach, however, Heidegger's account of self-understanding develops out of a close phenomenological description of our everyday absorbed engagement with the world, focusing in particular upon the way in which things show up for us, as he often puts it, 'proximally and the most part', in the course of our dealings with them. As a result, we find Heidegger directing his attention onto precisely the area where Korsgaard's account stands to be developed. Let me explain what *I* hope to get from Heidegger in this chapter.

The first thing I want to do in this chapter is to explain how Heidegger's account of understanding can help us to develop a more comprehensive account of our practical identities. I do this by turning to his description of everyday Being-in-the-world [*In-die-Welt-sein*], which comprises most of section one. I focus, in particular, upon 'circumspection' [*Umsicht*], the ready-to-hand [*Zuhanden*], and the network of purposive relations upon which these both rest. Doing this I will try to address a particular question: how should we understand the idea of an 'internalized' identity, a tacit – I will say, 'pre-reflective' – conception of who we are that is, at the same time, a conception of what is worth doing for the sake of what. I answer this by showing how, the way in which we experience the world in the context of our dealings with entities, itself embodies, insofar as it structured by, a kind of practical self-understanding – a conception of ourselves, to use Korsgaard's language. We are pre-reflectively acquainted with ourselves through our environments, because the way in which we experience the world has an important self-referential dimension, insofar as we are reflected back to ourselves from the very things we encounter in it.

The second thing that I will do in this chapter is to look to the broader features of Heidegger's account of understanding, in particular, to two closely related notions from his technical vocabulary: 'projection' [*Entwerf*] and 'familiarity' [*Vertrautheit*]. I do this in section two. I have said that I am interested not only in the attitudes which bring norms to life, but also those deeper structures of our experience which make it possible for us to have such attitudes in the first place. This is what I think that Heidegger's broader account offers. So my first aim is to identify some of these attitudes, which I suggest are forms of understanding.

In section three, I explain how our practical self-understanding relates to this broader context of understanding. To explain the relationship between these two forms of understanding it is necessarily to draw upon Heidegger's discussion of 'interpretation' [*Auslegung*]. I emphasise the distinction between the projection of possibilities which makes it possible for us to encounter anything, and the projection of ourselves into (or onto – Heidegger uses both idioms) some of the possibilities so understood. The former represents 'understanding' in its purest form. The latter, which I associate with practical identity, involves both projection and interpretation and therefore has a more complex structure.

By bringing interpretation into the discussion I can also offer some reflections upon what it means to adopt a practical identity (i.e., what the act of committing ourselves to treat some principle as binding upon us is like). Incidentally, this is also the point at which some of Korsgaard's commentators (e.g., R. Jay Wallace, 2012) have seen similarities between this aspect of her view and existentialism.[9] I mention this as the view I defend is also existentialistic. But interpretation also allows me to shed some light upon the way in which we determine what we have reason to do in the changing circumstances in which we find ourselves, i.e., upon the more complex activity of self-constitution which negotiates the competing demands of our various identities. This also shows how Heidegger can do justice to both of these aspects of Korsgaard's account: what we have reason to do is not just grounded in our identities, but in the on-going activity of self-constitution whereby we determine what we have reason to do given our identities in the various circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Finally, in section four, I explain how Heidegger's notion of familiarity, involves both familiarity with the possibilities of identification, and with the particular ways in which people tend to solve all of their interpretive challenges. In this context I draw attention to Heidegger's notion of 'everydayness', related to an interpretation of things which Heidegger associates with *das Man*, a kind of 'cultural sensibility' (as Dreyfus calls it) that Heidegger appears to be ambivalent towards insofar as it serves both to enable us to negotiate our situations, but also potentially to keep us within a restrictive domain of activity that can have negative consequences, particularly for philosophy. I only introduce this here because it relates to the issues I will discuss and it will be more fully elaborated upon in chapter 6.

2.1. Everyday Being-in-the-World

When we come across things in our everyday lives, Heidegger observes, we do not first of all survey them disinterestedly, they are not present for us as 'bare realities, as

[9] As Wallace describes it '[t]he existentialist dimension is the idea that practical reasoning bottoms out in orientations of the will that are themselves prior to reason and justification, insofar as they bring reasons into existence in the first place' (2012, 32).

objects in some sort of natural state... (2001, 69). Rather they are encountered in the context of, and so in relation to, whatever we are trying to do, whatever activity or undertaking in which we are engaged, and insofar as there is always something at stake in our endeavours, as already mattering in some way. As Heidegger puts it, they stand, and are met with 'on the path of care' (2001, 68).

Suppose, for instance, that I am making myself a cup of coffee. As I fill the kettle with water, I am not first of all aware of it as an object of a certain size and shape, made, let us say, from black plastic and matte aluminium, with a handle, a lid, a switch, and so on. I am not, that is to say, aware of it in the way I might be if I were trying to describe it to someone (cf. BP 163). Although I can, of course, come to attend to these so called 'objective' features, when something is, as Ratcliffe (2008) puts it, 'a participant in my activity' (44), in the way that I am imagining the kettle in this example, these features withdraw into the background. It is tempting to say that what comes to the fore in their place is that in terms of which the kettle bears upon what I am doing or trying to do, its 'functional properties' to give them a name. That might be closer to the truth, however, Heidegger thinks, even this is slightly misleading. In the context of our dealings with things, our relation to them is not 'theoretical', in the sense that we are concerned to grasp what the kettle is, or to conceive it in some way, say, as something which lends itself to being put to a particular use. This implies an altogether too detached and spectatorial mode of awareness. Heidegger expresses this point when he notes that our practices have their own kind of 'sight', a sight which he calls 'circumspection' [*Umsicht*]. Circumspection uncovers what a thing is for, its 'immanent reference to that *for which*' it is to be used (BP 163), but it does this in such a way that that 'as which' the entities are grasped, the 'in-order-to', as Heidegger refers to it, is not an *explicit* feature of our experience, not something we make the focus of our attention, but something we take into practical account. The way in which entities are present to us in our activities, their 'mode of being' in relation to our practices, he calls, 'readiness-to-hand [*Zuhandenheit*], and what is 'ready-to-hand is not grasped theoretically at all' (BT 99).

What interests us about circumspection here is the kind of understanding that Heidegger suggests that it embodies. That is what I will try to elicit now, and to that

end, let us return to the example. Making myself a coffee, I grasp the taps primarily as 'in-order-to' fill the kettle, the kettle as 'in-order-to' boil the water, and along with these things a whole ensemble of 'equipment' (broadly understood) to be used in a range of ways (e.g., the cafetiere which is 'in-order-to' brew the coffee, the draw which affords access to the spoons which are, in turn, for measuring and stirring, etc.). And as this already intimates, the various 'bits' of equipment that we employ in our activities are not used, experienced or understood, in isolation from one another. The function, in terms of which each is encountered and taken up, implies, enables and is presupposed by the function of other things, and this involves them in various more or less complicated ways with each other. Because things as I encounter them in the context of my dealings are interrelated in this way, my ability to come across any of them in terms of their functions, as lending themselves in some way to what I am doing, depends upon my familiarity [*Vertrautheit*] with the whole structure of 'in-order-to' relations to which they belong, the functional whole which Heidegger describes as a 'totality of equipment' [*Zeugzusammenhang* ('Context of equipment', SZ 75*), Verweisungsganzheit* ('Referential totality', 70), *Ein Zeugganzes/Eine Zeugganzheit* ('totality of equipment', 68)].

Our familiarity with a 'totality of equipment', is at the same time, familiarity with a kind of work or activity, and so it provides a context in which things can be encountered as bearing a range of different kinds of practical import. Things can, for example, be better or worse, more or less available. They can also show up as 'unavailable' [*unzuhanden*] in a variety of ways. The pile of dirty cups and plates that have collected in the washing up bowl aren't as immediately useable as the ones in the cupboard, their dirtiness is 'in the way' of my using them. If there are none clean then it is something I must deal with before I can press on with the task at hand. Things other than equipment can also stand out as needing to be taken into account e.g., the water pooling around the edge of the sink, risks soaking my shirt as I lean over it.

Ultimately these functional and impedimental relations hang together in the way they do because they are understood not only in relation to each other, but also to something which coordinates them, namely, that in which our activity finds its teleological fulfilment, broadly speaking, the end at which we are aiming. As

Heidegger puts it, it is that 'towards-which' our activity tends that 'bears with it the referential totality within which the equipment is encountered' (BT 99).

It is then only because we understand how this network of equipment belongs to some means of pursuing some end, and because we understand that we are trying to achieve this end, that particular things show up as salient for us. Circumspection depends, therefore, upon this understanding in order to uncover an environment that is the possible setting of my pursuit of a given activity. It depends upon it in order to uncover a setting in which those things which lend themselves to or stand in the way of what I am trying to do appear as the most salient features, and where those, e.g., the spice rack, the bottle of wine, the hobs, the walls and the floor, the plants on the windowsill, etc., which do not immediately bear upon what I am doing withdraw, to varying degrees, into the background.

If at any stage in our undertakings our 'towards-which' was something else, then things (perhaps different, perhaps the same things) would in turn be salient in different respects. If I was making pasta rather than coffee, for example, the hobs, the cupboard with the pans in and the spice rack would all be salient, as might the kale, the spring onions, the thyme and the rosemary in the garden, or the tomatoes and chilli peppers on the windowsill. The kettle might still play a role, but the cafetiere, the coffee, the sugar jar, etc., would quietly recede into the background. If we interrupt one activity, by switching to another, with this there will be a change in the face that the world shows to us, a kind of universal gestalt shift.

It is also worth noting that our 'towards-which' is not necessarily a final end or aim. Many of the things we do comprise only one part of a more complex enterprise, and we can speak of a 'towards-which' in relation to any of the intermediate steps or goals by which we make our activities intelligible to ourselves, insofar as each of these bears its own kind of practice, albeit ultimately one that is framed by something else towards which we are working. However, in the final instance, Heidegger suggests, every 'towards-which' goes back, not only to some further end which we are pursuing, some more complex, longer-term goal on the road to which there are various intermediate steps, but to something 'for-the-sake-of-which' we pursue the ends we pursue. This 'primary "towards-which"', to which the network of

purposive teleological relations goes back as its foundation, is not itself an end that we can achieve, at least once and for all, but rather, Heidegger suggests, something we are trying to be, something in terms of which we are trying to understanding ourselves. Heidegger himself gives a few examples, a craftsman (e.g. BT 153/SZ 117), an apprentice or a teacher (*What is Called Thinking?* 1968; 15), etc. The whole network of purposive relations, then, contains an important self-referential dimension, because it is anchored in a kind of self-understanding that is comparable to Korsgaard's notion of practical identity. In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* Heidegger stresses the way in which our actions always have a self-referential dimension, as both Okrent and Crowell note. It is in that for-the-sake-of-which our actions are undertaken, that we find this self-referring aspect of our activities, for what is at stake in our pursuit of them, what makes them intelligible, is what we are trying to be; I always act for the sake of some possibility of my own being, or as Korsgaard has described this, some 'practical identity'.

As we will see in a moment, this analogue of practical identity isn't where Heidegger's analysis of understanding terminates, and as it is only a step on the way to something else he doesn't detain himself with it for long. For that reason, although Heidegger gives some examples of this kind of self-understanding, Korsgaard is much clearer than he is about the variety of our identities and how this complicates matters. So it is worth noting that the 'for-the-sake-of-which', likewise encompass a range of different things, e.g., roles such as teachers, parents, friends, etc., but also the stand we take upon our 'factual' features, e.g., our being male or female, our sexuality, physical characteristics, relationship to other people (whether individuals, groups, or people in general) and so on, as well as the values we hold and try to manifest in our actions, e.g., what counts as virtuous and vicious. One consequence of the diversity of the evaluative standpoints we inhabit is that the description I have just given is somewhat simplified. Our actions don't just go back to one identity at a time, we may discover opportunities for enacting many different identities at once.

What Heidegger does stress, however, is that such stances are not first of all explicit, if we try to articulate our conception of what is at stake for us in our engagement with the world, this will come after the fact, and always itself as part of some

undertaking that is motivated by an aspect of our stance that will not be attended to. Although the for-the-sake-of-which is something in terms of which we understand ourselves, then, it is not an explicit comprehension or conception of our identity. What is at stake in what we do is not something we first of all have "in mind". In what way is our self-understanding instanced then? This is a question which, as I noted above, Korsgaard does not answer, for if we simply say, 'pre-reflectively' – which I have suggested she does in a roundabout way (i.e., by denying that it is reflective awareness) – we only identify the problem, we do provide its solution. We need, therefore, to explain what it means for our self-understanding to be pre-reflective.

In our relationship to things in the world as we go about them with circumspection, there is, Heidegger says, an '*associated unveiling of the self*' (*BP* 158).

> Dasein...finds *itself* primarily and constantly *in things* because, tending them, distressed by them, it always in some way or other rests in things. Each one of us is what he pursues and cares for. In everyday terms, we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of. .... [as] Dasein gives itself over immediately and passionately to the world itself, its own self is reflected to it from things' (BP 159)

The idea here is that there is a sense in which we are acquainted with ourselves as who we are, because our environment shows us the face it shows to someone who has taken the stance we have taken upon what matters, engaged the kinds of practical import that we have engaged, set out to achieve what we have set out to achieve. It is here then, that the description of the way we encounter things in our unreflective dealings with them most significantly advances the account of practical identity. For having described how this is inextricably bound up with our self-understanding, Heidegger can claim that we are acquainted with ourselves insofar as 'we find ourselves reflected back from the way we intend things in the course of acting unreflectively on our intentions (in the colloquial sense)' (Okrent, 66). We are implicated in the patterns of salience through which the world appears to us, and it is

our pre-reflective familiarity with the implicated self of practical identities, that reflection upon our identity, or upon what matters to us, tries to articulate.

Of course, the world as we encounter it is organized not only by our identities – as these are quite general ways of caring – but also by the particular activities we are engaged in for the sake of enacting these identities, and by the particular way in which we are pursuing these activities. And it is worth noting that these are also reflected back at us from the world, and are therefore accessible to us pre-reflectively. But while the world reflects *all* of these things, however, the point I wanted to stress in this section was that, because there is an unbroken chain of references leading back, through our understanding of what we must use, and what we are doing, to a stand we have taken upon who we are, we enjoy a pre-reflective access to our own identities, a pre-reflective form of self-understanding.

In the next section I want to explain Heidegger's broader account of understanding.

2.2. Understanding, Projection and Familiarity

In order to adopt an identity, we must have the ability to recognise opportunities for enacting it. Of course, we may not have the ability to uncover opportunities for doing so in every situation, but unless we understand, at least in quite rough terms, how to enact this way of caring, it cannot have any practical significance. Whenever we settle upon some end, we exploit this ability, and doing so we demonstrate an appreciation of the possibility of enacting this identity by pursuing this end. However, this ability itself is something we can distinguish from the way in which we care, that makes us take an interest in exercising this ability, we can separate our understanding of those possibilities *as* possibilities of this identity/ability to recognise possible ways of enacting this identity, e.g., our understanding that one can realize the identity of a teacher by marking student papers or by preparing for and delivering lessons. That is particularly clear when we consider that we might give up on our identities, hence, stop caring about enacting them, without losing our appreciation of what kinds of things we would be interested in if we rekindled our interest in being, say, a teacher. This understanding, is what Heidegger calls a 'projection' of its possibilities. In its most basic form, Heidegger thinks, all understanding is like this.

As Wrathall puts it, 'Heidegger's discussion of understanding is intended primarily to provide the formal structure of understanding in general, for the purpose of explaining what function understanding plays in world disclosure' (2013: 178). I cannot defend this claim here, however, I will follow Heidegger in describing understanding as a 'projection of possibilities' as this proves a helpful way to characterise the attitudes which make it possible for us to adopt our practical identities.

Heidegger's view appears to be that to have an understanding of a particular identity is to have the ability to identify in this way. This takes on a particular relevance when we appreciate what Heidegger thinks the scope of our understanding is. To explain this, I will start by describing the kind of understanding involved in having a given practical identity, then in having the complex mixture of identities that we in fact have, and finally, I will sketch – and it *can* only be a sketch – what understanding as a whole looks like. This will put me in a position to explain the relationship between understanding and our adoption of practical identities and the activity of self-constitution.

Let me start by explaining what kind of understanding we need just to adopt a particular identity, i.e., what the projection of an identity's possibilities involves, because this turns out to be quite complex. In order to understand an identity, we must do more than just appreciate the kinds of ends that could be 'involved' with this identity. That is because to understand these ends, we must also have some sense of what they themselves are, where that involves a projection of their possibilities, an appreciation (or at least an ability to recognise) various ways in which those ends are in turn capable of being pursued, various means of reaching our ends, and so on. And this in turn involves being able to see how bits of equipment can coalesce into functional wholes, that are involved with these ends in virtue of the kind of role they might play in some means of pursuing this end. So to adopt an identity we have to have some appreciation of the way in which all of these things are involved with each other – those things must have been, as Heidegger puts it, 'freed' for involvement with one another. To understand an identity, is to understand a range of possible interconnections of the ready-to-hand.

However, we do not just have one identity. And the complexity of our identities, points to an even more complex understanding of different possibilities of identification, i.e., of the for-the-sake-of-which. And because particular activities might be pursued for the sake of various identities, and because bits of equipment might fit into different functional wholes, and thereby offer themselves to a range of activities, our understanding is a complex network of involvements, some precise, others that may be much more vague. As projection Wrathall (2013) suggests that 'understanding', for Heidegger, refers to a formal structure of which he will (and we can) give various de-formalized examples. What I have just been describing are various examples of that. We understand an identity by projecting its possible involvements with ends, means and equipment. We understand a piece of equipment by projecting its possible involvement in a totality of equipment, with various activities, and with various identities. Each of these distinguishable 'understandings' or 'projections', adds its own contribution to the way in which we have access to the world.

Ultimately Heidegger thinks that our understanding is much broader even than this. One particularly salient way in which it is broader is that our own identities aren't the only ones that we understand – even if they are the ones of which we have the most developed understanding. The way we make our way about in the world also involves relating to other people, and their activities. And our ability to interact with them, and to take them into account in our own dealings, involves an understanding of what they are doing, how they understand themselves, and hence of possibilities other than those that we are currently enacting. So we must also understand the kinds of activity that anyone can engage in, the kinds of use to which anyone might put different things, or more broadly than this, the ways in which they might take things into account and give them significance. The way in which we exploit, and thereby demonstrate, this understanding is not by pressing into these possibilities ourselves, but by making sense of the others who we encounter in different ways. We make sense of them, Heidegger thinks, by projecting them onto these possibilities. And some of these are already presupposed by the intelligibility of our activities or the significance we attach to things in our dealings with them, e.g., when we make something for another person, or for 'one' to use in certain ways, or when we ourselves use something that has been created by 'one who [thereby] 'serves' [us] well or badly' (BT 153).

Recall, I said above that Heidegger maintains that, on some level, our understanding of various identities is also an ability to enact those identities, the range of our understanding is the range of our 'ability-to-be'. Our understanding of the possibilities of our own identification, i.e., of for-the-sake-of-which, is an understanding of the possibilities of Dasein. We must be clear about the sense in which that is the case, as that would, as he recognises, require developing our understanding of these things, working out the rough outline sketched (projected) in more detail, because it is almost inevitable that we have a more concrete grasp of what is involved in assuming and henceforth enacting, those identities which we have in fact assumed or enacted. So the idea seems to be something like this. Before I have become a teacher, I understand that this is the kind of thing one can be. I don't have a developed or specific grasp of the day to day work of being a teacher, but I have a certain degree of familiarity with it, such that I can recognise other's as teaching. And if I make it my aim to become a teacher, I do so with a certain prior sense of what this involves – perhaps aided by an understanding of how one hones one's understanding of such things. Importantly, that sense outstrips my ability to articulate the work, although I also have some ability to do that. If I become a teacher, I develop this understanding, by finding opportunities to act, bringing to light the possibilities for improving upon that, or the considerations that need to be taken into account, etc.

