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Telling habits

A habit-based approach to narrative identity

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Introduction

Personhood and personal identity constitute long-standing problems in philosophical discussion, as the concepts of what is a person and how persons persist through time lie at the dead centre of many issues, and especially of metaphysical and ethical ones. Among the incredible variety and richness of problems that persons display, there is one issues this thesis focus on: the relation between the notion of person and personal identity, and the embodied condition of persons. It's a relation that has long been in the focus of philosophical analysis, and indeed constitutes perhaps one of the thorniest problems that persons present: while psychological and cognitive features are often taken for granted in the concept of person, the embodied condition of persons has often been cast as less relevant to understanding the concept. The goal of this thesis is to establish a conceptual connection between the notion of person and personal identity, and the embodied dimension of persons.

Chapter One, "Framing the problems of persons", introduces the main conceptual points developed in the recent philosophical debate with regard to the notion of personhood and personal identity. It first offers an overview of the principal solutions that have been offered to the problem of how personal identity persist through time, and of the discussion pertaining the criteria of personhood. The analysis then follows the evolution of the debate by introducing the notions of practical and metaphysical identity and reconstructing the conceptual steps that underlie their separation; it further explores the consequences of this distinction, in particular in terms of the role played by conventions and the social dimension in the constitution of the concept of a person. The goal of the chapter is to both reconstruct the logic(s) according to which the debate moves, and to problematize some of its aspects, in particular the disparaged role the body is assigned in many conceptual solutions. The chapter concludes by endorsing a notion of person that emphasizes its practical and socially-informed dimension, while arguing that this notion still falls short of offering a view of personal identity adequately connected to the embodied dimension of the person.

Chapter Two, "A narrative approach to personal identity", introduces the narrative approach as particularly well-suited to respond to the problems of personal identity, especially as they emerged within the psychological paradigm that has ruled much of the debate. In the first place, the concept of narrative is introduced by means of Marya Schechtman's *The constitution of the selves* (1996), an influential narrative approach to personal identity. Schechtman's work allows to structure a notion of personal identity both practical and socially-informed, but that still falls short of being deeply embodied. Next, the narrative approach is briefly contextualixed with respect to its genesis and the evolution of the concept of narrative; the analysis then focusses on the continuity thesis, the thesis that narrative identity is structured in continuity with the dimension of action and experience, as it can be reconstructed through the work of Paul Ricoeur (1984) and David Carr (1986). In order to

better contextualize the narrative paradigm at hand, some of the main objections that have been moved against it are presented. Schechtman's work is then again taken under consideration through an analysis of *Staying alive* (2014), in which Schechtman futher refines her approach to personal identity, moving from a theory of narrative self-constitution to the notion of person-life. The complex architecture of her work is discussed in light of the continuity thesis, and in particular to the way narrative self-conceptions interact with the embodied levels of personal identity. This brings the discussion on to the themes of how embodied experience is related to narrative self-conceptions; and in particular, how such relation fails to be concretized in narrative agency, and how such shortcoming is connected to failure to fully embody personal identity.

Chapter Three, "Telling habits", intends to answer some of the problems that have emerged within the relation of narrative identity, narrative agency, and embodied dimension of action and experience. It does so by way of the concept of habits and habitual agency developed in the pragmatist tradition, and in particular by John Dewey. The chapter offers an overview of the pragmatist concept of habit; in particular, the notion of habitual agency is defended as a form of agency that is rooted in the agent's embodiment and embedded in the social context. Next, it is argued that habitual agency offers a fitting notion to some of the problems of narrative agency, and in particular, of how narrative agency and narrative actions come about and are actualized. Habitual agency can both be employed in service of narrative agency, but also autonomously contribuite to it. The notion of narrative agency as habitually informed translates to a strongly embodied and socially embedded notion of the person.