So, this entire domain of understanding, is an understanding of *our* own possibilities, it unpacks our ability to be. Because we must always have some such understanding in order to come into any kind of meaningful contact with the world, understanding as projection is, in Heidegger's technical language, an *existentiale* – an essential structure of Dasein. That is why Heidegger regards the whole space within which entities can appear – the space of our meaningful commerce with them – i.e., the world qua significance – as a correlate of our ability to be, i.e., the for-the-sake-of-which. I won't dwell on this point here, although I think there is something importantly right about it, and I will, therefore, return to it in Chapter 6. All I want to say for now is that it is this far ranging understanding, as projection, that provides the context within which we assume our identities.

One reason for stressing this might, therefore, be to give some content to our finitude, to the way in which the whole domain of understanding, must itself be understood as a projection circumscribed by what Heidegger calls 'death' [*Tode*], i.e., limit of our ability to be. For our purposes, however, what is important is that our adoption of identities and our self-constitutive activity are constantly exploiting and interacting with this background capacity.

2.3. Interpretation

I have described the context of understanding within which, on Heidegger's account, our practical identities arise, but now I must explain how they arise, and how we negotiate their competing demands by taking a stand upon what we have reason to do *all things considered*, i.e., the activity of self-constitution. Heidegger's answer to both, I think, has to be 'interpretation' [*Auslegung*].

Heidegger envisages several roles for interpretation, and it figures in several parts of his discussion (the emergence of 'presence-at-hand' out of the collapse of the 'ready-to-hand'; Language insofar as it effects the shift from a 'hermeneutic as-structure' to an 'apophantic as-structure'). More generally, however, interpretation, for Heidegger, refers to the development of understanding (BT 188). This development, as Wrathall (2013) has observed, can take several different but closely related forms. It can mean, for example, to refine the way in which understanding projects its possibilities (e.g., to incorporate what experience teaches us or the way in which our possibilities change as we become more adept at a particular skill), or to bring what is disclosed as possible into concreteness, by actualizing one of the possibilities we have projected in understanding (194). Often it plays several roles at once. For example, if I have understood that the hammer is to be used in-order-to drive the nails into the wood, in order to use it I must do so in some particular way, with a particular force, a tightness of grip, etc. I interpret the work by adjusting myself to it in light of what I have uncovered in using it, e.g., I hold it a little tighter, gently but repeatedly tapping the head of the nail, rather than pounding it once. One of its roles – and the one I am most interested in here – is to focus our attention, or more accurately, our interest, in upon specific possibilities (or upon entities in terms of certain of their possibilities) by lifting 'into salience some particular set of relationships' (194).

we might ask whether the actions themselves are 'virtuous', taking a broad view of the different virtues they might embody. Or whether there are deontic considerations that disqualify or make requirements of these. We may also seeks to understand what it is about *us* that makes these options appealing, and ask whether these motives are in good order. Korsgaard tends to focus upon this aspect of deliberation, but that is, I think, because she is most interested in the way reasons arise out of our reflective endorsement and rejection of the various incentives that arise both independently of and in reflection. Nevertheless, it would be too restrictive to regard practical reasoning as a matter of choosing between alternatives. If only because sometimes, the work of thinking is not to help us discount some of an excess of possibilities, i.e., to get us from many options down to only one. Rather, aims at expanding our view of our options.

In some situations we may have some options in view, but none that we can regard as giving us a genuine reason, e.g., no suitable ends to pursue as a way of enacting our identities or suitable means to achieve our ends. In other situations, our point of departure for reflection might be that we cannot see any options, even bad ones. We may see it as a requirement of thoroughness that we try to get 'all' the options on the table before we make a decision, or feel that the order in which we carry out certain actions matters (at least that we need to determine whether it matters), or again, that we should find a way of creatively combining different options, or integrating features of options that are by themselves not entirely satisfactory. Practical reasoning may also involve seeking constitutive solutions, e.g., 'what would make for an entertaining evening' (Williams, 1981: 104). [28] One thing that I am keen to stress, therefore, is that practical reasoning in my sense may involve a kind of imaginative exploration of the space of possibilities projected in our understanding, i.e., the possibilities we are capable of drawing into any kind of salience.

When we deliberate, I have said, our aim is to solve our practical problems. One thing that we need to leave room for here is that, although our practical problems are all ways of asking, 'what should I do?' this question can be framed in various ways. For instance, we may still know the shape that the solution to our problem must take, the more specific question to which it must be an answer. To give some

[28] A number of the above are also described by Bernard Williams (1981).

examples, 'how can I achieve this end?', 'how can I enact this identity?', 'what is the right thing to do?' I think we should also admit questions with broad practical import, where our interest in the answer is a practical interest. For example, 'do I really care about this friendship?', 'do I really want to go on being a teacher?', 'do I love so and so?' However we frame these practical problems, what I have said so far should give some indication of where deliberation fits into the account I have defended over the last two chapters. The solutions to practical problems of the sort I am envisaging here serve as an end, a 'towards-which' in Heidegger's language. Our efforts to find their solutions, is something we experience as a kind of work, and we are reflected back at ourselves from the things we intend in carrying out this work. When we find ourselves with a reason to pursue such ends this represents both an interpretation of some identity or identities and at the same time a stand we have taken upon what is at stake in our current situation.

Before I expand on what I have just said, I want to pause for a moment, to draw upon some of the things Korsgaard says about practical reasoning. As will be recalled from Chapter 1, for all the stress that Korsgaard places upon deliberation, she does not tell us much about what it is to deliberate. In a couple of places she suggests that it has its own distinctive phenomenology, which describes quite roughly what it is like in her view when we deliberate, e.g., 'When you deliberate, it is as if there were something over and above all of your desires, something which *is you,* and which *chooses* which desire to act' (SN 100). We must now reject that as too restrictive a view of reflection. However, she does make two interesting suggestions. Firstly, practical thinking, she claims, does not need to go on, as it were, inside our heads: 'thinking is just talking to yourself, and talking is just thinking in the company of others' (SC xiii; cf. 197). Secondly, that when we skip reflection, or bring our reflecting to an end, 'that is a kind of endorsement, for it implies that the work of reflection is done' (SN 161). This second claim, although it does not quite say this, nevertheless strongly suggests that when we *do* reflect, that is because we find ourselves with a reason to do so, i.e., we have an incentive to do so that we endorse. Reflection is something we engage in because we take ourselves to have a reason to do so and hence something which depends upon our endorsement. This in turn leaves it open that there might be any number of reasons for ceasing to reflect. We may come to think that there is no more time to dig further, or that it is pointless, or

we might lose our sense that we need to answer the question we were trying to answer. Both of these claims are, I think, basically right. However, I will only focus upon the second claim – and what I have suggested this to implies – as I think it will be helpful to explore some of its implications a bit further.

4.2. Finding a Place for Practical Reasoning

Although I have suggested that absorption and reflection contrast, it is nevertheless fruitful to start an investigation of the latter, by turning to the agent engaging in some activity, enthralled by some of the task, or by some aspect of the world, etc. Doing so, we can ask what needs to take place for an agent to move from one mode of activity to the other. We can start with the observation that there must, at the very least, be a disengagement of roughly the following kind: that some part of the way I am pursuing the task I am currently engaged in, ceases to strike me as an appropriate way of continuing. Sometimes this happens when I see a better alternative and simply seize upon it, without self-consciously choosing the one over the other. But in that case we won't have reflected. We say that we deliberate, or think about things, when we are detained by a question, and especially when we experience the activity by which we attempt to find an answer as a kind of work. So how does a question detain us? One way this might occur is if some of our other options suddenly look salient *as alternatives* to what we are currently doing. If we find ourselves with some interest in pursuing these alternatives, that may introduce a degree of ambivalence about what we should do, and that ambivalence is something we can experience as the pull to find a resolution. Another way in which we might find ourselves claimed by a question is if some aspect of what we are doing has come to appear problematic, such that, even without a clear sense of the alternatives, we are challenged to find a way of going forward.

This question might arise in relation to any number of things. It might be a question about the equipment we are using, or the means we are pursuing to our ends. Or, at the level of our interest in enacting some identity or combination of identities, as a question about what ends we should adopt. And even at the very general level of our interest in what we should be, as a question about which identities we should adopt. I cannot see any reason to treat these as relevantly dissimilar from one another, and I

therefore propose to explain them all as instances of the same structural change. I will tentatively describe this as a loss of confidence in the view we had taken, or as a lack of confidence arising from a shift in what we take ourselves to have reason to do at a broader level. I will explain what I mean by this in a moment.

One thing that it is worth stressing about our being moved to see ourselves as having a problem to which we must find a solution, is that reflecting/practical thinking is only one of the ways in which we might rise to this challenge. Take the following examples. If I don't know how to use a piece of equipment I might pick it up and try manipulating it in different ways to see if this brings anything to light. Even if I *do* know how, in principle, one uses a bit of equipment, I may still need to get a feel for *exactly* how to use it. If I don't know whether to continue marking student papers, or turn to the task of preparing for a lesson, I might simply check the time, or glance at the notes I have already made in preparation for a lesson to size up the task that remains. Or finally, if I am trying to negotiate a bit of tricky terrain, I might climb a tree to get a better view. On my view, each of these would count as activities aimed at solving a practical problem, addressing an uncertainty about how I am to proceed. So if I don't know what I should do, if this is a problem for me, then while I may try to solve my problem by thinking matters through, I may also simply look to the world to provide me with something that I can interpret as giving me a reason to do something in particular.

Just as practical reasoning (narrowly conceived) and theoretical reasoning can each play a role in an integrated effort to solve a practical problem, both forms of reasoning may also be joined to an exploration of our environment in a similar effort. Climbing the tree, in the final example, might uncover several routes to our destination, and this it might provide an occasion for us to think about – perhaps imaginatively explore – these options. The aim of this is still to get ourselves into a position where we can see what we have reason to do in the case about which we are uncertain.

This brings me to a point that I believe is quite important. If deliberation is only one way in which we might address our practical problems, then two things are important about the condition in which we find ourselves claimed by such questions

– which is a way of being in question ourselves. Firstly, this 'being-in-question' is something we discover, in a sense, 'prior' to reflection. It is something that is first of all disclosed before we address it in this or in another way. Secondly, in Heidegger's language we can say of our interest in finding a solution, that it projects a range of ways in which we might go about doing so, where these are in turn possible ways in which that interest can become more concrete. When we in fact deliberate, then, this involves recruiting thinking as a way to solve this problem. It involves taking a stand upon how we should go about doing this, what we have reason to do given that we are out to find a solution to this problem. Even if our problems can stack up, like the various intermediate moments of a complex, protracted 'towards-which', at some point we get on with the business of addressing them with whatever resources we can find at hand to do so. So it almost goes without saying that we needn't make a decision here, otherwise a regress would threaten. And while it may sound peculiar, particularly in light of our original contrast between absorption and reflection, there is a sense in which reflection itself may be absorbed, only absorbed at one level removed from the action at which it aims.

Now suppose that we grant that practical thinking (in my broad sense) is, as Korsgaard appears to suggest, only undertaken when we take ourselves to have reason to engage in it and also, what I have just been defending, that our 'being-in-question' is something that we discover prior to reflection. In that case it is, I think, also plausible to suggest that we may be able to shed light upon the way in which practical problems both come to grip us and to call for reflection, by considering them as grounded in something like the way in which our other activities are ultimately grounded. I have argued that every 'towards-which' is engaged, within the context of some identity, through an act of attunement that is at the same time a kind of self-interpretation. That is, I believe, also the case when the end is to find an answer to the question 'what should I do?'. So this question has to be awoken, has to claim us. It is something that must be motivated by our reasons, and explained by the process through which we constitute those reasons, where this represents a shift in the way in which we are attuned. More specifically, it is a way of being submitted to having things matter to us that is at the same time an interpretation of the world as significant in some way. So how, exactly, is life breathed into a question? How does a question come to claim us?

In *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger briefly discusses an example that we can take as a starting point. When we attend a lecture, entering through a door, Heidegger suggests, 'we do not [usually] apprehend the seats as such' or the doorknob, the windows, the blackboard, etc. and once the lecture begins, and we are 'sitting here in the auditorium, we do not in fact apprehend walls' (BP 163). But that is not to suggest that these things are invisible, only that we do not relate to them as the objects they are, but as part of the setting within which we are listening to this speaker, and in the context of this activity, as being of no immediate interest. However, Heidegger suggests, that can all change if we find ourselves becoming bored (BP 163), because in that condition our activity has started to break down.[29] Boredom – understood here as a kind of 'disinteresting' – breaks the claim that certain aspects of the world have upon me, and in doing so creates a space within which other things can come into view. We can easily fill in the details. We have lost interest in the lecture, it no longer holds our attention, and we have stopped listening. But suppose it doesn't seriously occur to us to just get up and leave. If *this* commitment remains in play, it frames how we respond to our boredom. For example, we may take an idle interest in the texture of walls or the pattern of the upholstery on the chairs. Or we may seize upon this otherwise unclaimed time, to think about how to deliver tomorrow's lesson, silently rehearse the bits that we are unsure about including, getting a feel for what, if anything, these add by way of content, or trying to find a more relatable way to explain some of the more difficult or abstract ideas, etc.

Take an example I have used already. I'm marking student papers, but it occurs to me that I also have to prepare for tomorrow's lesson. While the end of marking the papers fully claims me, I do not notice the other possibilities of my identity as a teacher, in a way, I am actively disinterested in them, have put them aside, at least *for now*. So when I notice another possibility as one I may press into, that may imply a similar disengagement to the one I described above. I understood myself as a teacher with a reason to mark papers, but I disengage from that activity, and so from that

[29] It would complicate things unnecessarily to go much deeper than this into the structure of boredom, and I therefore leave aside Heidegger's more detailed and sophisticated account of this in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.

interpretation of what I have reason to do insofar as I am a teacher. Doing this may place me back in the space of possibilities of that identity. If there is also some doubt about whether what I have reason to do is something stemming from *this* identity, then it may place me in the broader space of my identities more generally. Nevertheless, I am placed back into a space of possibilities shaped by certain assumptions, certain things in which I remain confident, that this or that matters, etc.

Let's build a bit more detail into the above example. The shift might be something like this. I'm marking papers, and while I know that at some point this afternoon I will need to look over my notes for tomorrow's lesson, that is not what I have determined that I have reason to do at this moment. That could change in a number of ways. I might get to the end of one paper, put it on the done pile, and call it a day. I haven't deliberated over what to do, but I have decided that I am permitted to leave this for today. And again, without deliberating, I stretch my legs, grab a glass of water, and retrieve the notes from my desk and a pen, take these over to the settee where I settle myself and begin reading through them. So I might transition smoothly from one activity to another, from one interpretation of what my identity as a teacher gives me reason to do to another. But suppose instead it goes something like this. I am marking one paper. I finish it, pick up the next and continue. I'm absorbed in this activity. I put a tick next to the introduction, 'very clear'. I make a mental note: could have said more about this and less about that. I wonder how significant it is that they haven't mentioned something. There's a spelling mistake; I make a note of the correct spelling in the margin. But then I put the paper down. The concerns that had been at the front of my mind a moment ago fall away. I've noticed that it's getting late and I need to prepare for tomorrow's lesson. At the moment that is only a consideration in favour of turning to this other task, so suppose instead that I solve the matter by going back to marking. But now I struggle to concentrate on the essay, I feel uneasy, I'm aware that I'm eating into my time. In a few hours our friends are coming over, and they'll stay most of the evening. I'm also aware that the essays are due back in two days, and I've only done a fraction of them. If I can just finish this one, at least there'll only be *n* more to do. It's no good,

I'm not marking or preparing for the lesson, I need to make a decision, and to that end I start venturing considerations.[30]

When I decide that I should stop marking papers to prepare for tomorrow's lesson, the whole structure on which my awareness rested, the interest in the papers, the pen, etc., may collapse too, and I may look to my laptop, the pile of books I had been consulting, the scrap of paper that I had jotted something down on, etc. The shift to deliberation might involve a similar shift in my awareness, perhaps one that resembles the boring lecture example. In the first version of that example, what came into focus was part of the environment, and in the second version, something I am resolved upon doing later. But in a similar way, possible courses of action, or interactions afforded (perhaps invited) by my setting, may come to appear salient.

To go back to what I was saying a moment ago, if we provisionally treat the issue here as one of confidence, then it is important to note that our confidence is usually only shaken up to a certain point – I will consider a more extreme case when I turn to Okrent in the next section. We are sure, for example, that *this* problem needs addressing. We may even have a direction for addressing this problem and so simply fall to reflecting. Setting out to address something that has been disclosed as 'in question' involves engaging a task (a 'towards-which'). And this involves letting other things capture our attention or figure in what we take into account.

What I am suggesting here, then, is that we call something into question for the same reason that, for example, we find something frightening. We are drawn into doubt just as we are drawn into fear. That before which I stand *is* doubtful or fearsome, but that is inseparable from the way in which it is disclosed through my particular way of being attuned to the world and of having access to things in the world. Recall what I said in the previous chapter about fear. If we encounter a large dog as threatening, i.e., if it takes on a threatening aspect, that reflects the way in which we have access to the dog through a particular mood. The features which show up as

[30] As an aside, there might be, as in this case, quite a bit of back and forth in the movement of interpretation. In principle that vacillation could go on indefinitely; there is nothing about normativity that guarantees that our sensitivity to considerations, our ability to see them as reasons, will be stable, even over the short term.

constituting the dog's fearsomeness, as justifying my fear, e.g., its large teeth, rippling muscles, fierce bark, etc., are the correlates of the mood of fear. These features are drawn into salience and the aspect of fearsomeness revealed through our fear, through fear's projecting of an entity upon some possibility of our vulnerability, letting it bear upon that vulnerability in a certain way; it is only for as long as we do this that we are able to confront the thing itself as fearsome. Fear 'uncovers [its object] beforehand in its fearsomeness' (BT180/SZ141)

Similarly, the lecture holds our attention and we get on with the activity of listening, because we have taken an interest, because we keep taking an interest. The fact that the lecture is engaging is inseparable from the way in which we find ourselves disposed towards things. Listening is the way in which we realize our interest. Just as the speaker (and what they are saying), the Powerpoint slide on the screen behind them, etc., are salient when we are engaged by the lecture, and the walls, the chairs, the other people, etc., fade into insignificance; when we disengage these other things may come back into view, not necessarily as things which we explicitly grasp, but as the possible sources of other solicitations, indications of actions which speak to us, and which we see that we could press into. Being in a mood determines the way in which we encounter things in the world as significant, and one implication of this is that in moods such as fear we cannot say that, for example, the fearsome dog causes me to feel afraid, rather, the dog's fearsomeness is itself a function of my mood. Its role as causal ground is itself a function of the way I am attuned. If I tried to explain my fear to someone I might point to certain features of the dog, its large teeth, its rippling muscles, and fierce bark, but the fact that these features count as a reason to be afraid is itself part of what that mood determines. In a similar respect, when I relate to one of my identities as doubtful, the doubtfulness of my identity is itself a corollary of my doubting. The way in which considerations stand out as reasons to be doubtful is itself a function of this disclosure. Their salience is inseparable from the way in which we draw them out because we are delivered over to finding them significant in this way.

In the next section I will exploit this idea to explain how our identities get called into question. I have to interpret certain things as giving me a reason to question the

value of going on in an identity. Importantly, we do not do *that* for a reason, it is a spontaneous shift in the configuration of salience, in our sensitivity to reasons.

4.3. Mark Okrent on Korsgaard and Heidegger

In this section I consider the criticisms which Mark Okrent levels at Korsgaard and Heidegger in his 1999 paper 'Heidegger and Korsgaard on Human Reflection'. Okrent's views are considered here for a number of reasons, but chief amongst these is the fact that, although he starts from premises to which I too am committed, he draws conclusions that are starkly different to those that I wish to defend. He does this, I believe, because he overlooks something important, and considering his arguments, therefore, provides both an opportunity to clarify my own position and to draw particular attention to this point. In a moment I will outline Okrent's reconstruction of Korsgaard's position. However, before doing so, I will give a brief overview of Okrent's claims, and explain which of these claims I think we ought to resist.

A consequence of Korsgaard's view of what it is to be a reflective agent is that our identities are 'reflectively unstable', insofar as it is possible for us to reflectively divorce ourselves from each and every one, not only individually but also (at least in principle) from all of them at once. On Heidegger's view, our identities are similarly unstable, insofar as he regards, 'real' anxiety – i.e., 'anxiety' understood as a kind of normative collapse, and hence distinguished from the background mood of the same name which quietly permeates all of our experience – as a rare but nevertheless, in principle, actualisable possibility. Even if our identities are all individually contingent, Okrent suggests nothing could motivate us to distance ourselves from each and every one of these. That is not something that I wish to contest. However, it does not follow from this that we cannot suffer a complete loss of confidence in the norms to which we have hitherto been alive, and to do so without coming alive to other norms.

Korsgaard appears to associate the possibility of this profound normative collapse with our ability to reflect upon and to call into question our identities. Heidegger on

the other hand, associates this possibility with our ability to spontaneously disengage from the stakes embedded in our identities, to stop caring in the way we have up until this point cared about things, and to fall into a profound form of indifference, which he calls 'Anxiety' [*Angst*]. Somewhat strangely, Okrent fails to appreciate this difference, despite the fact that he ostensibly draws his own view from Heidegger's account of human Facticity and 'thrownness' [*Geworfenheit*], terms which are for Heidegger intimately bound up with the notion of 'mood' [*Stimmung*], and hence, with mood's lability. I will claim that our identities are unstable, that this instability is an important and ultimately ineliminable aspect of the human condition, and that it entails the possibility of normative collapse, as Heidegger and Korsgaard both think.

4.3.1. Okrent's reconstruction of Korsgaard

When Korsgaard describes us as 'essentially reflective', part of what she is claiming, Okrent suggests, is that the only thing that we are essentially is a reflective being, a being capable of directing higher-order intentions onto its own mental acts (and Okrent adds, of recognising both acts as its own). Hence, as he puts it, the 'type' 'reflective being' is the only one to which we belong non-contingently. If the only thing which defines us by nature is our capacity for reflection, he goes on to point out, then anything else that we might happen to be, e.g., a teacher, a friend, a parent, etc., is inessential and hence, contingent. Specifically, these are contingent, not only in the sense that we might never have come to have the identities we in fact have, but also in the sense that we can give up on these identities, ceasing to accept as binding upon us the norms which attach to them.

Continuing, Okrent observes that, rooted in her view of what it is to be a person, Korsgaard believes that human beings have the ability to distance themselves, not only from their particular incentives, for example, to eat an ice cream or to spend the day at the beach, but also from the various conceptions of their identity which provide them with a basis for determining which of their incentives they can regard as reasons, e.g., their identity as a teacher, a parent, someone's friend, etc. Although he concedes that we are able to do this for each of our identities individually (1999, 72), Korsgaard's understanding of what it is to be a person, Okrent observes, commits her to something much stronger than this, namely, that we can distance

ourselves from, and so call into question, all of our identities at once. On Korsgaard view, then, it seems that our identities are fundamentally unstable, and that this instability is 'rooted in the very notion of what it is [on Korsgaard's account] to be a reflective being' (60).

According to Okrent this picture of what it is like to be an agent is simply untenable. It is untenable, he thinks, for the following reason. On Korsgaard's view our natures give rise to normative problems of the form, 'ought I to go on being a...?' (i.e., questions about whether a particular practical conception, and the reasons associated with it, are binding for us). But they also make it possible for us to pose a extreme version of this kind of question, to ask whether we should adopt *any* practical identities at all. In and of itself the possibility of asking such questions isn't what Okrent find objectionable. What Okrent considers a serious defect in Korsgaard's account is that if such a question ever does arise for us then, on her account, he suggests, it must do so in virtue of the fact that we have refused to subsume ourselves under any 'type', that we have distanced ourselves from the authority of every form of practical identity. And having so distanced ourselves we will have also deprived ourselves of the resources to answer the question that arises for us.[31] So 'Korsgaard's conception of what it is to be a reflective agent gives rise to a normative problem that cannot be solved if we are Korsgaardian reflective agents' (64).

4.3.2. The First Problem with Okrent's view

Okrent does not immediately say anything in support of his diagnosis of the problem with Korsgaard's view. The reason for that seems to be twofold. Firstly, he is attempting what looks like a *reductio ad absurdum* of Korsgaard's view, so all he has to do is draw out its problematic implications. By the end of this chapter I hope to have shown that he doesn't actually uncover anything absurd. Secondly, he suggests, Korsgaard herself recognises the problem in her own account. I want to consider if that is the case.

[31] Strictly speaking, that is probably not a fair reconstruction of Korsgaard's view, while we might ask this question because we genuinely doubt whether these identities are binding on us, we can also do so without losing a grip on our identities, say, if we are just curious about our reasons, and in that case we may find that, bound up with the identities we have, there are self-affirming reasons.

In support of *this*, Okrent observes that at certain point in her argument Korsgaard appeals to our identity as human beings or as she will also put it to our 'human identity'.[32] One thing that is particularly significant about this, Korsgaard thinks, is that as such creatures we need reasons in order to live and to act, and this non-contingent fact about us is, in turn significant because it is, she will claim, our reason for adopting our various other practical identities. By treating our human identity as a source of reasons, Okrent claims, Korsgaard is trying to avoid committing herself to a view on which our identities are unstable in such a way that we can come up against a normative problem that is insoluble. Moreover, he thinks, she would succeed in doing this if this claim didn't give rise to a tension in her account, which in turn forces her into a dilemma:

> either our animal nature is a simple fact that does determine what we ought to do, in which case she must abandon her concept of what it is to be a reflective agent, or she maintains her view of reflection, in which case nothing about our animal nature can determine what we should do (64).

Aside from the minor inaccuracies that I have highlighted above, Okrent's reconstruction of Korsgaard's position vis-à-vis our ability to call our identities into question is mostly fair. However, this last move represents a significant misreading of what she is trying to do when she makes the appeal to our human identity. Let me explain why that is.

When Korsgaard says that we *must* value ourselves as animals that need reasons to live and to act, when she assumes that this is not only a natural fact about us but something which carries normative significance for us, the 'we' in question is not 'we human beings', as Okrent assumes, but 'we her readers'. That distinction is important because she is also making another assumption. She is assuming, not unreasonably, that *we* have at least some practical identities – after all, we are reading her book, and that is something which a person who does not identify with a

[32] This is something that I will consider in greater depth in the next two chapters.

practical conception of themselves would have no reason to do.[33] This is in turn significant, because at this point in *The Sources of Normativity* Korsgaard has just offered a transcendental argument, the purpose of which is to support the claim that, if we have *any* practical identities at all then we are also, at least tacitly, committed to valuing our humanity, where that includes valuing ourselves as creatures who need reasons to live and to act.[34] And one implication of this view, Korsgaard suggests, is that we ought to grant that at least part of the value of our other practical identities derives from the fact that they enable us to live and to act as the kinds of creature we are, or as she also puts this, that part of our reason for endorsing these identities derives from our need of them (SN 125).[35]

Like Okrent, I believe that the argument that is supposed to establish all of this is ultimately unsuccessful.[36] But even if we do not accept Korsgaard's position, one thing that is clear is that she is not claiming that as humans we either have some kind of inherent reason to endorse our practical identities or are simply determined to do so. What she is claiming is that those of us who have practical identities already grant some significance to the fact that we need these. Two things follow from this. Firstly, it simply misrepresents Korsgaard's position to regard it as an attempt to stave off the 'problem' that Okrent perceives in her account. For which reason this 'attempt' cannot be read as the admission Okrent reads it as. Secondly, rather than some kind of weird intermingling of naturalistic and normative perspectives, all that Korsgaard says here is that some (perhaps most) of the time we human beings regard the facts of our nature as significant.

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[33] As we will see in a moment, this is not an assumption that she will make about human beings in general.

[34] Getting us to reflect upon that fact, Korsgaard thinks, will show us that we have a reason to take the value of humanity into account in our actions, and so to act morally in her broadly Kantian sense on which the moral law is associated with respect for humanity.

[35] Strictly speaking this would only give us a reason to endorse *some* identities, not necessarily the ones we have.

[36] I consider Korsgaard's transcendental argument and her account of the connection between our 'human identity' and morality, in more detail in the next chapter.

This becomes especially clear when one considers that, while we cannot stop being a person, or a reflective being, Korsgaard is explicit in saying that we can, in principle, stop caring about any and every fact about ourselves.

> You may cease to think of yourself as a mother or a citizen or a Quaker, or, where the facts make that impossible, the conception may cease to have practical force: you may stop caring whether you live up to the demands of a particular role (SN 120).

This is something that she reiterates in *Self-Constitution* – although that was published after Okrent's paper – when she writes that

> you can walk out even on a factually grounded identity like being a certain person's child or a certain nation's citizen, dismissing the reasons and obligations that it gives rise to, because you just don't identify yourself with that role (23).

But she puts the point even more strongly when she insists that we can become, what she calls, 'complete practical normative sceptics,' that we can find ourselves in a condition in which we do not value anything at all – including our humanity – a condition in which, therefore, reasons do not have any purchase upon us.

What is fundamentally at issue in Okrent's response to Korsgaard, then, is this: he denies that we could ever find ourselves distanced from everything that matters to us, in a situation where we do not have the rational resources to answer the questions, 'what should I do?' However, when he addresses himself to Korsgaard, Okrent doesn't offer any support for this claim. This would have been less of a problem if he had been entitled to claim that Korsgaard, at least implicitly, grants that our identities are grounded in a fact about our natures, and that the instability in our identities, which her account of reflection seems to imply, does not reflect how things actually are for us. If it had been a shared assumption, that would at least have given him some licence to consign the argument for his diagnosis of the problem in her view to somewhere else. But if Korsgaard thinks that this instability is a problem, it is not a problem for her account, but for us: the fact that it is always possible that

we will succumb to nihilism is something with which we must live – if scepticism in any given case is the worry that our practical problems do not have a solution, the consolation in nihilism is that we do not have practical problems. Therefore, in addressing himself to Korsgaard, Okrent does not demonstrate that there *is* a problem with her account at all. He simply begs the question in assuming that there is one. Does he, then, provide some support for this idea, derived from considerations that Heidegger has introduced? I suggest that he does not, but let us first consider this aspect of his argument.

4.3.3. Okrent on Heidegger

'The fundamental fact of human existence for Heidegger', Okrent suggests, 'is that we intend things in a normatively oriented world which depends upon our already having been committed to some practical identity or other' (71). To my mind that puts things a little bit too strongly, but presumably what he means is that Heidegger will claim that, proximally and for the most part, we find ourselves immersed in the world, already engaged in various projects, caring in various ways, using bits of equipment, responding to the solicitations of our environment, and so on. All human intentionality is situated in our commitment to various forms of practical self-understanding, and any higher-order reflective attitude, including those that we adopt towards our own practical identities when we call these into question, must emerge out of this context, by means of its modification.

Okrent's view, then, can be summarized in the following way. We are thrown into the world, and this means that we find ourselves with certain commitments. We can come to doubt and question these commitments. We can also drop out of them. But because our commitments are prior to any decisions we make, when we do call them into question, or give up on them, it must be because we see ourselves as having reason to do this. And this reason must come from one of our other identities. Although it is less relevant to the point I want to make, Okrent also suggests that we can also adopt new identities. But again, he thinks, we only do so if we see ourselves as having reason to do so. He concludes, that we cannot drop out of all of our identities, because we would have to have a reason for doing this. And that reason

would imply that at least one identity survives. This in turn implies that we never come up against the question of our identities' value without having some identity.

Okrent's position is an interesting one. However, there is a serious problem with it. He assumes that the fact that our current identities *can* give us a reason to adopt new identities or to call into question and even reject some of those which we have already, any change in our identities *must* be motivated (and hence controlled) by the normative resources we have at any moment. Not only does Okrent give no support for the idea that all changes in our identity are governed by norms, but by assuming this he overlooks what, I take it, is a fairly commonplace intuition about human beings, namely, that we sometimes experience a change of heart, or to put it in a more technical way, we are capable of undergoing (and in fact sometimes do undergo) normative conversions.

The notion of normative conversion is one I will revisit later in the thesis, but it warrants a brief explanation here. What I have in mind is nicely captured by John McDowell, when he employs the notion of 'conversion' to explain a certain kind of shifts in an agent's character. 'The idea of conversion', he says, 'would function here as the idea of an intelligible shift in motivational orientation that is exactly *not* effected by inducing a person to discover, by practical reasoning controlled by existing motivations' (2002: 102). Similarly, one of the complaints which McDowell levels against Bernard Williams in the same paper, nicely captures what I think is wrong with Okrent's view, namely, that he does not accept that there is any way to effect the transition from having an identity to calling that identity into question or walking out on it, 'except one that would count as being swayed by reasons' to which we are already alive (100). And this overlooks the way in which 'it might take something like a conversion to bring the reasons within the person's notice' (107).

It is strange that Okrent would overlook precisely this, because he ostensibly draws his view from Heidegger, and in particular, from Heidegger's discussion of human Facticity and thrownness, both of which notions are bound up with the latter's account of mood. Okrent isn't particularly clear about how he thinks that we come to find ourselves with the commitments we do, perhaps because he does not think he needs to go into this to make the point he wishes to make, but one thing that

appears to be implicit in his view is that at a certain point, the process by which our sensibilities are moulded into the shape in which we find them comes to a halt, and the 'rational' dynamic that I have described above takes over. But if, like Heidegger, we regard our 'thrownness' as bound up with our moods, then however settled our modes of caring become, they are always in principle susceptible to the kind of shift that I am interested in, and have been describing. We are constantly 'being-thrown', or as we might say, we are in the throw.

If that is right, it has several important implications: (1) when we call our identities into question, the fact that in doing so we take ourselves to have a reason to question them, and to care about the answer to this question, may already represent a shift in our motives. For instance, the standpoint from which I ask about the value of an identity might be the standpoint of someone who has already lost much of what animated that identity, the enthusiasms, the sense of its purpose, etc. (2) Okrent, as I have said, insists that we cannot drop out of every identity. If we mean by this that we cannot succumb to a profound loss of faith in the values to which we have hitherto been alive, as both Korsgaard and Heidegger suggest, then Okrent is, I think, mistaken. When he extends the criticism from Korsgaard to Heidegger, he misses another opportunity to notice the dynamism of our moods, because Heidegger explicitly associates this collapse with a particular mood, the implication of which being that the possibility of collapse is bound up with the movement of affect. Unless there is a reason to think that the dynamic of our shifting moods is incapable of throwing us into complete indifference, we have to admit Angst as a possibility.

When I speak of 'conversion' in this context that shouldn't imply a complete overhaul of our whole way of being in the world, although I believe that this *is* in principle possible, though extremely rare. Much more common are subtle shifts in the way we care, in the way we understand ourselves. Shifts in which one mood is overcome by another, or one way of seeing things gives way to another. Indeed, because we understand ourselves primarily in terms of the world with which we are concerned, these shifts are usually experienced as a dwindling of the enticement of some possibility, or as a growing excitement at the prospect of something, or again, as a shift in our attention.

Admitting this dynamic does not itself imply that we ever distance ourselves from every way in which we are invested in things and find them significant. However, every practical self-understanding is, not only a stance upon what matters, but also at the same time, a stance upon what does not. When we engage some possibilities we let others slide over into indifference. To put it a little differently, every mood, in surrendering us to having some possibilities matter, involves assuming an indifferent attitude towards others; Anxiety is simply indifferent to all of these possibilities because it is the context within which the interpretative activity that draws them into salience takes place. To claim that anxiety is possible is just to say that this particular activity may cease, that the way we have differentiated things in terms of their significance may collapse.

But in that case, Okrent is not entitled to dismiss Korsgaard's view that something like complete, practical normative scepticism is possible, nor Heidegger's view that anxiety is possible. Furthermore, the instability of which he talks is, then, not something that we should exclude from an account of what it is like to be an agent, but a constitutive feature of what it is to be a human being. It is always in principle possible that we will succumb to various forms of indifference, and so ultimately, to profound nihilism. More commonly, we will simply lose a grip on some of the things we care about; the consolation is that we are able by the same token to grasp others. Our normative foundations *are* unstable, because our identities, like our moods, are fundamentally labile, and that is something we must live with, simply part of our peculiar human predicament.

Ultimately Okrent's concern is that, if anxiety is possible, then there is a fundamental divide between being human and being animal. On his view we must have a nature, and that nature must take the form of being committed to something. On Heidegger's view valuing, or more broadly, finding that things matter, is simply not what it means to have a nature. To have Dasein's way of being, doesn't mean that we must find things significant. It means that we must be either indifferent or not indifferent. For Heidegger, we cannot be neither, in the way, say, a table is. Granted we sometimes speak metaphorically of the world being indifferent to human

concerns, but strictly it is neither indifferent nor not indifferent, its way of being doesn't have indifference as one of its modes.

I want to end this part of the thesis with a small qualification. I claimed in the previous chapter that our identities were fundamentally similar to our moods, but Anxiety poses a challenge to that. It poses a challenge because it appears to corresponds to the condition which Korsgaard describes as complete practical normative scepticism. And that, it will be recalled, is the condition of an agent who does not have any practical identities. For as long as we are in-the-world, i.e., as long as we are alive, we cannot be free of a way of being attuned to the world, but we can be free of a way of being attuned to the world that takes a positive interest in things, and gives us a grip upon reasons, making it possible for us to act. To be in anxiety is to have an identity – a mode of affectively attuned, pre-reflective self-understanding – but it is not a practical identity, because to find ourselves in anxiety is to find ourselves open onto the whole space of possibilities in the mode of complete indifference, with no basis for taking an interest in things, which as a result recede into this indifference, and hence, incapable of gearing into the world in any way or of engaging in practice of any sort.

– Part II –

Chapter 5

Moral Normativity and Moral Identity

5.0. Introduction

The first half of the thesis has considered practical normativity, emphasising in particular, the relationship between the norms to which we are alive and the practical conceptions we form of ourselves. In responding to Korsgaard's account of practical normativity, and developing the notion of practical identity, I put aside the more specific issues that arise when one considers moral norms and normativity. In this chapter I will begin by introducing Korsgaard's position vis-a-vis moral normativity. I will then respond to this, suggesting that there are some serious flaws in the argument she offers in an attempt to establish the necessity of moral norms. This will lead me to draw two related conclusions. Firstly, I will suggest that what Korsgaard calls our human or moral identity is, like every practical identity, ultimately contingent. This brings my position very close to the view that has been defended recently by Humean constructivists like Sharon Street and James Lenman, a position I will consider in some detail in a later chapter. Secondly, I will claim that even when we identify ourselves as members of the party of humankind, i.e., assume our 'human identity', it is open to us to form almost any conception of what we thereby acquire reasons to do, and that, therefore, our human identity is only contingently a 'moral identity' in Korsgaard's sense of that term.

One of the main aims of this chapter, then, is to demonstrate that the notions of 'moral identity' and 'human identity' come apart. Specifically, I argue that, identifying with a normative conception of our identity as 'just someone' does not necessarily require us to commit ourselves to moral norms. If our human identity *is* a moral identity, it is so contingently. Unlike previous chapters Heidegger will not feature in the immediate discussion. However, focusing in upon the notion of 'human identity' will put me in a position to consider, in the next chapter, something that Heidegger *is* concerned with: the mode of being in which we absorb ourselves in a publicly interpreted world of anonymous norms, addressing us simply as 'one'.