Chapter One. Framing the problems of persons

0. Introduction

The problems that persons pose to philosophy are all the most singular as persons – or, as we usually call them, people – are everywhere around us. Indeed, dealing with persons makes up a large part of our everyday life, and we do so with a certain degree of self-confidence. We routinely have little to no difficulty understanding what is and what is not a person, re-identifying them correctly, treating them more or less appropriately, and understanding each other when we talk about other persons and their adventures through life. This commonplace understanding of what persons are and how they behave themselves can be put under stress when we are faced with some slightly less ordinary situations, such as more or less radical changes of character, the onset and progress of more or less debilitating physical or mental illnesses, the attribution of responsibility in ambiguous situations, and the like. Some of these situations stretch to its limits our normal understanding of what persons are, how they go on existing, and how they should be treated; but, even in such situations, most people will have quite strong intuitions on what is going on. The problem is that in just such situations we often realize that our fellow persons, with whom we usually get along, have quite different intuitions. Indeed, they seem to have a very different understanding of how persons work. Perhaps what is peculiar is not that we should not understand how people work despite dealing with them daily; but that we manage to deal with them smoothly and effectively when we don't understand how they work. We thus all have a good practical understanding of persons. When this everyday grasp slips, we are left to wonder what exactly we were grasping and how far our disagreements with our fellow persons actually go.

If we look at the kind of situations we are left perplexed at, it might look as if we are the source of our own problems. Why should one concept, such as that of being a person or being the same person over time, cover so much ground? I mentioned changes of characters, illnesses, and the attribution of responsibility as matters we seek to unravel through the concept of person. Other matters include: issues at the beginning of life, such as the right to abortion, and at the end of life, such as the issuing of advanced life directives; human and animal rights; environmental rights and the responsibility principle; the advantages, disadvantages, and general consequences of technological developments and innovations; and, more broadly yet, matters of social and economic justice. The list could go on. Persons often appear in such debates under a normative question: what can and cannot be done to persons? How should persons be treated? To what are they entitled? And sometimes, the issue is posed as a descriptive one, that is, under which description should we identify an entity as a person? And under which description should we re-identify persons through time so that we may assign responsibility, recognize entitlement to a given treatment, respect previously expressed wishes, assess

responsibility, etc.? We give both descriptive and normative accounts of persons, and we do so in a way that roughly expresses some form of complementarity: falling under the description of 'person' opens the way to being treated as a person. On the other hand we often feel like an entity that would hardly descriptively qualify as a person still deserves to be treated as such. We employ the term more or less liberally, and we employ it often. It should hardly come as a surprise then that it shows both flexibility and ambiguity.

Reflecting the variety of issues that persons are caught up in, philosophy has dealt with persons from various points of view: from metaphysics to ethics, to political and social philosophy, to moral psychology, to action theory, just to mention a few. The downside of this broad, persisting interest is an overgrown garden of theories, views, hypotheses and paradigms, clustered around the most amazing variety of problems.

Philosophers have long been obsessed with clearing up the matter of persons. In doing so, they themselves have produced such a quantity of concepts of persons to fill many books. In such books, persons have had many fantastic adventures, many of which real persons could only dream of, and in the course of such adventures have been reduced to strains of psychological relations, to bodies, to brains, and to pieces of brains; declared to be souls, simple matters, and honorific titles; they have been re-distributed over time and space, re-arranged into several other persons, have been split and glued together, and in many good cases they have straight-up disappeared. We will cover some of these adventures in the following pages, but the discussion will be limited to the most recent developments rather than tracing the long, nerve-wracking history of the concept. Starting in the 1960s, a strain of the debate about persons and personal identity rose to prominence: haltingly, the debate on personal identity expanded to embrace reflections and problems concerning *what matters* in personal identity. While the focus had first been on personal identity as a metaphysical issue, now the problem lay in the role self-concern, responsibility, and self-interest(s) in determining survival, bringing normative, ethical and empirical theses into the matter. This turn in focus was precipitated by theoretical elaboration on thought experiments involving fission, the separation of consciousness, and itself led to a shift of interest and perspective that eventually evolved into the thesis that identity is not what matters in survival; or, from a normative point of view, that it should not be what matters. This debate had had a somewhat false start some centuries before: it was started by John Locke but did not blossom the way it did until more recent years. Nonetheless, the first seeds of this matter are to be found in his treatment of personal identity in book IX of *The Treatise on Human Understanding*, where Locke set the direction of the debate on what is a person and how they continue through time (Schechtman 1996). Indeed, Locke's reflections fathered what is *the* most popularly held and enduring, if contested, approach to personal identity: he wrote:

> [...] we must consider what *Idea* the Word it is applied to stands for: It being one thing to be the same *Substance*, another the same *Man*, and a third the same *Person*, if *Person*, *Man*, and *Substance* are three Names standing for three different *Ideas*; for such as is the *Idea* belonging to that Name, such must be the *Identity*. [...] For as to this point of being the same *self* it matters not whether this present *self be* made up of the same or other Substances; I being as much concern'd and as justly accountable for any Action was done a thousand Years since, appropriated to me now by this self-consciousness, as I am, for what I did the last moment. (Locke 1694/1975, II, 27.16)

Here Locke distinguishes being the same man (the same *animal*) from being the same person, the same rational being; and, importantly, he distinguishes it from being the same soul, as well. Indeed, here Locke asserts that being the same person does not mean being the same substance, but rather the same consciousness; a fruitful insight. But this is not all: Locke is also arguing that the problem of persons is a rather false problem: it is a problem of misunderstanding, of semantic confusion about what we mean when we say 'person', as distinguished by 'man'. Locke perhaps hoped to clean up the misunderstanding in a timely manner, and to go on to talk about persons. But four centuries later, the misunderstanding seems here to stay.

In fact, the debate on persons and personal identity has shown, if nothing else, two things: first, that there is an array of questions that can be asked about personhood and personal identity; second, that these questions may have different *relata* altogether – that it might be the case that not one single entity or concept of personhood can satisfyingly answer them all, and that 'personhood', as well as 'personal identity', have several, overlapping and ambiguous meanings. Inquiry into some of these meanings and their applications will engage us for the length of this chapter. I do not mean to explore all the nooks and crooks the debate has gotten itself into: others have dissected and expounded it thoroughly. Rather, this first chapter aims, first, to provide a bird's-eye view of the debate, in order to provide a general grasp on its difficulties and proposed solutions. The discussion will follow problems, rather than solutions, in order to offer a general perspective of the kind of interests and complications that arise around persons. Numerous causes of tension run through the discussion, precisely because the concept of person appears in such a range of situations and delicate matters, each having its own internal difficulties. The struggle to make ends meet – to harmonize the concept across so many differing problems – has compelled most to dissect the issue in a variety of smaller ones. The idea is still the same as Locke's: that there might be a fundamental misunderstanding in what we mean when we say '(same) person' in different contexts. Following one such lead, in order to see how it reacts within the other issues presented by personal identity, will be the second goal of the chapter.

The main goal of this chapter is not, thus, an in-depth discussion of each of the topics it faces, but to give a sufficiently comprehensive and selective introduction to the debate and its internal mechanisms, tensions and strains, as the preferred solution to one problem of persons will often occasion difficulties in another. This to-and-fro structure will afford the occasion to establish, and familiarize with, the lexicon I will use for the rest of the discussion. Getting the gist of the debate, understanding what is at stake – why it is so important and why persons get so up in arms about it – is fundamental in understanding its developments, which often appear quite detached from the concrete reality that issued them. The concerns that motivate any approach to the problem of persons are to be understood as well as the solutions they offer; and it will be seen that from the same concerns, very different solutions can spring up.