5.1. Korsgaard on Moral Normativity

5.1.1. Introducing Korsgaard's account

Korsgaard's account of moral normativity is, like her account of practical normativity, heavily indebted to Kant. And like Kant, as Geuss (1996) puts it, she claims that 'autonomous human agents stand not only under the categorical imperative but also under the moral law' (189). Unlike Kant, however, Korsgaard draws a sharp distinction between these two claims, as we saw earlier. It is a much weaker claim, she thinks, to say that we stand under the categorical imperative than it is to suggest that we stand under the moral law, because the former is more straightforwardly constitutive of autonomous agency. Korsgaard maintains this because what the categorical imperative, as she interprets it, states, is simply this: that for an action to be ours, it must be autonomous, and for it to be autonomous it must issue from a principle that we are able to regard as a law or as having law-like force. In this way, it simply describes the structure of the free will. As we have also seen, Korsgaard's own version of this Kantian claim hinges upon the notion of practical identity: the principle which we treat as a law has normative status for us because it is embedded in a conception of ourselves that we have embraced. This connects her account to Kant's later work, in particular *Religion within the limits of Reason Alone*, and the discussion we find therein of *Gesinnung*, which Henry Alison describes as 'the enduring character or disposition of an agent which underlies and is reflected in particular choices' (1990, 136). On the face of it, however, it seems that the identity (or character or disposition) which serves as the foundation for our actions could be either good or bad, as the categorical imperative (in Korsgaard's limited sense) does not tell us which law it is that *ought* to determine our conduct, leaving us free to adopt whichever of these conceptions of ourselves we care to adopt. The moral law, then, does not yet appear to be on the table, and the account of practical identity, as we have considered it so far, contains, in Korsgaard's own words, 'a deep element of relativism' (SN 113) or agent relativity. It is by completing the Kantian line of thought mentioned above that Korsgaard seeks to overcome this relativism.

There are two steps to Korsgaard's account of moral normativity. Firstly, she not only supplements her account of practical identity, but develops that notion by

relating it to moral normativity with the following claim: like any norms, moral norms, if they are to be binding for us, must satisfy the categorical imperative, they must stem from a principle that we will as a law, a principle embedded in a conception of our own identity (which Korsgaard will call our 'human' or 'moral identity') that we embrace. Secondly, she claims a special status for this form of identity, and so in turn for the attendant moral norms. Moral identity is, she argues, 'non-contingent'.[37] This is particularly important as, if moral identity *was* contingent in just the way that our other practical identities are, then while we may embrace this conception of ourselves, it is also possible that we will never do so. And that would mean that we would not have a handle on moral norms. It would also be possible that, having once embraced it, we may come to reject it. And in either case, the introduction of this notion would neither complete the Kantian line of thought, nor, therefore, do much to attenuate the agent relativity that Korsgaard will tolerate in her account of practical identity more generally. This is, in turn, particularly important as some recent commentators on Korsgaard's work, such as Sharon Street and James Lenman, have defended what they describe as a 'Humean' form of constructivism which embraces precisely this view in asserting the contingency of moral norms. Although there are, I believe, quite serious problems with Humean constructivism, especially Sharon Street's version, I will consider this view in a little bit more detail later in the present chapter and also in Chapter 7. My reason for doing this is that the view I ultimately want to defend (and the view that is, I believe, most consistent with Heidegger's position) is 'Humean' in the very limited sense in which these authors use that term, insofar as it refuses to follow Kant in regarding the moral law as a constitutive norm of agency in the way that the categorical imperative in Korsgaard's restricted sense is. Before considering this issue, however, let me first outline Korsgaard's position vis-a-vis moral identity.

5.1.2. What is Moral Identity?

What Korsgaard means by 'moral identity', can be summarized quite briefly, as what she has in mind is simply the conception of ourselves from which moral norms

[37] I have used quotation marks here as this is how Korsgaard most commonly describes moral identity. However, strictly speaking, the view she defends is that moral identity is foundational for our other practical identities and that this makes it considerably less contingent than these, but not altogether necessary or inescapable.

derive their force for us. And true to her Kantianism, the conception in question, she thinks, is one through which we identify ourselves as members of the party of humankind or, in more Kantian language, as citizens of the kingdom of ends. However, to appreciate what exactly Korsgaard takes to be involved in assuming this identity, we must recall some of the features of her account of practical identity more generally.

To have any identity, for Korsgaard, means to enact that identity, to be engaged in an activity of self-constitution, i.e., to be engaged in the project of making ourselves into, for example, teachers or students. It is in relation to this activity that norms acquire their force for us. For instance, the thought that 'a teacher ought to φ' will only motivate me to φ if I am trying to realise my identity as a teacher, to make myself into the kind of agent that a teacher is. So when Korsgaard says that my identity is a 'description under which I value myself,' what she is saying is that my own self-worth derives from my success in enacting a way of being upon which I place value, something which I take it that it is good to be. Korsgaard also maintains, somewhat controversially, that reasons (and the identities to which they attach) are public rather than private.

It is worth noting that Korsgaard's insistence upon the 'publicity of reasons' (and her appeal to Wittgenstein to defend this thesis) has attracted, and continues to attract, criticism. Two general kinds of criticism are common. The first offers arguments which aim to show that granting the publicity of reasons does not help Korsgaard to respond to someone who is sceptical about the claims which others make upon them in the name of morality (e.g., Joyce 2001). The second offer arguments aimed at showing that certain implications of Wittgenstein's private language argument (to which she appeals) are insufficiently pursued by Korsgaard (Baynes, 2001: esp. 62-63) and possibly inimical to her ends (Gert: 2015). Obviously the success of both of these lines of argument depends upon what one takes Korsgaard's ends to be, and this is not a question that I wish to take up further. What I have not come across is any convincing argument against Korsgaard's basic view, which is what concerns me here, and I shall not, therefore, engage with this literature.

For our present purposes we can take Korsgaard's publicity thesis to amount to the following: when we take a view of who we are, and of what reasons we therefore have, we characterise ourselves in terms that can always in principle be applied to other people, and this in turn implies that our identities are ones that other people can in principle share with us (even if as a matter of contingent fact we do not share certain aspects of our identity with anyone else). While Korsgaard insists that *all* our identities are public, in this sense, the claim is particularly important in the case of our 'human' or 'moral identity', as it has at least two important consequences in her account of this.

The first important consequence is this. If I take you to be engaged in the same self-constitutive activity as me, e.g., that of making yourself into a teacher, then my conception of what teachers have reason to do, is not just a conception of what *I* have reason to do, but rather, of what we, qua teachers, *both* have reason to do. So while our circumstances will inevitably differ in various ways, what you have reason to do in your circumstances is, insofar as we are alike in our identities, what I would have reason to do in those circumstances, and vice versa. In adopting an identity, therefore, we establish a 'unity of will' with those with whom we share that identity (SN 127). In the case of our human or moral identity it is often this unity of will that is most apparent as, for example, when we regard some norm (or set of norms) as binding upon us insofar as we are just someone, and so also upon everyone else insofar as they are just someone. In establishing this unity of will with all other human beings, we (at least tacitly) identify ourselves as members of the party of human kind.

Now many of the claims that we make on behalf of everyone are not distinctly moral (something I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter). Moral norms turn out to be only a subset of those norms which we take to bind us as 'just someone'. For example, 'one should not run with scissors', 'one should use a hammer for that...', 'no one goes in there...', 'there's no reason to do that', 'it's pronounced...' (i.e., one ought to have said...), etc. Precisely which norms bind us in this way will depend upon how we conceive of our human identity, and as Korsgaard admits, this 'has been constituted differently in different social worlds' (SN 117). However, one

feature of human identity must, she thinks, be stable across all of its forms, and this brings us to the second important consequence of her 'publicity' thesis.

The second important consequence of Korsgaard's publicity thesis is this. When I respond to the various norms which address *me* as a certain kind of agent, I am trying to make myself into that kind of agent. And as someone invested in enacting a certain kind of agency, I am committed to valuing other members of this kind, because my perspective as that kind of agent, is one from which the value of *anyone* who is that kind of agent, i.e., anyone engaged in the same self-constitutive activity, can be appreciated. It is worth noting that there may be a question of when we must acknowledge that someone is engaged in the same activity as ourselves, but this introduces issues that I do not wish to consider here, although I will say a little more about this later. What we can say however, is that in having this identity we are always suitably positioned to recognise the value of anyone else that we recognise as sharing that identity with us. Again, this is particularly important in the case of our 'human' or 'moral identity', because in responding to the norms which address us as 'just someone', Korsgaard thinks, we embrace the value of that which we share with everyone else, i.e., our humanity, and in doing so, we not only value this in our own person, we respect humanity as such. And if that is the case then, whatever else one ought or has reason to do, one ought or has reason to respect humanity wherever one finds it. So in identifying with our humanity, she thinks, we thereby acquire a debt to other people simply as other people, which is to say, we acquire properly *moral* reasons from this identity (Korsgaard & Pauer-Studer, 2003).

5.1.3. The Special Status of Moral Identity

Amongst our various identities, moral identity occupies a special place. It does this, Korsgaard claims, because it is our 'moral identity', our conception of ourselves as just someone, as a member of humanity, which 'makes it necessary to have other forms of practical identity' (SN 129). That is the case, she thinks, because the reason these are important to us, the reasons it matters to us that we have some practical identity or other, is that, as the kinds of animals we are, i.e. reflective human animals, we need them in order to live and to act. This is what Korsgaard calls our 'human need to be governed by such identities' (SN 125). Because we are the kinds of

creature we are, then, part of our reason for having our contingent practical identities, she claims, stems from our need of them, and even though this underdetermines *which* identities we will adopt, the normativity of these identities depends in part upon the fact that we value that we are able to make a leap into caring about things in this fuller sense. The idea is that our identities solve a problem we face as human beings, and are valuable as such. Finally, because this need lies at the foundation of all of our identities, our humanity is, as she puts it, 'a conception of ourselves that we should be able to reach, so to speak, reasoning backwards from any particular conception of practical identity, regardless of which one it is, and asking why it is normative for us' (Korsgaard & Pauer-Studer, 2003)

How would this reasoning progress? For any of our identities we can ask 'why should I care about being such and such?' In doing this we needn't have lost the sense that being such and such matters; we can inquire in this way for all kinds of reasons, e.g., curiosity, an urge to understand ourselves better, etc. If our inquiry bears fruit, we may uncover some other identity behind the first, some way of taking things to matter that is more general, and furnishes us with some reason to care about the things we care about. If we continue along this course we may eventually ask why we adopt any practical identity at all. It is at this point, Korsgaard thinks, that we encounter the relevant fact about the kinds of creature we are, that we need reasons in order to act, and that, as practical identities give us our grip upon reasons, we need these in turn in order to do this. And this, Korsgaard claims, means that part of our reason for having these identities stems from our need of them. In the next section I will suggest that she is not entitled to make this inference and that all she can say is that if we want to live and act as the kinds of creatures we are *then* we have a reason to adopt some practical identity, which is importantly different.

It is important to note that nothing about following the above course of reflection compels us to embrace what it has uncovered; Korsgaard is not saying that once we have reflected in this way we must accept our identity as a human animal that needs reasons to live and to act, and thereby take upon ourselves the project of living a human life. So it is not, therefore, quite as Bratman (1998) thinks, that '[t]he continued application of the pressures of reflection leads... to my endorsement of a

conception of myself as a reflective being' (p.700). Rather, once we have carried the course of reflection sufficiently far, the reasons arising from our contingent practical identities will only remain binding upon us *if* this more fundamental conception of our identity is one with which we can identify (cf. SN 119). It is possible that, brought to this point, we will reject our humanity. Korsgaard's point is just that, in doing so, we will lose our grip upon our reason for having all of our other practical identities.[38]

What she has offered then, is a transcendental argument moving from the premise that we care about various specific things, because we already identify ourselves in various ways, to the conclusion that, whenever this is the case we are also necessarily committed to valuing the kind of creatures we are. I will, as I have already suggested, try to show that this argument fails in the next section. However, before offering a response to Korsgaad, two additional points are worth making. Firstly, it is important to stress that Korsgaard is not saying that we are always alive to the demands of our humanity, whenever we are alive to any other normative demands. Her argument assumes that we can be, and indeed, that we are at least some of the time, insufficiently reflective. And when we have not reflected sufficiently far back, it is possible for our commitment to the value of humanity to slip out of view, and for any tensions between this and our other practical identities to go unnoticed, leaving us to pursue various course of action in ignorance of the reasons that we would, if we were ideally reflective, acknowledge as our own. Secondly, Korsgaard takes a fairly nuanced view in setting out the consequences of the priority of our moral identity over our other contingent practical identities. Clearly, if she has gone to the effort of trying to show the foundational status of this identity, she must think that having such an identity places some constraints upon us. One of these is that we

[38] I don't think that not having a reason is necessarily sufficient to get us to give up on our commitments. We tend to think of ourselves as having a reasons for our commitments, and this gives that realization that they are groundless, a certain power to destabilize our identities. Korsgaard assumes that we would have to give up on these. But there are, I think, other options. For example, this realisation may cause a sense of the absurd to permeate our life, at least until we forget that we have no reason to do what we do, stop letting that question have force for us; Camus seems to have sought to amplify that question. Alternatively, we could be ironists, like, for example, the sceptical Hume is, in relation to some of the natural beliefs with which we cannot dispense.

cannot adopt other identities that are radically inconsistent with the value of humanity without introducing deep reflective instability, i.e., constant tensions within our identity which diminish our autonomy insofar as we are never wholly behind our actions, and which reflection may at any point uncover, throwing us into a dilemma. However, we can, she thinks, adopt identities which occasionally give rise to tensions but which are not inherently at odds with the value of humanity. Furthermore, in such moments of tension, she suggests, we are not obliged to sacrifice our other commitments in order to satisfy the demands of morality. Here she is, it seems, trying to avoid Williams-esque worries about the way in which some moral theories – by so obliging us – may pose a threat to our integrity. Her view is less susceptible to this kind of criticism because every identity, moral identity included, is, she thinks, flexible enough to permit us to make an exception of ourselves occasionally, to transgress the law that we have made binding on ourselves. But they also come with a kind of meta-commitment to not make an exception of ourselves too often, for in that case we will no longer be able to understand our actions as attempting to live up to those demands or ourselves as enacting that identity, and then we won't be able to see our actions as valuable (SN 103).

5.2. Criticisms of Korsgaard's account of Moral Normativity

Although I have defended several of Korsgaard's central claims in the first half of the thesis, there are a number of problems with her account of moral normativity. In this section I explain what I consider to be the most significant of these problems. I suggest, firstly, that the transcendental argument, which I have just outlined, fails. It does so because we needn't be trying to live and to act as the kinds of creature we are whenever we try to enact our contingent practical identities. This, I will claim, has several consequences. Firstly, it means that we are not rationally committed to identifying with our humanity whenever we identify ourselves in some other way. Our human or moral identity, then, is ultimately just as contingent as our other identities. In embracing this my position aligns with that of contemporary Humean constructivists, like Sharon Street, for whom, if moral norms bind us, this is because, as a matter of contingent fact, we constitute ourselves as moral agents by committing ourselves to acting on these norms. Despite the contingency of moral identity, however, one concession I do want to make to Korsgaard is that we appear to have a

very deep tendency to identify ourselves in this way. Everyone at one point or another has identified themselves, if only tacitly, with all of humanity by regarding the norms by which they are bound as ones which bind them as 'just someone', and even if we do not always articulate this implication, as ones of which everyone ought to recognise. I will argue that although we often assume a 'human identity', this does not always commit us to valuing something that we share (or must take ourselves to share) with all other human beings.

5.2.1. Against Korsgaard's transcendental argument

As we have seen Korsgaard claims that we constitute ourselves as the autonomous agent of our actions, by treating our incentives to carry out these actions as reasons, by embracing a conception of ourselves from which they can be regarded as such. We need identities, then, in order to secure a grip on the reasons we need, in turn, in order to discharge our agency. And it is only in discharging our agency that we can pursue a life as the kinds of creatures we are. This is important because it means that whenever we enact our identities this can be described as succeeding to live and act as the kinds of creatures we are. And that is how Korsgaard tacitly construes all of our actions. This, I believe, overlooks one extremely salient fact, namely, that we can satisfy our 'human need' for reasons without our doing so being in any way at issue for us, without our actions themselves being in any way *responsive* to this need, and therefore, without this 'success' counting for anything from our perspective. To put it another way, the fact that I am alive to reasons and that this enables me to pursue a life and to act as the kind of creature that I inevitably am, may be something to which I am completely indifferent, even upon being made reflectively aware of this fact. This is a more specific version of the quite general point, that our actions can often be described in any number of ways, some of which will inevitably have very little relation to the description under which we choose to act in the way we do.[39] Although it is not what concerns me here, this is one of the reasons that our actions can be viewed in a markedly different light by other people, and by ourselves once these actions are behind us. What I am interested in here however, is the fact that there are always at any moment many true descriptions of our conduct to which we are indifferent. For example, when I write in my notebook it may be trivially true

[39] Elizabeth Anscombe (1965) also makes this point.

that, I have put a certain pen to use where I might have used a different one or a pencil. But presumably, this is not something that I need to care about. I haven't chosen to use this pen *over some other writing utensil*. I have simply found something to hand with which I can pursue my immediate end. It is also trivially true in such cases that I have 'succeeded' in transferring some of the ink from the cartridge onto the page, although admittedly this might stop being something trivial, from my perspective, if I fail to do this, because in that case I would have also failed to write anything. As far as I can tell, Korsgaard does not give us any reason to think that the description, 'acting as the kind of creature we are', necessarily has any more relevance than the ones we have just considered in these mundane examples. And what that suggests, I believe, is that at most we are committed to caring that we do not fail to live a life, for instance, by dying, or by falling into a coma, etc., *because* we are trying to live a particular life, and so to do so would mean to fail at what we are trying to do.

Consider a slightly closer analogy. Suppose my friend is playing in a Sunday league football final, and he has asked me if I'll come along to show support. I don't care much for watching football live or on television, but as it happens, my friend's involvement is enough to earn my enthusiasm for this game. In this case, it is the particular match that I am interested in and not football in general, and so my reasons for watching it do not lie with the fact that it is a football match, but with the particularities which distinguish *this* match from most other football matches; it is these which draw it out of indifference (or by which *I* draw it out of irrelevance). Nevertheless, I *am* watching a football match. Now that isn't to say that in watching my friend play football, I mightn't discover that I enjoy certain other aspects of football, or football spectatorship, that I had not previously anticipated that I would find enjoyable, and I might, therefore, develop an interest in football more generally. Similarly, when pursuing a particular life I might develop an interest in some of the possibilities that I am not currently enacting, such that if circumstances made it impossible for me to continue enacting this particular identity I might divert myself into one of these other pursuits. But that awakening of interest is an entirely separate act, and my endorsement of what we might call the 'species' (football, life) only follows, if I value the particular match I am watching or the life that I am pursuing *as*

an instance of that species. And nothing about the fact that I am pursuing a life ensures that this is the case.

Mark Okrent (1999) seems to make something like the point I am making here when he observes that

> at points it seems as if [Korsgaard] thinks that the fact that an acceptance of our nature as reflective animals who need to adopt a practical identity in order to live and act could provide a reason for adopting some practical identity implies that it does provide a reasons, implicitly or explicitly, for any agent who does in fact adopt such an identity (64).

Now if that were the case, it would not determine which identities we are to adopt, only that we are to adopt *some* identities. However, as he goes on to point out, while it would not, therefore,

> fully warrant the adoption of [any particular] practical identity...the fact that most of us do accept [some] identity would imply that we ought to adopt the principles associated with [our human identity], whether we recognise this or not (64).

However, Okrent continues,

> for Korsgaard, an agent has a reason to act only if she implicitly or explicitly accepts that reason. So, pace Korsgaard, it can never follow from the fact that I have some practical identity that I in fact have a reason to respect humanity in myself and others... [in particular, because] an agent might adopt some practical identity for some other reasons (e.g., she understands herself as being called by God to do so) or for no reason at all... I may simply be unreflectively caused to have that identity' (64).

My only disagreement with Okrent, on this point, is that he associates the failure of Korsgaard's transcendental argument with the fact that according to the Kantian

conception of reflection which he attributes to her, it is not necessary that an agent reflects upon their practical identities.

However, framed in this way, the point does not quite address Korsgaard's view. As I noted earlier, she does not think that we inevitably recognise that the normativity of our particular practical identities is, in some way, underwritten by the normativity of our moral identity. Rather, she maintains that, under the pressure of reflection we can eventually be brought to see this dependence. But as we are not always sufficiently reflective, on her view, what she is claiming is the following: (i) that an ideally reflective version of ourselves must endorse our human identity if they are to sustain their other commitments, and (ii) that if we do not endorse this identity, then the grip we enjoy upon what we have reasons to do and to believe is reflectively unstable. And this reflective instability, she thinks, diminishes our autonomy. So Okrent's version would leave it open to Korsgaard to maintain, as I believe she does, that an ideally reflective version of ourselves *would* recognise a dependence between our human need and our possession of practical identities, and that such an individual would, if they were to maintain their other practical identities, endorse a conception of themselves as just someone. But the claim I have been making is that there needn't be any significant link whatsoever between the identities we adopt and the fact that in enacting these we are acting as the kind of creatures that we inevitably are. So even though we shouldn't think of ourselves as fully reflective all the time, we are not committed to the claim that, when we do reflect, this makes the kind of difference that Korsgaard thinks it makes. We might reflect, and doing so, discover that we *would* need identities if we wanted to live and act as the kinds of creature we are. But we *can* in principle look upon this need with indifference, and still maintain our other practical identities, still pursue the particular life we wish to pursue.

5.2.2. Second criticism of Korsgaard

The claim I have been defending is that we do not need to identify with a normative conception of our humanity in order to consistently endorse other practical conceptions of our identity. However, that still leaves it open that sometimes we *do* identify ourselves as 'just someone'. In the next chapter, I will argue that, the contingency of this identity notwithstanding, we have a very deep tendency to

identify in this way.[40] We all fall into the habit of making claims on behalf of everyone, of regarding norms as binding without exception, or understanding our actions as those that 'anyone' should perform in our shoes. Incidentally, this is sometimes associated with a tacit commitment to moral realism, e.g., John Mackie (1990) thought that we ordinarily conceive of values as "objective prescriptive" features of the world because we think that moral properties are there to be experienced by anyone (although ultimately Mackie thinks this embodies an error). Similar comments upon our philosophically naive experience are found in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness,* where he uses the term 'spirit of seriousness' to describe this tendency into which we all so frequently fall. Before I defend that view, however, I want to consider the relationship between our human identity and our moral identity.

In the last section of this chapter I followed Korsgaard in suggesting that, strictly speaking, 'moral norms' are those that take the form of a debt to other people simply as other people. As such, moral norms turn out to be only a subset of those norms which bind us as 'just someone'. Precisely which norms we acknowledge as binding in this universal manner will depend upon the conceptions of humanity or our human identity that we have adopted. What is common to any conceptions of our human identity, however, is that in assuming it we try to live up to a standard whose mode of addresses is universal, i.e., we try to be and do what just anyone ought to be and to do. Korsgaard also recognises that there are different ways in which we might do this, but she thinks that one stable feature across the different possible conceptions of our human identity, is what Kant calls 'respect for humanity'. And for that reason she will also describe this identity as a 'moral identity'. In this section I consider whether, in identifying ourselves as 'just someone', we must in fact commit ourselves to valuing humanity, and whether this in turn commits us to placing value upon all human beings.

My answer to this question has three steps. I begin by suggesting that the argument from publicity simply isn't capable of establishing the value of all human beings. Despite this, I think, Korsgaard *can* employ the argument from publicity to claim that

[40] This is something that Heidegger appears to have appreciated when he refers to the everyday mode in which we dwell, anonymously absorbed in the world of the 'one' [*das Man*], and his account of the anonymous way in which we understanding ourselves is something that I will consider in the next chapter.

anyone who places value upon living and acting as the kind of creature they are,[41] is committed to valuing anyone who is succeeding (perhaps even those who are simply trying) to live an act as the kind of creature they are. And that includes everyone apart from Korsgaard's 'complete practical normative sceptics'. The main problem with Korsgaard's view, as I see it, however, is that when her transcendental argument fails, she loses any entitlement to claim that whenever someone identifies with a normative conception of humanity, that implies that they regard 'living and acting as the kind of creature they are' as valuable, as part of the normative content of that conception. And that means that it is open to us to simply reject that particular conception of what everyone ought to grant as mattering, and of what we have reason to do insofar as we are 'just someone', just as it is open to us to reject any other specific content. So when I said earlier that I believe that we have a deep tendency to adopt a 'human identity', I was not suggesting that we tend to endorse a specific view of what we have reason to do, but that we tend to regard at least some reasons as binding upon us, because they are binding for everyone.

On Korsgaard's view – and I believe she is right – the bare fact of being human does not guarantee that an agent will care about enacting what we are calling a 'human identity', because with respect to anything that we are inescapably (e.g., members of a particular species, race, or gender), it is always, in principle, open to us to be indifferent to these facts about ourselves. Korsgaard's 'complete practical normative sceptic' is someone who is indifferent to everything, their humanity included. But she also gives less extreme examples, as in the following passage (also quoted earlier in the thesis):

> you can walk out even on a factually grounded identity like being a certain person's child or a certain nation's citizen, dismissing the reasons and obligations that it gives rise to, because you just don't identify yourself with that role. Then it's not a form of *practical* identity anymore: not a description under which you value yourself (SC 23).

[41] Korsgaard is a little unclear about how 'living' should be taken. I will assume that to value living means something like to value the pursuit of a life, rather than to value the bare organic processes of human life. If we already grant that human life is itself valuable then the argument from publicity is obsolete.

This is important, because although Korsgaard recognises that our factually grounded identities are distinct from the facts themselves in which they are anchored, she blurs this distinction when it comes to what we value. And this leads to a problem in her account. To illustrate why, let me give an example.

If I am indifferent to the fact that I am a man, in the sense that I am not trying to live up to the demands that issue from a view of what I must do as a man, i.e., a conception of masculinity, then the thought that 'men ought to *φ*', will never motivate me to *φ*. For the same reason, I am clearly not committed to valuing other men who *φ*, or indeed, any instance of so called 'manliness' that their actions might embody, because that won't be a virtue that I recognise. This is the argument from publicity run in reverse. But now suppose that I *am* occasionally susceptible to the motivational force of such a thought. At least in those moments, I *have* attached a certain significance to the fact that I am a man, that as such I ought to do certain things because they are worthwhile, represent a good way to be a man. When I do this I have also, therefore, formed a normative conception, if perhaps a limited one, of masculinity. That fact alone, however, does not ensure that I value myself, let alone that I value anyone else. The reason for that is that what this conception does is to specify the conditions under which we will recognise someone (anyone) as acting in a way that it is worthwhile for a man to act, a way that makes them into a good man, perhaps also makes it possible for us to attributed the virtue of 'manliness' to them or to their conduct. The argument from publicity means that I cannot consistently value only myself and my own actions insofar as I (as they) live up to this standard.

Whatever conception of masculinity that I form, it seems natural to assume that I will attach the most value to those who measure up to the ideal which it institutes, the least to those who persistently fail to meet its demands. It isn't entirely clear what value I must attach to someone who fits into the latter category, but plausibly, I am still committed to recognising their efforts (inefficacious as they may be) to be 'good' in some relevant sense. What is clear, however, is that in trying to live up an ideal of masculinity, I am not necessarily committed to valuing *all* other men. That is because, it is always possible for a man, not only to fail to live up to a normative conception of masculinity, but to be indifferent to its demands. What is there for

someone who does assume their masculinity as a form of identity to value in that person? The answer isn't quite as straightforward as it might seem. It is not, that is to say, 'nothing', because, even without trying to live up to a conception of masculinity a person might still do the kinds of things that one would do if one *were* trying to live up to this conception. And there are at least two opposing ways in which that fact might be found significant. On the one hand, that person's actual identity may be cast in a favourable light because it leads to them doing the kinds of thing that they should to do anyway. On the other, the fact that they are acting in this way for different reasons might count against them. For example, compare Kant's discussion of the naturally sympathetic or compassionate person in the *Groundwork*.

Whatever the case, what I think this shows is that if one *does* identify with a normative conception of masculinity, this does not necessarily commit one to value the bare state of being a man (even if it is in principle possible that one identifies with a chauvinistic conception of masculinity according to which 'being male' is itself something to hold in esteem). This is important because the same structure of argument applies to being human, or 'just someone'. And this drives a wedge between the bare fact of being 'just someone', on the one hand, and trying to do what just someone must do, on the other. Korsgaard's habit of describing both of these things as 'being just someone' or 'being human' risks eliding an important distinction. It is not the fact that you and I are both people that I value when I identify in this way (although I might also value this). Rather I commit myself to regarding a particular way of being 'just someone' as good, a way of being that others may not live up to or even try to do so. And that means that what we value in this way is always in principle exclusive of some individuals, i.e.., those who aren't trying to enact this identity.

On Korsgaard's version, what we value when we assume a conception of our humanity is just 'living and acting as the kind of creature we are'. To succeed at this, as I have said, all an individual needs to do is to adopt some practical identity and act in some way. So it is very inclusive, the only individuals it excludes are those who do not meet these slight conditions, the 'complete practical normative sceptics'. Even if we do not adopt *this* conception, the particular view we take of 'what one ought to do', *may* still involve us in a commitment to the value of being just someone, i.e., to

what I have been calling respect for humanity. Hence, my human identity *may* be a moral identity in Korsgaard's sense. But it will only be so in virtue of the content of our conception of this identity, i.e., if I accept that one ought to value every human being. And this cannot be established through the publicity argument. However, it is also open to us to form a conception of what 'one' has reason to do, that does not instance any commitment to the value of being just someone. Perhaps simply to take a more substantive view of what one ought to do, one on which there are various opportunities for individuals to fail to live up to what we regard as the standard which bind us all. In that case, at most, that individual is committed to placing a value, that is exactly proportional to the value they themselves derive from living up to demands which address them as 'just someone', upon others insofar as they too are recognised as doing this (and recall, recognition can be withheld). Because it is only insofar as you or I succeed in conforming to this standard, that I am straightforwardly committed to valuing myself or valuing you, this would mean there are also more opportunities to withhold our respect. For instance, if an individual fails to do what anyone ought to do, depending upon how the 'ought' is qualified (i.e., whether it specifies an ideal to which we ought to aspire, or the minimal conditions that one must meet), they may thereby debase their humanity. And on our own view of what we have reason to do as just someone this may dissolve our debt to such individuals, may expel them from the kingdom of ends. That strikes me as closer to what many people's actually commitments are like, but in principle, we can form conceptions which are highly idiosyncratic, and expel anyone who we do not recognise as pursuing the *same* human project, and that might mean anyone whose broad world view is different from our own. What I think that all of this shows is that there is nothing that the bare fact of having a human identity necessarily commits us to, our conception of this identity can take virtually any form. Each and every aspect of the commitment which this generates is established contingently. And understanding this we are now in a position to turn to Heidegger, and to consider the role of that form of identity.

Chapter 6

Being 'Just Someone' and the Anonymous Dimensions of Identity

6.0. Introduction

In the previous chapter I turned to Korsgaard's account of moral normativity. I suggested that we often adopt what she calls a 'universal' or 'human identity', i.e., a normative conception of our humanity. And as I explained, this is something with which we identify whenever we take ourselves, or anyone else, to have certain reasons insofar as they are 'just someone'. Korsgaard argues that whenever we identify ourselves in this way, one of the things we are committed to valuing is humanity itself, whether in our own person or in that of someone else. Hence, this identity is, for her, always a moral identity, even if that is not all that it is. She also maintains that this identity has a certain priority over our other practical identities because it provides at least part of our motivation for adopting these. And this, as we saw, led her to claim that, if we are alive to the force of any reasons whatsoever then we also stand under the moral law (as expressed in Kant's formula of Humanity). I argued that neither of these claims hold up to careful scrutiny. We can substitute Korsgaard's claims with two others. Firstly, that while our human identity *might* be a moral identity in Korsgaard's sense, it is quite conceivable that it is not such, and it is, therefore, only ever *possible* that the moral law will have force for us. Hence, not all agents are necessarily moral agents. And secondly, that it is also only ever possible that our 'human identity' will provide part of the motive for adopting our other identities because, ultimately this identity is itself a contingent feature of our self-understanding, and importantly, one which we do not require in order to adopt other identities. To this last claim I would, however, add that we nevertheless have a very deep tendency to identify with a normative conception of our humanity, and why that is the case will hopefully become clear by the end of the present chapter.

In this chapter I want to build upon these two claims further. Our human identity is, I have suggested, sometimes a moral identity and sometimes not. In 6.1. I will begin by exploring what else might be involved in having a normative conception of our humanity, e.g., what kinds of accent, other than a moral accent, we might place upon the idea that there are certain things which we, as human, ought to think and do. I

also want to consider how this form of identity functions in our lives more generally. In order to do this I will turn to Heidegger's account of *das Man* and our everyday mode of being-in-the-word, or 'everydayness' [*Alltäglichkeit*]. I will claim that what we find here just is a phenomenological account of what I will continue to follow Korsgaard in calling our 'human identity'. I also want to consider more closely the idea that our human identity is itself contingent, and I will offer some suggestions about what it would mean for us to lose or to give up on this conception of ourselves – in particular, to lose or to give up on this identity while retaining other forms of practical identity.[42] The latter, I will suggest, is just what we do when we are 'authentic' [*eigentlich*] in Heidegger's sense of that term, and in the second half of this chapter I will draw upon certain features of Heidegger's discussion of authenticity.

In the condition of authenticity, we take over an important insight from Heidegger's analysis of the condition which, in *Being and Time*, he will describe in terms of Anxiety [*Angst*], Death [*Tode*] and Conscience [*Gewissen*]: we appreciate that, because all of our identities are ultimately contingent, the only thing which we are essentially is a thrown potentiality or 'being-possible' - what Heidegger will sometimes call 'pure Dasein'. There are a number of things which I could say – and which other authors have said – about authenticity and the various notions which are closely related to it in Heidegger's thought, but I want to limit myself to two points that I believe to be of particular importance. Firstly, that identifying ourselves as 'pure Dasein' we recognise that each of us enjoys a deep kind of agential unity (which I will consider in more detail in the next chapter), and secondly, that in authenticity, we substitute our normative conception of humanity with what I will call a modal conception of humanity, i.e., a conception of the different modes through which we, as human, can be attuned to or normatively oriented towards the world.[43] It is with these two claims that I will end the present chapter.

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[42] Recall that Korsgaard accepts that there is at least one condition – complete practical normative scepticism – in which we do not identify ourselves in this way, but that is because it is characterised by the collapse of every form of practical identity, and not just our human identity.

[43] Strictly speaking authenticity involves a way of understanding ourselves as 'Dasein' rather than as 'human'. In the present context, I believe that this substitution is innocent.

6.1. Das Man, Everydayness and Human Identity

Division I of *Being and Time* is concerned with Dasein in its everyday mode, the mode in which we find ourselves, as Heidegger puts it, 'proximally and for the most part' (BT 37). One of the things which characterises this mundane condition, he claims, is a particular way of understanding ourselves, and it is in this context that he introduces the notion of *das Man*. Macquarrie and Robinson (1962) translate this as 'the "they"' (as does Stambaugh, 2010), while Dreyfus (1991; 2013) opts for 'the one', and Blattner (2006) for 'the anyone'. I prefer to follow Wrathall (2013) who leaves the term untranslated. Heidegger uses '*das Man*' almost exclusively to refer to the way in which we understand ourselves in our 'everydayness': as being in the world both with others, and as those others are themselves in the world, but in such a way that the distinction between us and them is completely effaced, leaving only an anonymous 'one'.

The claim I wish to defend in this section is that the most important feature of this anonymous form of identity is that, in assuming it, we identify with a normative conception of our humanity, and that Heidegger's discussion of it can, therefore, help us to characterise our human identity in more concrete terms. Before I turn to this task, however, it is worth noting that Heidegger insists that, strictly speaking, *das Man* is not just a feature of 'everydayness' but an *existentiale*. *Existentialia*, recall, refer to invariable structures of Dasein, and what this claim amounts to, then, is that there is some sense in which being 'just someone', an anonymous 'one', is itself an invariable aspect of our experience. I will try to clarify, and ultimately defend this idea in 6.3., but for now let us put it to one side, and return to our everyday mode of being 'just someone'.

When Korsgaard discusses our human identity, she tends to rely, implicitly at least, upon a distinction between reasons which speak to us insofar as we are 'just someone', and reasons which only acquire force for us because we have adopted certain other practical identities. However, the contrast, as she appreciates, is not a sharp one. The norms which bind me if I am trying to enact the identity of, say, a teacher, are the norms which bind anyone who values themselves under this description. And so the conception of what teachers ought to do, to which I seek to

conform my actions, is just a conception of what one ought to do if one is trying to be a teacher, i.e., what one ought to do under a certain specified set of conditions. Of course, what teachers ought to do might depend in turn upon the circumstances in which they happen to find themselves, but what I am claiming here is perfectly consistent with further qualifications of this kind: what a teacher has reason to do in particular circumstances is what one has reason to do if one is a teacher and one finds oneself in those circumstances. What this suggests, I believe, is that we are entitled to take a much broader view of the kind of norms that attach to a conception of our humanity, in turn, making this way of identifying ourselves a much more general feature of our experience.

Although I did not frame it as a feature of our human identity, we encountered something like what I have just been describing in chapter 2. One of the claims I explored there, and that I ultimately endorsed, was that as we enact our identities we are constantly drawing upon an understanding (or more exactly, an interpretation) of the way in which *one* copes in a range of circumstances, e.g., how one comports oneself in having these identities, how one's projects determine which tools one concerns oneself with, how one uses these tools individually and in conjunction with one another, etc.[44] And because we are familiar with various ways in which one lets certain things (e.g., tools, materials, etc.) be involved with other things (e.g., projects), with various ways in which one articulates situations as significant, we are able to appropriate these techniques as specifying norms for our own conduct, as prescribing how we should comport ourselves, so that we are able to cope in those situations ourselves.

Heidegger observes two further things about the everyday way in which things have been interpreted as normative for us, insofar as we are just someone. Firstly, he observes that we are able to cope, at least on the face of it, seamlessly, in extremely far-ranging, complex and subtle ways. Indeed, he will go so far as to say that

[44] If everydayness is as pervasive as I will argue, the very way in which we disperse ourselves into the various identities which we adopt electively (e.g., certain roles like 'teacher' and 'friend') may itself be beholden to certain norms which we engage as 'just someone', because the question of which identities we ought to adopt, is just one of the practical problems that our human identity helps us to navigate.

'publicness' [*die Offentlichkeit*][45] 'controls every way in which the world and Dasein get interpreted' (BT 164). Secondly, that although we are constantly revising and refining the view we take of what one has reason to think and to do in various circumstances and under various descriptions, our competency for dealing with the interpretive challenges of everyday life is something into which we are first of all delivered. As he puts it, the 'everyday way in which things have been interpreted' is a mode of comportment into which Dasein has, in the first instance, 'grown', i.e., something to which we find ourselves always already given over (BT 213; cf. BT 41). Taken together, what those two claims imply is, that everydayness is an utterly pervasive attitude into which we have grown in such a way that, prior to any reflection of our own, we always already find ourselves immersed in a publicly interpreted world, with the means for making our way about in that world already at our disposal.