The first section thus opens with an overview of some of the various meanings of 'identity' that have been identified when talking about persons, as we will keep incurring in different declinations of 'identity' throughout the chapter. The second section explores the two main approaches that have been developed to explain how persons persist through time, the biological and the psychological approach to personal identity. It is one of the lengthier sections, and will focus mostly on the psychological approach, as its popularity and variations offer a perfect opportunity to showcase the problems of personal identity. The third section introduces the distinction between metaphysical and practical identity, mostly following Marya Schechtman's work (1996) in the construction of an alternative paradigm through which to explore the problem of personal identity. Here the clash between notions of identity and (what matters in) survival will become evident, overlapping with questions of continuity. The fourth section deals with the problem of personhood: that is, what is needed for an entity to be a person. Incidentally, it might appear strange that the question *What is a person?* should not appear sooner; but much like a Möbius strip, these two crucial, classical questions - *What is a person?*, and, *How does a person continue existing?* – intersect in such a way that it is hard to keep track of where one ends and the other begins; so that, no matter where one starts, one will eventually end up deep into the other. The discussion will in any case be restricted to human persons, as they are paradigmatic examples of our standard about persons. I will only stop briefly on such characteristics and will discuss at greater length how such characteristics interplay with other elements of personhood: the normative dimension and the social dimension of personhood. Such problems will ease the discussion into the fifth section, where the matter of conventionalism about persons will be taken under exam. The sixth section deals with some of the problems of method that discussions on persons has encountered or created, and occasions a re-interpretation of the problems of the debate.

The goal of the first six sections is then to offer a perspectival reading of the debate, by showing its structure and the logic(s) moving it, and bringing into relief some of the theoretical lines around which is organized: between biological and psychological identity, the social and non-social constitution of persons, reductionism and antireductionism, practical and metaphysical distinctions. Discussion of methods will have to wait until the sixth section. Still, a broadly naturalistic framework is assumed throughout the discussion, by which I mean that only issues compatible with the findings of natural sciences will be taken into consideration; the soul then, the great and now forgotten protagonist of the discussion, will not be debated. At any rate naturalism should work as a boundary within which we can freely move; it should not be taken to imply strict physicalism.

In the seventh section, the issue of practical identity is taken again under consideration in relation to the notion and the role the body has in its architecture. In particular, it will be argued that while it is often placed under issues of metaphysical identity, the body should instead compare in a notion of practical identity – because it takes part of practical concerns, and because it is an embodied perspective the one that structures practical relations. This last point occasions a brief dip into the paradigm of extended, embodied, enacted and embedded cognition and its possible use in the matters of person; it also offers the opportunity to distinguish between the concept of person and the concept of self. The eighth and last section concludes the chapter by recapitulating the findings and opens to the second chapter, where the problems encountered in the first will be revisited in light of a practical perspective on persons.

1.1. The identity of persons: four problems

As in so many philosophical problems, the most difficult thing about the problem of persons is to ask the right questions. The second most difficult thing is to understand them. Persons pose two sorts of problems, roughly. The first is the problem of personhood, of the conditions to be fulfilled to be a person. The second is the problem of personal identity, of the conditions under which persons persist through time. In themselves easily formulated, such problems are in fact entangled with a number of issues. Before starting to sort them out, a first effort must be made to distinguish the several meanings of 'identity' that will appear in the discussion. I will rely on Michael Quante's (2017, 4) work as a starting point in laying down the most relevant meanings of identity found in the debate. Quante sorts the problem of the identity of persons into four smaller problems, each involving a different use of 'identity':

(1) The conditions of personhood problem: This is the problem of *qualitative* identity, of which properties or capacities an entity must have in order to belong to the class of persons. All entities belonging to the same kind have the same qualitative identity: two sheets of paper from the same ream have the same qualities, although they are numerically distinct; the same goes for persons. The attempts to individuate the *necessary* and *sufficient* conditions to be to be a person are often configured as a list of person-making characteristics.

(2) The unity of person problem: What makes one person *only* one person at a point in time? This is usually known as the problem of *synchronic* identity, and mostly comes up whenever the standard equation holding that for every human being there is one person gives away (for example, when we are confronted with persons having a split personality, or with so-called 'group persons'). The answer to matters of synchronic identity may be implied in the conditions of personhood, or not. We will deal with this problem only in passing.