Still this is quite abstract, so let me try to give an idea of the kinds of norms that might play a role in our everyday familiarity. I will only be able to do so here in a fairly sketchy manner, as the way in which we understand ourselves as *das Man* has 'various possibilities of becoming concrete' (BT 167), and Heidegger's own account is itself largely schematic. I will say something more about the norms we engage under various descriptions, but before I do so I will consider the more general norms which bind us *simply* insofar as we are members of the party of humankind. As I have already said, something like Korsgaard's version of the moral law, as described by Kant's formula of humanity could, in principle, find a place in this understanding. But because her transcendental argument fails, and because, however important we may think it is, 'respect for humanity' is just one, specific way of determining what one ought to think and do, it is quite conceivable that a particular concrete normative conception of our human identity should be missing this feature. Heidegger's view – perhaps unsurprisingly given that Aristotle's influence was, by his own admission, crucial to the development of his thought – seems to have more in common with virtue ethics, at least insofar as it takes a much richer view of what constitutes success, and allows that this be determined across multiple dimensions. If this suggestion is plausible, then part of what is involved in having a human identity

[45] This is one of the terms Heidegger will use to characterise 'everydayness'. It describes the way in which we inhabit the world as 'one', with all that that entails, e.g., tacitly assuming that how things appear to us is how they would appear to anyone in our shoes.

is that we find ourselves already insinuated into an outlook which recognises the importance of virtue and the perils of vice, and taking a certain view of what constitutes virtuous and what vicious (or at least practically unwise) conduct in various situations – for example, what one does for the sake of being polite, prudent, compassionate, courageous, honourable, wise, etc. It would also, presumably, be open to a Heideggerian to incorporate some of the more sophisticated features of a broadly Aristotelian view. For example, the complex ways in which the various virtues cut across one another suggests that the person of practical wisdom, who is able to navigate the course of the mean, must *see* what the situation calls for, because ultimately this resists codification. That seems especially close to what Heidegger thinks, given that he already has an account of the *sight* in which our everyday activities sustain themselves, namely, 'circumspection', and translates *phronesis* as *Umsicht* (circumspection) in his *Plato's Sophists* (15).

Finding ourselves involved in a project of constituting ourselves according to the standards of these various dimensions of 'goodness', however, is only one of the ways in which *das Man* involves us with certain identities from the start. Another way in which it does this is by taking over the interpretation of our attributes. Take a person's gender. Although our particular conceptions of gender can, as always, differ markedly, one thing that is relatively stable and that we are given to appreciate from a young age is that if one is a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, this bears a certain significance. And because 'Dasein has grown up both into and in a traditional way of interpreting itself' (BT 41/SZ 20), we are insinuated into an understanding of our own masculinity or femininity, and we always already find ourselves enacting this identity. This kind of distinction might also cut across those mentioned above such that, for example, what constitutes politeness or bravery in a particular context might differ if one is a man as opposed to a woman.

That *das Man* takes over the interpretation of our own attributes, however, is just one example of something much broader: that even before we can reflect upon things for ourselves, we are immersed in a publicly interpreted world, and therefore, given to understand that certain things, or features of things, are salient and that they bear some particular significance (i.e., one understands that certain things and features of things *are* salient and what significance they have). Take, for example, our ability to

cope with other people. In the form we find these abilities in most of us this has already undergone considerable refinement. However, before this refinement could take place we must already have possessed various ways of rising to the interpretive challenges that others pose for us. Understanding what one uses and how one does so in different contexts, we are able to recognise (within a certain range) what broad kind of activity a person is engaging in, when for instance they are using something appropriately relative to what they are doing, when they are using it inappropriately, or creatively, even, when they are using something in place of what one ought to use for a job (and we are able to make sense of this inexpedient substitution, because we understand that one does not always have the right tool for the job). We also know how to read certain things from their actions. For example, what might motivate them to undertake something, or whether they are distracted or angry. And if we have to make an effort to interpret them we understand the kinds of explanation one gives. We know how to concern ourselves with others, when we need to adapt what we are doing to take them into account, and more generally, when to pay them special attention and when they can be left to fade into the background. And when our interactions with the world give way to scrutiny of some aspect of it, when we relate to some domain of entities in their presence-at-hand, we know what one takes for granted in one's scrutiny, how one lets one's broader concerns frame this scrutiny, what kind of characterisation one seeks given one's reasons for scrutinizing it, which features one needs to make explicit, which relations, and so on. One understands moreover that there are certain things to which one ought to grant credibility when confronting a putative fact about something one is scrutinizing, and other things which one would find incredible, and that one ought to hold in suspicion, etc. That might also extend to how one engages with certain institutions, determining which ones one trusts.

The general point which I take these examples to illustrate is that we always start with a background of unanalyzed, taken-for-granted pre-judgements – a kind of familiarity. Granting this, Heidegger takes it to have a number of important consequences; indeed, many beyond the range of what we can consider here. There may be many other attitudes involved, but hopefully those which I have described give some sense of what kind of roles this identity plays in our lives. Before I

conclude this section, however, there are a few further points that I believe are important.

In the above descriptions I tried to avoid complicating things by assuming that the norms to which we are alive are simply ones over to which we are delivered. If that were the mark of *das Man* then Heidegger's account would be much less plausible than I think it is. What he actually claims, however, is that we are delivered over to them in the first instance. But we are never *simply* submitted to a normative conception of our humanity, because every such conception is always in a certain respect imprecise. We can, for example, understand that a person is undertaking to make something using a particular tool, even if we do not have any familiarity with the artefact under construction or the implements used, but we can always extend our familiarity, and often do so if only out of curiosity. As a result our human identity is something which – even if certain elements remain relatively stable – we are constantly revising and reinterpreting. We are always in the process of making the stand we take upon the demands one faces in various roles more precise (whether we are currently enacting these or not), and under various descriptions, etc. So we are not *just* furnished with a set of interpretive resources and set on our way; we are constantly developing these in response to our encounters with other people, our interactions with the world, through our own reflection, and perhaps through various other avenues as well.

Throughout all of this activity, however, we never stop identifying with a conception of what one has reason to think and to do. We remain orientated towards what we are justified in taking to be the case, in taking to be relevant, or in taking to be incumbent upon us simpliciter as well as under various descriptions. And for that reason, whatever stand we take at the end of this, we deliver the commitments at which we have arrived back into a view of how things are, at bottom, for all of us; we commit ourselves beyond our localized circumstances, into a situation that is general. This is, I take it, what Heidegger means when he says that *das Man* 'knows only the 'general situation' [*allgemeine Lage*]' (BT 346/SZ 300), because to say that this situation is 'general', in Heidegger's sense, is just to say that it is characterised by 'publicness', that is, by a way in which things *are* for me as they are for others, because ultimately, for all of us insofar as we are *one*.

These further reflections, I think, mean that we can save Heidegger's insights from the suggestion that he is primarily concerned to bring out the problematic conformism of everydayness (a view which might find support in the fact that he will characterize it, as I will explain in the next section, as 'inauthentic' [*uneigentlich*], as well as from some of Heidegger's more Kierkegaardian moments). This is important because once that pressure is removed, it is, I believe, easier to appreciate that Heidegger is essentially taking over (and developing) an insight from Husserl: that everyday life sustains itself in a naive commitment to realism. Everydayness functions in Heidegger's philosophy in much the same way that the natural attitude functions in Husserl's. The main difference is that the thesis of the natural attitude (i.e., the way in which we posit certain things as really being the case) becomes, in Heidegger's account, the positing of norms that have force for us insofar as we are just someone. And that, more than anything, illustrates just how pervasive this identity is.

6.2. Authenticity, Resoluteness and Anticipation

In this section I want to do two things. I have suggested that every particular normative conception of humanity is contingent, but I now want to explore the idea that this very structure may also be contingent, that we can *be* without this. This, I suggest, is one way of understanding the claim that 'authenticity' is one of our possible modes of being. In this section, then, I consider what it might mean for us to dispense with a normative coneption of humanity, what we might replace it with if we did this, and how far this kind of substitution is possible for us.

The previous section has, hopefully, given some indication of how difficult it is likely to be for us to extricate ourselves from our everyday mode of being. And while, in the previous chapter, I suggested that we do not require a reason to adopt an identity, given the pervasiveness of everydayness, it is likely that in most cases we *have* adopted our other identities at least under the guidance of norms which we have engaged on behalf of everyone. One thing that I will explore in this section, then, is whether it is possible for these identities to become autonomous of our 'human identity', even if they did not arise autonomously of it. I think that we find a

compelling answer to all of these questions in Heidegger's account of authenticity and inauthenticity, which I will introduce in a moment.

In the previous chapter, it will be recalled that I also argued, against Okrent, that a breakdown of the normative structures in which we usually maintain ourselves is, in principle at least, possible for beings like us. Among certain other things, this tells us that we are not identical with any of our practical identities, that every one of them is ultimately contingent, including our 'human identity'. Although they refer to this condition by different names, this is a claim upon which, Heidegger and Korsgaard converge. In 'anxiety' we are unable to take a stand upon our being and so unable to press into any of our possibilities, just as, in the condition of 'complete practical normative scepticism', there is nothing that we must do, because we do not identify with any normative conceptions of ourselves. Indeed, for Korsgaard, a person in this state cannot even properly be said to act, because they have no grip upon reasons, and we need such a grip, she thinks, in order to constitute ourselves as the author of our behaviours, to constitute those behaviours as voluntary actions rather than mere bodily movements. However, for all that they converge Heidegger makes something more of the possibility which he calls 'anxiety'. The reasons for that lie in his broader phenomenological project in *Being and Time*. Heidegger approaches the question of the meaning of being by analysing the structure of the entity which has an understanding of being, namely, Dasein. The possibility of anxiety, he thinks, tells us something important about this entity, something which our everyday understanding of ourselves does not. Taking his lead from anxiety, and in particular, from the fact that it casts light upon the contingency of our identities, Heidegger will claim that rather than conceiving of ourselves in terms of the particular possibilities we engage in adopting various identities, a more 'originary' way in which to conceive of ourselves is in terms of our possibilities as such. Understood in this way, what we are essentially is what he will sometimes call 'pure Dasein', an entity with the finite ability to project itself upon possibilities, to be open onto a world, and to understand itself and its environment in terms of the different ways in which these can be given concrete significance.

Why is this relevant to our present discussion? In the previous chapter I claimed that our human identity is contingent in a stronger sense than Korsgaard is prepared to

accept; it is not only possible that it will collapse, but also possible for us to live our lives – I mean, really live our lives, and not merely exist in atrophied condition of anxiety – without this identity. For that to be possible, our other identities must be capable of being (or becoming) autonomous of our human identity. However, because all of our identities have collapsed in anxiety, such that the only thing we can understand ourselves as is 'pure Dasein', the possibility of this condition does not, by itself, show that we are able to adopt other identities without also assuming a conception of our identity as 'just someone'. What I have been claiming in the previous section of this chapter, might make this possibility seem unrealistic, because I have said that for the most part even those identities which pick me out under a particular description are *not* generally independent of our human identity, but rather, merge into a view of what one has reason to do, and find their motivation in reasons which are addressed to us insofar as we are just someone. This is where Heidegger's view differs most significantly from Korsgaard's, however, because he maintains that not only is a condition of breakdown possible, but also that we are able to carry over the insights which anxiety affords, back into our lives, back into a way of being-in-the-world through various identities which have invested things with meaning. And this way of being is what Heidegger calls 'anticipatory resoluteness' [*vorlaufenden Entschlossenheit*].

In chapter 3, I noted that Heidegger uses 'anxiety' in two senses. It is both, the way in which we have been delivered into a finite understanding ('death' [*Tode*] understood as the limit of our 'being possible', our ability to project ourselves upon possibilities), and the condition of breakdown in which we are thrown back into this space of possibilities as an undifferentiated, uncanny domain when the bonds of interpretation out of which we construct our identities have collapsed. Although, as Heidegger says, Dasein's '[b]eing-possible is transparent to itself in different possible ways and degrees' (BT 144), there are two broad ways in which we can comport ourselves towards this limit, two broad modes of 'being-towards death', namely, authenticity [*eigentlichkeit*] and inauthenticity [*uneigentlichkeit*]. Whenever we divert ourselves into one of our possible ways of understanding ourselves and our environments, we can either let this normative orientation stand as a possibility, and therefore remain alive to the fact that what grounds the norms to which we are responsive is our own commitment to regarding them as binding upon us, or we can

cover up this fact. The latter, according to Heidegger, is the attitude which prevails in everydayness, and this makes that mode of being 'inauthentic', because in committing ourselves to a view of what one ought to think and do, we treat this view as if its force were simply given, as if this were not sustained by the commitment into which we have been delivered, and ontologically speaking that distorts the phenomena.

What does this mean? Against the backdrop of anxiety our everyday way of pressing into possibilities shows up as presumptive, as just one of our possibilities, and as, therefore, binding only because we accept it as such, because we have been delivered over to a certain way of factically being the entity which we inescapably are. Incidentally, some of Heidegger's analyses of the structure of our everyday mode of committing ourselves can be read as attempts to illuminate its 'presumptuousness' (where this needn't carry the normative connotations that the accusation of presumptuousness usually carries), in an attempt to express the ontological insight into our structure that anxiety affords us, because that is another way of letting our possibilities show themselves as a possibilities, thereby uncovering our freedom from being bound up with these way of identifying ourselves. Resoluteness leaves this backdrop in operation, it lets anxiety quietly pervade our activities, leaves open the ground of our self-interpretation, and importantly, holds the future open as a dimension in which we might temporalize our time (give concrete meaning to the past, present and future) differently, either by undergoing a shift or a collapse (i.e., readiness for anxiety/death). And so it lets a certain kind of responsibility for our own self-constitutive activity remain illuminated. Importantly, that is only supposed to clarify these norms ontologically with respect to their ground, it isn't necessarily intended to give us any reason to give up on them. As Nietzsche appreciated, it is only the expectation of finding a legitimizing ground where none obtains that makes this discovery so destabilizing (See, for example, Book I of *The Will to Power*). Another way to think of authenticity is to say that it lets the ground of normativity show itself as the contingent forms and habits of life with which we are caught up, even if in glimpsing this, we cannot articulate exactly what that consists in. One thing that this attitude does do, however, it to give us something – a fact about ourselves – that we can assume in various ways. If it is going to count as a reason to give up on those ways of life or, for example, to give up on the idea of there being anything that

is univocally normative (anything that binds without doing so with force that is borrowed from our own contingent commitments), we have to make it such, and we only do so from the perspective of some form of life with which we are contingently caught up.

Understanding ourselves as 'pure Dasein', as a being defined by its possibilities rather than by the norms under which it happens to stand, we have a number of possibilities open to us. We can engage a way of being 'just someone', holding open the fact that its norms bind us only because we have engaged it, and allow this to frame our other identities in more or less the way we do in everyday life. But because the way we engage *this* identity is, at bottom, something for which we never have a reason, this possibility extends to our other identities. There does not need to be a chain of motivation leading back to our human identity. We can also forgo any conception of what we have reason to do insofar as we are just someone, substituting for a normative conception of our humanity, a view of our possibilities as Dasein. Heidegger's account of authenticity is sometimes regarded as a form of individualism, because anxiety picks me out in my own individuality, as 'I myself'. But even in this mode, we are always a particular instance of something general, and in that sense, understanding ourselves authentically as 'pure Dasein', is always at the same time a way of being 'just someone', only it does not necessarily commit us to a normative conception of our humanity. That is why I took care to stress that, although Heidegger tends more often than not to treat *das Man* as the self of everydayness, it is in fact, an *existentiale*. Our being towards the limit of our own possibility (death), be this authentic or inauthentic, not only determines the possibilities we hold open for ourselves, it also frees Dasein-with, as a mode of being, for its possibilities, and this means that we can also stand in an authentic relation towards others, i.e., we can project those entities which we encounter in the world in the mode of Dasein-with upon the possibilities which we have understood in our own self-projection. And in doing this, we are also able to substitute for a normative conception of what each of us has reason to think and to do, a modal conception of what each of us has to think and do, a conception of humanity's possibilities. There may be various ways of giving significance to this, but if we have a thoroughgoing appreciation of the groundlessness and contingency of our own way of being responsive to norms, then one consequence may be that we cease to

regard other's failures to see the reasons to which we are alive as a *normative* failure. The question, that I will not be able to answer here, is how far this attitude is one that we can incorporate.

In the next chapter I build upon some of the issues raised here by turning to Sartre to develop the idea that 'shame' [*la honte*], explains why Dasein is always 'just someone', i.e., why *das Man* is an *existentiale* and not just one of Dasein's modes (as, for example, authenticity and inauthenticity are). This account, I argue, also explains how we are able to hang together as the same individual even across the most profound shifts in our identity. Because we are open onto a world that is, in principle, there for others as well as for us, because it is there, in principle, for perspectives other than the one we currently inhabit, I myself am one of the things there are in this world, accessible to others, and it is this being-for-others that constitutes me as a unified being capable of taking ownership of the various possibilities. Our constant orientation towards this world runs like a thread through the successive ways in which we realise our own temporality.

Chapter 7

Normative Conversion and Existential Identity

7.0. Introduction

In the last chapter I claimed that there are at least two important 'anonymous' aspects of our identity, two ways in which we can understand ourselves as 'just someone'. The distinction between these is, I explained, one that can be found in Heidegger's account of *das Man*. And, drawing upon that account, I characterized them, respectively, as a normative and a modal conception of our identity as 'just someone'. The first of these is a kind of practical identity, which I have followed Korsgaard in calling our 'human identity'. This has now been explored in some detail; however, there is, I think, quite a bit more that needs to be said about the second aspect of our identity. I propose to call this second aspect of our identity, which is the focus of this chapter, our 'existential identity', and I will explain the reasons for this new terminology in a moment.

The discussion is divided into two parts. Part I explores existential identity by offering an account of normative conversion. To help set this account out I will draw upon two philosophers whose views place them in the neighbourhood of the positions we have considered so far, namely, Sharon Street and Jean-Paul Sartre (I will also explain in moment why I believe that this is helpful). The conclusion towards which I build in this section is that any account of agency must do justice to the deep unity – i.e., the existential dimension of who we are – which enables us to undergo pronounced shifts in our practical identity. Part II will address a much more difficult question: 'how does this dimension of our identity (i.e., our deep unity) arise and upon what does it depend?' In order to answer *this* question, what is needed, I believe, is an account of the constitution of our existential identity. I will argue that Sartre's account of 'Being-for-Others' [*L'etre-pour-autrui*] – although on the face of it concerned with something quite different – provides the materials for such an account. Drawing upon Sartre's discussion of shame, and emphasising the distinction he draws between mundane and 'original' shame, I argue that it is only in the context of the latter that we are unified across shifts in our practical identity, including the

shift we would undergo if our identity collapsed into a state of *Angst* (Heidegger) or 'complete practical normative scepticism' (Korsgaard).

7.0.1. Why Street and Sartre?

I have mentioned Sharon Street's work on two occasions in the thesis so far. In the Introduction I suggested that her attempts to characterise meta-ethical constructivism are helpful insofar as they bring out the similarities between *that* enterprise and the phenomenological one which I have been pursuing. In Chapter 5, I explained that my response to Korsgaard, brings my position close to that of Street, and a number of contemporary philosophers, including Carla Bagnoli, David Velleman, and James Lenman, who have sought to defend various forms of 'Humean constructivism'. What unites my position to the views of these philosophers is that we all reject the Kantian view that morality is in some way non-contingent; as Korsgaard sometimes describes this, that the moral law is in some way a constitutive norm of autonomous agency. Letting this stand, I want to return to Street's characterisation of meta-ethical constructivism, or more exactly, to her characterisation of the (essentially phenomenological) work that she thinks must be undertaken by anyone trying to give an account of agency. I will argue that the view of agency which emerges from this is untenable. That is something which comes out with particular clarity, I believe, when we consider her (admittedly quite brief) remarks about a kind of pronounced normative conversion. The view encapsulated in her remarks about conversion, however, can be contrasted with the view that is defended by Sartre. And that brings me to my reasons for turning to him.

Sartre explicitly discusses conversions of the kind that I am interested in. And while he shares certain intuitions about these with Street, his view of them represents something much closer to the 'existential Kantianism' of Korsgaard and Heidegger that I have been defending. However, neither of these philosophers devotes much attention to the phenomenon of normative conversion. Korsgaard will remark that 'you are not a different person just because you are very different. Authorial psychological connectedness is consistent with drastic changes' (1989, 178). And Heidegger acknowledges the lability of our moods, including those that contribute substantially to the way in which we find the world to matter. Although, the

relationship between Heidegger's account of affect and Sartre's is not easy to plot, I have argued that Heideggerian moods are always attached to an understanding, and that in having a given mood we are always at the same time pre-reflectively aware of ourselves as someone who cares in a particular way. So a shift in our mood is also a shift in the way that we are acquainted with ourselves in what Sartre would call our 'projects', because these simply reflect, as Crowell (2015) puts it, 'who I *am* in the mode of engaged agency' (online). So despite significant differences in where they lay the emphasis in setting out their respective views, when Sartre describes the instant in which new projects arise from the collapse of others, in which we undergo "conversions' which cause me totally to metamorphose my original project' (BN 497), and again, when he refers to the 'perpetual modifiability of our initial project' (BN 486), he is describing basically the same changes.

7.1. Sharon Street on Conversion and the Practical Standpoint

Before I turn to Street's remarks on conversion, let me give a very brief outline of her position. Street starts with the notion of the 'practical standpoint' or 'practical point of view', by which we are to understand, she says, 'the standpoint of an agent' (2012: 45).[46] Constructivists, she suggests, think that normative statements are true if they are entailed from within the practical standpoint. And it is therefore part of the work of constructivism to give a 'formal characterization' of what this standpoint is. 'To give the practical point of view a *formal characterization*', Street says,

> is to give an account of the standpoint of valuing *as such*, where this involves giving an account of the attitude of valuing that doesn't itself presuppose any substantive values but rather merely explicates what is involved in valuing anything at all (40).

Putting aside the question of whether her 'practical standpoint characterisation of meta-ethical constructivism', as Lenman and Shemmer (2012) refer to it, provides a sufficiently encompassing definition of that position, what I want to suggest is that the way in which Street herself attempts to provide an account of the practical

[46] Korsgaard also sometimes refers to it as 'the standpoint occupied by any creature who is in the state of mind of "valuing"' (SN 40)

standpoint, or more exactly, the way in which she conceives of that task from the outset, is problematic.

What is problematic about Street's view is that it implies that the standpoint of the agent reduces to the standpoint of the agent's attitude of valuing. Street uses that term to refer to the outlook an agent has insofar as they have adopted various practical identities (although she prefers to speak of 'normative commitments'). So what she is, in effect, saying is that the agent themselves reduces to their attitude of valuing. Actually her view is a little bit more sophisticated than this, as I will explain in a moment, but she is nevertheless placing a limit upon what counts as an account of agency, *before* she has inquired into what it is to be an agent. The problems with her view can be brought out with particular clarity, I think, by considering her brief reflections upon a kind of pronounced normative conversion.

Towards the end of her 2012 paper, 'Coming to Terms with Contingency', having just defended the 'Humean' view that a person's commitments, even their deeply held normative commitments – as she thinks the commitment to morality is for many of us – are ultimately contingent, Street adds what appears to be an important qualification. While we can easily think of ourselves without some of our commitments, in these instances, when the commitments are particularly deep, things are not so straightforward. The reason for that, she suggest, is that there is also a sense in which our commitment to morality and our other deep commitments are 'not at all a contingent matter' (57), because there is a sense in which these commitments are constitutive of who we are as individuals. So while there is, Street says, a perfectly intelligible conception of personal identity on which I can imagine myself without certain deep commitments, there is another sense in which it is not at all contingent that I am the kind of agent that I am, because these commitments define who I am in my own eyes, such that 'I would regard myself as having vanished or died were I to lose them'. It is this, as we might say 'substantive' (rather than 'formal') sense of identity, which, Street thinks, 'intuitively matters' (2012, 18).

In and of itself I do not think that there is anything wrong with regarding, as Derik Parfit puts it, 'some events within a person's life as, in certain ways, like birth or death' (1984: 328). Or that, because we recognise that these are not literal births and

deaths, that when I disappear, as Street says, someone else will take my place. There are contexts in which it is perfectly natural to use, what again Parfit calls 'the language of successive selves' (327). Street is not entirely clear about what it means to say that the 'substantive' kind of identity is the one which intuitively matters, but there are, I think, at least two ways of understanding it: (i) that this sense of identity is the *only* one that matters to the agent themselves, or (ii) that this sense of identity is the sense which matters if we wish to give an account of the practical standpoint. I think that we should resist both of those claims. I will say a little about the former towards the end of the next section, but the latter is the most problematic. By taking this stance, Street's view risks treating each notionally distinct self as a genuinely distinct agent, and by doing so she loses sight of something important about what it is to be an agent. So in claiming that our identities have an 'existential' dimension, I am suggesting that the practical standpoint, i.e., the standpoint we inhabit as agents, is broader than Street's account suggests.

7.2. Sartre on Conversion

Like Street, Sartre thinks that, when we undergo a 'metamorphosis' of our deep projects, there really is a sense in which we become 'other than we are' (BN 486). If we become conscious of the fact that radical conversions of our being-in-the-world are possible, this is, among other things, an awareness of the threat that our freedom for such conversions poses to our current identity. This is something we feel in the uncomfortably disquieting condition which Sartre calls 'anguish' [*angoisse*]. Whenever we envisage a different fundamental attitude to the one which we currently inhabit, embodying different commitments, etc., Sartre insists that we inevitably do so from 'outside', as someone who cannot participate in this attitude, because there is a sense in which to 'understand' the commitments which are constitutive of another attitude would be already to have assumed that attitude (BN 487). Hence, for Sartre, our practical identities and the attitudes of value which are associated with them are defined by what is unrealizable for us so long as we remain committed to the things we are committed to. The normative force which we would feel in that attitude is something that we cannot realise within the compass of our current projects. However, there is a crucial difference in the way that these two writers handle the issue of conversion, one which vividly highlights the difference in their respective

conceptions of the practical standpoint. Unlike Street, Sartre does not limit his account by only taking the outlook of an agent anticipating a future shift in their sensitivity to reasons, and that has important implications.

Although viewing conversion in this way can help to bring out some important points, if we restrict ourselves to this anticipatory perspective, as Sartre recognises, we do not have the whole phenomenon in view. Conversion is cast in a markedly different light if we attend to the moment of transformation itself, to the delicate and ambiguous blend of attitudes as one gives way to the other, or to the shifts in our character, or to those we have already undergone, and from which our present attitudes may have in some way taken their bearings. This is something which, Sartre suggests, many authors have described (he cites an example from a short play by Gide, and Raskolnikov's conversion in the Epilogue to Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, 487). Sartre's view, then, is much more attentive to the whole phenomenon, and as a result he recognises the way in which conversions can be experienced as a very real, definite and memorable event for those who undergo them – a point William James also observes in his now classic study of religious experience (see, James 2001. esp. 156-178)

When we look back upon our former attitudes, we do so in terms of our present commitments, and although they may be in some sense familiar to us, regarded in this way it can sometimes be difficult to see how the commitments which they embodied could have been our own. And yet, despite this fact, our previous attitudes and, importantly, the actions which they motivated remain ours and refer to us immediately. We cannot disown them simply because we no longer inhabit them (or the context in which they made sense). Once we are on the other side of a conversion, our past attitude resists realization (i.e. being made present), just as much as any possible future we might consider. But in *this* case the resistance does not suffice for us to disown this past in a way that would allow us to claim, in good faith, that we are no longer who we were. In this connection Sartre also speaks of a sincerity in which we confess ownership of our past choices and more generally of what we were as having been (see BN 89).[47] However, this explicit 'owning up', rests

[47] This is different from the project of sincerity which Sartre analyses as a form of bad faith.

upon a more basic, pre-reflective awareness of our connection to our past actions, one that we can see at work in every instance where we recognise that something refers immediately to me as who I was. What is said of what I did or what mood I was in yesterday is said of me (BN 138). These mundane examples, as well as certain moods such as embarrassment, guilt or despair, in which we may long to be rid of what we inescapably are,[48] an 'original synthesis of our past and present' (BN 137), as Sartre refers to it, is dramatically illustrated. There is a sense in which, therefore, there is resistance not only when we try to realize other attitudes, but also when we try to dissolve the connection that we have to those attitudes which we realized once, but no longer.

On Sartre's view, to be an agent is to be such that you might at some point have to negotiate the confusion of being someone whose commitments are no longer what they were, of the familiar patterns of significance, the feelings that things typically elicit from us, the responses they typically solicit, having been replaced by something unfamiliar. And what goes along with this, namely, the threat of our present commitments slipping into the past, is part of what it is to be an agent, of what it is to inhabit the practical standpoint. This is something which we will only be able to make sense of, however, if we are constituted as an agent, i.e., a unified entity to whom actions can be appropriately attributed, in a way which is not captured by the unity of the deep commitments embedded in our attitudes of value. And that is because even when those commitments dissolve, when we are no longer their willing servant, the actions we carried out as such do not cease to be ours. Our agency, if it should become invested by different values does not cease to be *our* agency. So while any future 'self' is only ever possible, we are in a sense, prepared for becoming other than we are, and in a sense free to do so, and this expresses our existential identity.

To be sure, we are not responsible for our actions in quite the same way when the commitments from which they followed were animated for us; but that is not to say that we are not responsible. We *are* responsible for the stances we adopt towards these actions, for the meaning we give to them. And this brings me back to what I said above about Street not being quite right when she says that it is our current practical identity which matters. We are involved with these commitments, because

[48] Kierkegaard makes good use of this point in *The Sickness unto Death*.

they are ours, and that is almost interchangeable with saying that they matter to us. Our commitments take their orientation from who we were, and from who we might become, from the commitments we had and that we might come to have, by conferring importance upon these things. My past is cast in a certain light by my present, and my present takes its bearings from this past. On Street's view, this responsibility disappears, because I can say that actions embodying past commitments are not mine, that they belong to another agent. But I can only do this by resolving myself into a collection of parts, making of myself a series of distinct agencies. What it would have been more appropriate to say, then, is that it is only in terms set by our current identity that anything is given as mattering. But once we've established that *I* am more than my attitudes of value, as a subject and as an agent, it is not necessary that we think of this as the only aspect of our identity which matters (either to us as individuals or in the context of our present concern with articulating the structure of the practical standpoint).

Although I think that Street's account describes something very important about what it is to be an agent, as well as the practical dimension, our identities also have an existential dimension. This dimension constitutes me as an agent across different practical identities, and so prepares me for conversions, which when I undergo them, express the freedom I enjoy from these identities, a freedom not of volition but with regard to my being-in-the-world. Agency, on this broader view, shouldn't be regarded *simply* as the expression of our will, but rather, as a complex blend of volitional and spontaneous activity. The latter, is at once an expression of our autonomy *and* something which plays an important role in the constitution of our will. And because my identity has this existential dimension, the standpoint I inhabit as agent, my practical situation, is structured by the possibility of conversion and so by reasons which do not currently speak to me.

7.3. Shame and Being-for-Others

In this section I want to turn to another aspect of Sartre's thought, namely, his account of 'being-for-others' [*être-pour-autrui*]. Although on the face of it this account is concerned with something quite different from what concerns us here, I will argue that it provides the materials for an account of the constitution of what I have been

calling our 'existential identity'. I will begin by introducing Sartre's account of shame [*la honte*]. However, as I did at the beginning of the last section, I want to start by saying something about my continued engagement with Sartre.

In the last chapter, and again in the previous section of this chapter, I have been suggesting that Sartre and Heidegger's respective positions are a lot closer than has sometimes been recognised. This conciliatory approach is somewhat harder to maintain in the present case, however, as it will be clear to anyone who has engaged with both of these thinkers that, firstly, there is nothing directly corresponding to an account of 'Being-for-others' in *Being and Time*,[49] and secondly, that in offering his account of this, Sartre is criticising Heidegger's own account of our relationship to others, with its emphasis upon 'being-with'. While I cannot go into their differences here, I hope that it will lend my position some credibility to note that, at least as far as the two philosophers were themselves concerned, this particular disagreement seems to have been resolved in 1945 when Heidegger conceded the point to Sartre, writing, not only that *Being and Nothingness* 'demonstrates an immediate understanding of my philosophy, such as I have not until now encountered', but taking particular care to stress, in addition to this, that 'I agree with your criticism of 'being-with,' and your emphasis on 'being-for-another" (Denoon Cumming, 2001, 74).[50] Of course that does not constitute a blanket endorsement of Sartre's position vis-a-vis our relationship to other people. That is especially the case if, as I believe, Sartre continues to elaborate the implications of our being-for-others throughout *Being and Nothingness*, and not only in the sections which explicit address it, as to endorse these views would therefore concede a lot of ground to Sartre. But it will, I hope, suffice for present purposes.

7.3.1 Being looked at by another person

[49] The closest is probably an understanding of the mode of being of Dasein-with. If an understanding of my own capacity for being threatened makes fear a slumbering possibility of being-in-the-world, makes the fearsome something I can encounter in my environment, then an understanding of the mode of being that other people have, is a capacity for encountering them in our environment, and hence, of someone looking at me.

[50] It is worth mentioning that two years later when Heidegger published his 'Letter on Humanism', he has changed his tune somewhat.

Imagine that I am kneeling on a landing in order to peer through a keyhole at something taking place in the room beyond. As I become increasingly absorbed in the scene unfolding before me, I also become less and less aware of my surroundings. Eventually the hallway, the staircase behind me, the walls and the ceiling, the door and the keyhole, all but disappear, and all that remains is 'a spectacle... presented as "to be seen," a conversation as "to be heard"', where these 'potentialities of the world indicate and offer only themselves' (283). Even my own body fades into an almost total inconspicuousness so that I experience myself as a nothingness encircling the scene, 'a pure consciousness of things' (283). But suddenly I hear footsteps in the hallway or a creak on the stairs, and feeling the look of another person fixed upon me, my experience is transformed. Now, instead of simply being the medium of my activity, I rediscover my body as a conspicuous object crouching on this landing, pressed up against this door, etc. My actions, which had simply unfolded as a response to the solicitations of their environment, are suddenly a performance to which the other person has borne witness. At the same time, the way I experiences my environment has changed – the keyhole, for example, is no longer simply my access to something to be seen, but a concrete presence in the world which I have given this significance and put to this use. And through all of this I am also aware that the other person's access to me as an object, and to the objects which populate our shared environment, goes hand in hand with their ability to 'transcend' all of these things, myself included, and to give them meaning in relation to their own projects.

There are, of course, lots of other ways in which our experience might be transformed in addition to this upon hearing another person approaching us, but, following Sartre, suppose for a moment that in this instance I feel ashamed at having been caught in such a compromising position. What does this involve? To begin with, it is worth noting that although it is the occasion of our shame, it is unlikely that the fact that someone has discovered me will ever be *simply* this, because it is also apt to have much broader significance for me. For example, there may be various ramifications, and I may feel a certain urgency to discover what these are likely to be, what I can salvage, and so on. But if I do worry about, try to predict, or otherwise reckon with such possibilities, it would, I think, be fairly uncontroversial to claim that this is an accompaniment to my shame and not my shame itself. Perhaps

more intuitively associated with that feeling are the various assumptions I might be inclined to make regarding the person who has discovered me, about how I appear to them, how they think of me, etc. However, Sartre observes, these too are, strictly speaking, incidental to my experience of shame. And we can even go a step further. If I were to discover that the footsteps which alerted me to the presence of another person came from elsewhere, inside one of the other rooms perhaps, or that the creak was only the breathing of an old building, and that there is in fact nobody there, then, while this discovery will of course change my experience, if only because the threat of any repercussions which I had envisaged is less immediate, it will not by itself suffice to dispel my shame.

What this means is that, just as the presence of another person in our vicinity does not necessarily make us feel ashamed, shame does not necessarily require us to posit the presence of another person. In short, the contingency runs both ways. We can appreciate why that is the case once we recognise that while every situation in which we feel ashamed might be significantly different from every other situation in which we feel this, shame itself always has the same basic structure: it is, as Sartre puts it, a kind of confession, it asserts that: 'I am this being' (BN 285).[51] To put it another way, shame recognises (is sustained through the recognition of) the justice of a certain characterisation of ourselves (BN 291). That is significant for two reasons.

To understand the first of these reasons, it may help to recall my argument, in the previous chapter, that whenever we take a characterisation of an object – whatever that object happens to be – to capture something of the nature of that thing, we thereby institute a norm: there are certain things which one must now grant of that object, a certain way in which one ought to think of it. If this is right, then although shame picks me out as the particular individual who is guilty of wrongdoing, it is also something I feel in a certain solidarity with others, because it is, at the same time, an attitude that I can only adopt while enacting a conception of what *one* ought to think and do (or in this case, feel), a way of making myself be 'just someone'. And ultimately, that is why, if there *is* someone there to manifest the look which

[51] That same confession might, of course, have addition significance which may or may not belong to our shame, e.g., there may be some things which, I take it, I no longer deserve and others that I now do.

occasions my shame, what matters is not what they actually think, or what I take them to think, but what they would be justified in thinking of me, perhaps even what they should, in some sense, think of me (although these are not quite the same thing). To put it differently, if there is someone there, the shame I feel in their presence is a claim upon them. But for that reason, their presence (or absence), even if only contingently related to my shame, is not irrelevant, because one of the opportunities it affords me is to discover how they in fact view me, and if that differs from how I view myself, that is something which in turn makes a claim upon me; it is a move in a negotiation about what we both have reason to think and do.

The second reason that it is significant that in shame we grant certain things about the kind of entity we are is that this means that shame must have, as part of its structure, an experience of ourselves as objects. Sartre is particularly keen to stress that, while we need not be functioning at present as an object that is specifically picked out as significant in some way by a particular consciousness in this experience (BN 304), and may not, therefore, feel quite so conspicuous, quite so conscious of our actions, etc., we will still feel ourselves as a concrete presence in the world, and as such as something to which other people have access. Taking this together with the independence of shame from the experience of being looked at, we are forced to conclude that *this* experience of, as Sartre puts it, our 'being-unrevealed', must also be distinct from the experience of being looked at by someone, and moreover that I can feel the same bodily conspicuousness and recognise the outside of my situation, without another person setting these in relief. Being-unrevealed is not an experience of this or that other person, or of the sum total of individuals, but rather, of my presence in a world that is in principle there for others, the real possibility of my presence to other people. Indeed, before we can experience the empirical presence or absence of another person, the other must already be there for us as an 'original presence' in our world. The other, in this instance, might be described, in broadly Heideggerian terms, as the possibility which we project into the world in understanding the mode of being of 'Dasein-with'. We understand our own constant presence in the world, by virtue of which we fall constantly under the gaze of indefinite and omnipresent 'others', and in virtue of this my being seen is the constant, if occasionally slumbering, possibility of being-in-the-world.

Our being-unrevealed, which manifests itself concretely in the experiences of being looked at, and in that of shame, is something very general, something we can feel as significant in all kinds of ways, and it is, for example, also concretely realised in pride, embarrassment, vanity, fear, etc. Indeed, 'these feelings themselves are nothing more than our way of affectively experiencing our being-for-others' (BN 311). However, it is also independent of all these ways in which we characterise ourselves in some way. It is an experience that is prior to any stance upon what kind of entities we are, i.e., any alignment with some way of fixing us in a look. The most basic experience of being-looked-at, which Sartre calls variously 'pure,' 'original,' or 'fundamental shame', 'is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being *an* object' (BN 312). This shame does not depend upon my having 'committed this or that particular fault' but simply upon the fact that I have "fallen" into the world, as an entity in the midst of other entities (BN 312). In having the structure of an object, the entity which I am revealed to myself as being in this experience is one which 'reserves a certain indetermination, a certain unpredictability' (BN 285), where this is 'directly connected with the infinite possibilities of a free Other', before whom I am 'an infinite and inexhaustible synthesis of unrevealed properties' (BN 292). Fundamental shame is the bare experience of my being-unrevealed before an indefinite and omnipresent subject that I cannot reduce to an object. It is not an experience of this or that other person, or of the sum total of individuals, but rather, of my presence in a world that is in principle there for others.

This experience of myself as an object is not only something that manifests in certain feelings, however. Rather, Sartre suggests, it 'is a constant fact of my human reality' (BN 303). We can appreciate what he means by this, if we return to our original example, because an implication of this is that even the voyeur's enthrallment must be structured by this original shame. That is not immediately obvious because in this experience we have allowed our being-for-others to become insignificant. But as Sartre points out, 'if each creak announces to me a look, this is because I am already in the state of being-looked-at' (BN 301); the fact that our situation has an outside that can at any moment take on a definite significance for us, suggests that we always at least tacitly appreciate our being-for-others.