(3) The persistence of person problem: What conditions must hold so that person A a t_1 is the same person as person B a t_2? This is doubtlessly one of the more enthusiastically debated problems of persons, and its thorniness has merited it a number of names: the problem of personal identity; the problem of diachronic identity; the problem of identity over time; and (controversially, as we will see) the problem of survival. It is a variant of the classical metaphysical problem of how things persist through change. We are concerned here not with qualitative identity, but with *numerical* identity.[1]

The problem here is presented in its most well-known, although problematic, formulation. It is problematic because it takes for granted that both A and B are persons (at t_1 and t_2, respectively), and

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[1] Quante (2020, 57) rightly points out that the usage of numerical identity here is improper, as numerical identity per se is not connected to time: it is a relation of self-identity. I will nonetheless sometime call it numerical identity, since it is a widely spread usage as a way to distinguish formal, logical identity and different kinds of identity through time. Further, it is not necessary that the relation of being the same person might also be formulated as an identity relation, as stage theorists do (cfr. Sider 2001); but I will not concern myself with this position here.

what must be found is the relation that makes them the *same* person. But it has been argued (Olson 2007) that what should be asked is what makes it so that person A at t_1 is the same *entity* at t_2 – rather than the same *person*. This way of formulating the question keeps open the possibility that a person may survive to a later point in time even if they cease to be a person. In pointing out this difference Eric Olson, a philosopher long engaged in defending biological positions in the debate of personal identity, is trying to formulate a question in *personal ontology* that concerns who we are fundamentally. Olson is here appealing to the notion of personal ontology as used by Judith Jarvit Thomson as a theory field different than 'personal identity' on which much of the literature focuses. The remark concerns the fact that the criterion of personal identity (under a particular characterization) and its ontological counterpart can come apart; the conditions of existence of beings like us (human persons, whatever we are) may not be the same as those of persons (whatever *they* are). It is a distinction that recognizes that humans are persons, but also indicates that the kind to which we must look to check our persistence conditions should be *human* rather than *persons*; that we might be persons, but this might not exhaust the matter of what we are.

The matter can also be posed like this: Do the conditions of personhood entail criteria which determine what relations must hold between A at t_1 and B at t_2 so that A is B?

The answer is *yes* if we take being a person as a substance sortal, that is, a kind of entity that has its own persistence conditions. Being a cat is a substance sortal: the criteria of identity of cats are determined by their (natural) kind, the kind *cat*. Similarly, if being a person is a substance sortal, then our persistence conditions will be given by the kind *person*, and its persistence conditions, which we are set out to find. As one belongs essentially to the kind one belongs to, if one is a person and *person* is a substance sortal, then being a person is an *essential* property of persons. This means that a person cannot cease to be a person and go on existing, much like a cat cannot cease to become a cat and continue existing. Whenever someone ceases to be a person, then one stops *existing* altogether, and whatever is left is a different kind of thing (a certain amount of body-shaped organic material, for example). This is what I will call *person essentialism* (DeGrazia 2005, 30).

But the answer is *no* if we take *person* to be a phase sortal concept, like 'student' is: a kind to which one belongs temporarily. One may genuinely be a student, but one does not go out of existence when one stops being a student. Being a student is just a phase of one's life, a property one has for a certain stretch of time, but it does not entail autonomous persistence conditions. On this view, one may obtain personhood at some point in their life and may also lose it later on without ceasing to be the same thing (cfr. Wiggins 1976, 1980; Tennant 1997).

We may then find a characterisation (of the criteria of personhood of) A and B that entails criteria of

persistence: for example, we might say that persons are animals endowed with certain status for a certain period of their lives. But we might also adopt a definition of personhood that does not entail any criteria of persistence, that are then left to be sorted out independently. If personhood is not a sortal term, then we will have to find out what sortal concept may resolve the persistence problem of a given entity. In fact, the way these first three questions are reciprocally connected depends on whether person is a sortal concept or not, that is, whether the concept offers identity and persistence criteria. As long as these issues are not cleared, Olson's formulation of the persistence question is to be favoured, as it does not prejudice the matter from the start in favour of any given solution.

(4) The structure of personality problem: The last problem seems to be a bit different, as it regards the kind of reflective relation a person has with themselves. Persons take towards themselves reflective, critical and evaluative attitudes; they exhibit what has been called a normative self-conception (Korsgaard 1996). The problem of the structure of personality is the problem of identity understood as the kind of person one is in terms of values, character, inclinations; the kind of identity involved in the 'search for identity' during one's formative years (and beyond), in an identity's crisis, and in much of our everyday talk. This sense of identity, apparently of a different kind altogether from the first three senses, will reveal its importance later on.