To explain this further, let me return to the condition of enthrallment for a moment, because in the light of fundamental shame, the voyeur example takes on a second significance. In enthrallment, we do not cease to be for-others, but the outside of our situation is sunk into indifference. That is helpful because it gives some suggestion of what it would mean for us to not feel our being-for-others, which is in turn helpful, because in order to circumscribe a particular structure of our experience we have to be able to give some sense to what our experience would be like without it. If we were not constantly, if often only tacitly aware of our being-for-others, we could not, strictly speaking, be said to be indifferent to it, as it would be nothing for us. But in that scenario a range of experience would be impossible for us. Even if the kind of enthrallment in which our being-for-others temporarily withdraws into irrelevance is only one of the modalities of our actual experience, it nevertheless offers us a glimpse of what our experience *would* be like if we were not 'for-others'. And this is something Sartre exploits, when he allows the transformation our voyeur undergoes to stand as an analogue for what he describes as the 'modification' affected by the upsurge of the other in my world, their presence 'to me everywhere as the one through whom I become an object' (BN 303). He is contrasting our everyday experience as structured by the other, with a kind of hypothetical solipsism, eliciting a picture of what it would be like for us if we existed as a kind of pure consciousness (the for-itself) which does not experience its being-for-others, a condition which he calls 'strict solitude'. Before describing this transformation further, however, let me recap what I have already said about 'the look'.

7.3.2. The Structure of Fundamental Shame

Recall, that in being looked at by another person we become attuned to our being an object, to the fact that entities now escape us, and to the relations which result from our being in the midst of such entities and sharing their structure. What I will do now is: (1) elaborate these features a bit more, and (2) return to the claim I made at the beginning of this section: that our being-for-others also constitutes our existential identity. To show how our 'being-for-others' constitutes the existential dimension of our identity, I will need to explain how it also brings out a shift in the temporal structure of our experience. It is this shift which affects the 'original synthesis' of our past, present and future, which I mentioned in the previous section,

it is this synthesis which holds me together as an agent throughout the course of my life.

Objects, as I have said, are not exhausted by the way in which my ends characterise them, by their 'being-an-object-for-me'. But this has quite far reaching consequences. I said above that, in feeling another person's look turned towards me, I also recognise immediately that things in my environment turn a face towards them too, but it is not just towards this other person that they flow; they also flow into a world. And because the other person is only experienced on the basis of the original presence of the 'other' to me, even in this experience I feel concretely that things exist for every living human being, and so I escape myself into a million looks. If I was not 'for others', then I would belong 'to a world whose meanings were revealed simply in the light of my own ends' (531). Indeed, it could *only* be these ends which give meaning to things, for example, 'make of the mountain an obstacle difficult to overcome or a spot from which to get a good view of the landscape, etc' (531). Strictly speaking, there would be no such thing as a mountain, because I would be incapable of isolating particular objects from the meaning they have for me. Instead, there would only be an obstacle, which gives way to a spot from which to get a good view, etc. And one consequence of this would be that I could only reckon with things whose meaning is univocal. My ends would determined what things mean, how they are significant, what kind of responses they call from, and so on, in a way that left no room for alternative perspectives. As my actions would be guided by how things are organized for me in this way, they would only be responsive to the immediate way in which things appear. And because they themselves could not be experienced as object, they could not bear any appraisal; they would, in a sense, 'carry in themselves their whole justification' (BN 283). Or to put it a bit more precisely, there could be no question of whether they are justified.

This contrasts with the kind of absorption in which we in fact often find ourselves. In such moments we only set aside or disinterest ourselves in the various alternative perspectives that one might take on our situation, or on our actions, because we feel that we already grasp what we need to in order to act. In the condition of 'strict solitude', however, I could not even pose the problem of how it is appropriate to construe a thing or respond to it, because there would be nothing beyond my

immediate view of things to take into consideration. The problem would *never* 'be posed of knowing what meaning [something] could have *in itself*' (BN 531).

Similarly, if it is our being-for-others which 'causes the appearance in the situation of an aspect which I did not wish, of which I am not master, and which on principle escapes me since it is *for the Other*' (289), then, even if my ends could be frustrated, there would be for me no question of my having foreseen this, nothing which the frustration could reveal about my situation as it stood before and no way in which it could, therefore, speak retrospectively to the appropriateness of what I had done. There would be nothing which escapes me, by which my actions could be made to show themselves as good, bad, inopportune, prudent, skilfully executed, etc. If I did not understand my being-for-others, then nothing could make me feel that my situation, my actions, and so on, have objective qualities and characteristics.

My being-for-others, therefore, subtly alters the way in which I find myself attuned to the things in my environment, it involves, that is to say, 'not only a transformation of myself but a total metamorphosis of the *world*' (BN 293). It can help to think of the kinds of experience our being-for-others enables, in relation to some of the things that Husserl said about perception. If instead of mere affordances, what our actual experience consists in is seeing objects presented successively through their various aspects. For the presently seen aspect to appear to me as an aspect of an object at all, however, the other aspects which are currently occluded must have some kind of presence to me. It is something like this that Sartre has in mind when he says that things escape me into an infinite series of possible presentations, and it is, it seems, only because I appreciate that there are others to whom these faces could in principle reveal themselves that they are 'there' in this halo of unactualized reality.[52] However, objects are not only constituted as things to which others have perceptual access; they are constituted as things which the other person can act upon, find meaningful, etc. And on Sartre's version of this, the occluded aspects include the meaning which others can give to them, the uses to which they can put them, etc. But the idea is still that there is a sense in which these things are already there for us, if only vaguely intended.

[52] See, for example, *Analyses concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, esp. 'Part 2: Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis'

7.4. Being-for-Others and Existential Identity

I have claimed that, insofar as we are 'for others', when we relate to things in the world as significant in particular ways, other possible ways in which they might be taken as significant, different evaluative aspects they might reveal, are in some sense present in our experience.

On the one hand, this can be conceived of as an understanding (in Heidegger's terminology, a projection) of the possibility of seeing them from different evaluative angles, from the standpoint of different identities or attitudes of value. But this depends upon my understanding of the other as a subject distinct from myself and irreducible to an object. So on the other hand, the presence of these different aspects, should also be conceived of in terms of their possible presence to others. Those alternative conceptions can be reconciled because the other has exactly my structure, and so shares my possibilities. And for that reason, the hidden faces of the objects in my environment are ones which it they would show to anyone in a position to see them. They are not concealed from me in principle, and forever, but only for the time being in virtue of the kind of access I have to them at the moment. Things intimate the other possible attitudes or perspectives through which we (or one) could relate to them, and in our orientation towards them we are this 'one' in principle. It is not that a further something is needed for me to recognise that their possibilities are mine; rather, that is a given because the possibilities which they reflect to me are already 'ours'. It seems, then, that the presence of these vaguely intended aspects is also the projection of a possible future in which I can, in principle, bring them to fulfilment. Before going on, it is worth saying something here about how that comes about, as the comparison I made above between perceptual horizons and evaluative aspects might lead us astray – especially given Sartre's view that we can 'choose' other attitudes.[53] The perceptual horizons are there

[53] Strictly speaking the sense of choice Sartre has in mind is related to his understanding of 'original freedom', and therefore means, roughly, that these are possibilities of our own self-constitutive activity, not that we can bring them about by an effort of our will, so to speak. However, it would take us too far off topic, to try to defend this particular aspect of Sartre's view, and so in the present context it is easier to jettison it.

for me as the aspects of things which I can bring to intuitive fulfilment, in most cases, simply by reorienting myself in relation to those things, or by manipulating them in certain ways. But that is not what evaluative aspects are like. A more illuminating example would be that of a gestalt shift. If we know that an image is ambiguous in the sense that it can be seen in two or more different ways, as Merleau-ponty points out, this knowledge is not the same as its intuitive fulfilment. While knowing this it is possible that 'the figure in fact refuses to change its structure' and so 'my knowledge must await its intuitive fulfilment' (2002: 30).

Once we inhabit a world which escapes us, this provides the context within which we can also recognise that world in different aspects. And when we undergo a transformation in the way we take it to matter, therefore, in spite of the rearrangement of its salient qualities, it remains the same world seen now in a different aspect. In escaping us, then, the world is constituted as something which can remain constant for us even in taking it in markedly different ways. Hence, our being-for-others secures us in an orientation towards a world that is given to us as capable of revealing itself in aspects which remain for me and for the moment concealed, but which it might in principle show me, if I can secure the right kind of access to it. This is an orientation towards the world, runs like a thread through the different stances we might take up towards it. And in this way, I want to suggest, the constancy transfers to my identity. Just as each aspect in which I seize upon the world acquaints me with myself insofar as it reflects my self-understanding, so the way in which I understand the world as something that does not reduce to the aspect through which I currently relate to it, reflects back at me all of my possibilities as *my* possibilities. This orientation towards the world, constituted by my being-for-others, allows me to understand *myself* as something distinct from my current attitudes, gives me a certain freedom to become other than I am; a freedom etched upon the face of the world *qua* world. In this way it prepares me for taking possession of these attitudes should I undergo a conversion. It acquaints me with my own capacity for being other than I am at the personal level, makes this aspect of who I am, something present to me at a pre-reflective level. Insofar as this awareness, defines me as capable of various ways of being, none of which exhaust me, I am aware of myself as something over and above my personal identity, something free to enact the possibilities open to 'one'. It is only once the world escapes us, that it can

become the mirror of our freedom to be other than we are, and not simply the mirror of our current practical identity. The perpetual modifiability of our initial project, then, is something of which we are constantly albeit quietly reminded; it is something with which we must live.

This way of being prepared for conversion, arising from the fact that we are 'for others', also has a reverse side, without which what I have said so far would not give rise to our 'existential identity'. If being prepared for conversion is a way of relating to our future possibilities, then I also need to explain how we can relate to our past, to the attitudes we leave behind if we undergo conversion. This is what I will do now.

Once we are constituted as objects 'for-others', and the world escapes us into an infinite series of hidden aspects, we find ourselves as beings 'in-the-midst-of-the-world'. This implies that like those things amongst which we find ourselves, we have various aspects which are not revealed to our present point of view upon the world. Although that means we are now 'things' towards which we can adopt an explicit intentional relation, in such a way that reflection upon ourselves is made possible, this is not the main change that we undergo. For attention to this entity in the world to be reflection we must be able to recognise that upon which we reflect as ourselves, and this means we must be acquainted with ourselves as this entity in the world at a pre-reflective level. So a deeper change is, as Sartre puts it, that the self as being-for-others comes to 'haunt' the unreflective consciousness. There is, that is to say, a direct and genuinely *reflexive* consciousness of myself *through* the Other (Gardner, 2009: 128), in which there is no gap between my 'self' and the object that I am for others. Strictly speaking I am not simply *an* object for others, I am all of the 'objects' into which others can divide me, e.g., my actions, my motivations, my thoughts, my body, etc. Although each of these things is intimately bound up in my own experience, their occurrence together for the other, who only sees there external (hence, contingent) relation to one another, constitutes me as one for whom it is 'wholly contingent that it should be *this* order' (BN 333) into which things arrange themselves, *this* face that things should show to me, *these* attitudes which should be mine. I have already noted several ways in which our experience would be impoverished if it were not for the recognition of a distinction between myself and

others. I now want to draw attention to one final implication of this, that although our present must always be unified with our past in one sense, we cannot *be* this past except as a being-for-others.

Unless my practical identities and their attendant perspectives upon the world are possible objects 'for-others', they cannot be objects for me. In that case their only life would derive from the fact that I am enacting them, such that once I have undergone a shift in my identity, who I was and how the world appeared to me before this shift, would simply dissolve. There would be nothing for me to look back upon and claim as my own former attitude or attitudes. But once I am constituted as a being-in-the-midst-of-the-world, there is something for those attitudes to *be*, something in which they are anchored even as I give them up. Once I am for others, then, the attitudes and identities which we no longer inhabit become, as Sartre puts it, part of 'the ever growing totality of the in-itself which we are' (BT 138). But this is only possible if we are capable of being, at the pre-reflective level, something in the midst-of-the-world. Without being constituted in this way, there is a sense in which, although our previous 'personal' self would have shaped our situation, would be part of the contingency into which we are thrown, it would not be 'us' in any way. But if our past is nothing for us, it cannot be something from which we, at present, take our orientation, we cannot give to it a meaning, and so there could be nothing like, for example, repentance.

Being for others not only projects a future of different possible ways of being an agent, then, it also ensures that if we realize any of those possibilities, the identities which we give up in doing so can settle out into a past from which we can take our orientation – a past upon which we can reflect, or to which others can refer, and which throughout every subsequent change, nevertheless remains our own.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to develop a detailed phenomenological account of agency. I began with the claim that in order to understand agency it is crucial that we understand how we come to have a grip upon reasons. This is a view that is shared by Christine Korsgaard, and I took her work on the sources of normativity and the nature of agency as the point of departure for my investigation.

As well as offering phenomenological clarification of the nature of the attitudes (broadly understood) which sustain normativity, I also explored those which hold open the space of possibilities within which self-constitution unfolds the kind of understanding and the mode of attunement that must inevitably be in place prior to any stance we might take upon what we have reason to think or to do. Finally, I suggested that a phenomenological approach, can also address the question of how there can be a practical standpoint at all. It is in this context that I turned, in the final chapter, to Sartre. I argued that what I call our 'existential identity' holds the agent, and so the practical standpoint, together. Drawing upon Sartre's account of Being-for-Others, I defended the claim that the condition of possibility of our existential identity is what Sartre calls 'fundamental shame'. I now give a more detailed breakdown of what I have argued.

In Chapter 1 I offered a detailed account of Korsgaard's position. I also considered Steven Crowell's interpretation of her account; I argued that he fails to come to grips with several important features of her view. This afforded me an opportunity not only to clarify my own understanding of Korsgaard's position, but also to explain how the account that I have developed in this thesis relates to hers. Unlike some of her other Heideggerian critics, I have not found as much pressure to set the largely Heidegger-inspired account that I have offered here in opposition to Korsgaard's account. And with the exception of Chapter 5's discussion of moral normativity, the view I have defended throughout is, I think, broadly consistent with her position.

Korsgaard's account of the attitudes, very broadly understood, which bring norms to life for us and of how these attitudes arise turns upon the notions of 'practical identity' and 'self-constitution'. The first chapter identified these notions as the

aspects of Korsgaard's account of practical normativity which was in most need of development. In Chapters 2 and 3 I drew upon Heidegger's phenomenology of agency to develop my own account of these things. Chapter 2 did so with a focus upon Heidegger's account of understanding, while Chapter 3 does this with a focus upon Heidegger's account of mood. I argued that our practical identities are best characterized as forms of affectively attuned, pre-reflective self-understanding. Throughout this discussion I also described the dynamic through which these arise. I characterised that dynamic – the activity of 'self-constitution' – as a way of being delivered over to having things matter to us that is also a way of seizing upon the situation as mattering in some way, and hence, as a complex blend of the active and passive. An account of the attitudes which breathe life into norms, however, is only one aspect of what I have suggested that Heidegger has to offer. I have, therefore, also explored the way in which on his view, understanding and mood hold open the space of possibilities within which our identities (and with them our reasons) are constituted. In this way, what I have offered goes beyond an account of the sources of normativity.

Chapter 4, which concluded the discussion of Part I, raised the question of where reflection fits into the kind of account that I set out in Chapters 2 and 3. I offered, in answer to that question, a phenomenological sketch of practical reasoning, which describes how this activity should be understood in relation to our other activities, our identities and to the ongoing process of self-constitution in which we are caught up. Responding to Mark Okrent, in the second half of this chapter, I explored his suggestion that the condition of normative breakdown which Heidegger calls Anxiety and Korsgaard calls 'complete practical normative scepticism' is impossible. I argued against Okrent, suggesting that he had failed to appreciate the connection between the aspects of Heidegger's account that he finds attractive, and the account of mood upon which it ultimately rests.

Chapter 5 marked the beginning of Part II of the thesis. In this chapter I introduced Korsgaard's account of moral normativity. This account centres upon the notion of our human identity, and the claim that this is also, necessarily a moral identity. Unlike her general account of normativity, I suggested, Korsgaard's account of specifically moral normativity is highly problematic. I have argued that there are serious flaws in

the transcendental arguments that she offers in an attempt to establish the necessity of moral norms. On the view I have defended in opposition to Korsgaard, moral normativity isn't interestingly different from practical normativity. This aligns my position with Humean constructivists like Sharon Street, Carla Bagnoli, and James Lemnan. The transition to Korsgaard's account of moral normativity is accompanied by a more general shift in focus in the thesis, from the personal aspects of our identity to its more anonymous dimensions. Despite rejecting Korsgaard's claim that our identity as 'just someone' necessarily has a moral dimension, I suggested that, by approaching the topic of moral normativity in this way, her account does bring to light something interesting, because her notion of our 'human identity' captures a genuinely important, anonymous form of practical identity.

Chapter 6 took its point of departure from the anonymous form of practical identity that Korsgaard uncovers. Placing stress upon the way in which this identity involves understanding ourselves as 'just someone', I suggested that it can be illuminated further by exploring it in relation to Heidegger's notions of *das Man* and 'everydayness', which offer a phenomenological account of being 'just someone'. Having rejected Korsgaard's account of morality in the previous chapter, I suggested that one thing that the account I have defended does leave room for is something like Aristotle's virtue ethics.

As well as offering an account of the role of our 'human identity' in our lives, I also explored the idea that this may be in some way contingent. I suggested that this is exactly what happens in the condition that Heidegger calls 'authenticity', and I concluded that this condition is in principle possible, arguing moreover that our other identities can survive the collapse of *this* identity. One thing that Heidegger's account of authenticity does bring to light, I suggested, is another form of anonymous identity, a way of understanding ourselves in terms of one's possibilities. In contrast to the normative conception of our humanity that I explored earlier in that chapter, I called this 'modal conception of our humanity'.

The modal conception of our humanity, I argued, involves an understanding of the possibilities of normative identification that we share with other people, i.e., the range of practical identities that it is open to 'one' to adopt. In Chapter 7 I consider

an important dimension of this. If the possibilities are 'one's' and we are this 'one' ourselves, then there must be some sense in which those possibilities are open to us, some sense in which they represent practical identities that we could at least in principle come to adopt. I suggested that, if we ever did come to adopt some of these possibilities it would involve a kind of normative conversion, and so the practical standpoint, the standpoint we inhabit as agents, must be such that we can undergo such conversions. At this stage I turned to Street and Sartre, to examine the notion of normative conversion. To accommodate normative conversion we need to acknowledge a deep unity that we enjoy as agents. This unity is bound up with the way we are open onto the world as a space of possibilities as 'just someone'. I called this dimension of what it is to be an agent our 'existential identity'.

In the second half of Chapter 7 I asked how this dimension of our identity (i.e., our deep unity) could arise and upon what it depends. To answer *this* question is to give an account of the constitution of our existential identity. I turned to Sartre's account of 'Being-for-Others', which I have claimed provides the materials for such an account. Drawing upon Sartre's discussion of shame, I emphasised the distinction he draws between mundane and 'original' or 'fundamental' shame. I have argued that we are only prepared for, and capable of surviving, normative conversions, if we have been exposed to the other. And it is, therefore, only in the context of 'fundamental shame' that we are unified across shifts in our practical identity, including the shift we would undergo if our identity collapsed, as Heidegger believes it does in 'Anxiety' [*Angst*] and Korsgaard in 'complete practical normative scepticism'.

It is fundamental shame, therefore, that holds open the practical standpoint that we inhabit as agents. And it is within the context that this provides that the pervasive anxiety in which we project the limit of our ability to be, as the possibilities of the 'for-the-sake-of-which', arises. Anxiety in turn provides a context within which we can take, and be delivered into, the various stands upon who we are and upon what matters to us that make up our identities. And finally, with all of this in place, we constitute our identity concretely by negotiating the demands under which we find ourselves as we go about our circumspective dealings in and with the world.

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