This concludes the general overview of the kind of questions the personal identity debate presents, although these are far from being *all* the questions that can be asked about personal identity, which can be numbered in the dozens (Rorty 1996, 1 ff. offers a good overview). We will go through additional questions and problems as they come up, much like we will have many occasions to turn back to the problems presented and their formulation. Because of their relevance and extent, these four questions serve well as the starting point of most inquiries. Each question highlights a different aspect of being a person, often squashed together to create a theoretical vertigo difficult to navigate. Quante's partition is meant to highlight how such questions are interrelated, but, to his mind, impossible to reduce to one another without infringing on their legitimate field. The fact that most of these questions are usually referred to while talking about 'identity' is part of the problem, and I will adopt Quante's classification through the discussion in order to keep the confusion at bay. Nonetheless, Quante's partition is not the only way to go about them, nor devoid of implications: it's already theoretically laden, and just how will become evident as the inquiry unfolds.

1.2. The persistence of persons problem

1. How do persons persist?

How do persons persist through time? We generally do not question too much whether the people we meet today at the office are the same we met yesterday and the day before that and we will probably meet again tomorrow. But there are cases when this common-sense understanding of the continuity of persons fails. Someone has a freak accident and falls into a coma; someone starts forgetting things and chunks of their life; you look through an old album and struggle to recognize yourself in middle school. More than melancholic moments to reflect on the brevity of life and the harshness of adulthood, these are occasions to ask what we are really dealing with when we deal with persons. Falling into a vegetative state, losing one's mind, and losing one's hopes and dreams, seem very different situations to which we may apply, curiously, the same pensive sentences: «They are no longer with us», «I can't say that I recognize them anymore», «He is not the same person», or variants thereof. What do we *mean* by that? How can these different situations all warrant the same considerations? Are we speaking literally or figuratively? Just how do persons go on through time, what are the things persons may survive and what are, instead, life-changing, or life-ending?

Of course, we ask these questions about an array of things, just not persons. Staring at a table full of half-drunk glasses at a party, I might wonder which one was mine. This affords a distinction between evidential questions – How do I know which glass is mine? By looking at the one whose smudges match the color of my lipstick – and substantial questions – Which glass is mine? It is not the case that the glass is mine because it has my lipstick smudged on it – that is a consequence of the fact that it is my glass. The glass is mine as I drank from it, thus leaving lipstick over it. What counts as evidence of personal identity, as an answer to an epistemological question, is not the same as what counts as the constitutive relation, the metaphysical-cum-semantic criterion of personal identity. This distinction between evidential and constitutive criteria of personal identity, while in principle immaculate, might result to be less rigid than it appears. It certainly poses a recurring problem to the various criteria proposed to track personal identity through time, as such criteria could be evidence for survival, rather than being constitutive of it (Shoemaker and Swinburne 1984, 20).

The persistence question takes the form of, What is the relation such that person A at t_1 exists at t_2? Ideally the answer should give the logically necessary and sufficient conditions for a person identified at one time to be the same as an entity identified at another. The question in its usual formulation structures persistence through time as a relation binding together two, or more, synchronic moments of a person, often called a 'time-slice' or 'person-stage' (McInerney 1991). Since persons, quite like human beings, animals, and most things in general, have a temporal extension, it is conceivable that

they exist at a time for all the time that they exist: person-stages are such temporal slices of persons, and the persistence question then strives to explicate just how such synchronic slices are tied together through time.[2]

Answers to the persistence problem are varied and complex, but they generally fall within two broad families: the biological approach and the psychological approach.

2. The biological approach

The biological approach, in its broadest, most generic formulation, states that what it takes for a person to be the same over time is spatiotemporal continuity of physical matter. This position can be declined in a number of ways. One of the most popular versions is animalism, according to which persons are basically and essentially human animals, and thus the persistence conditions of persons are those of members of animals of the species *Homo sapiens* or should be worked out within the metaphysics of human animals. Animalism turns the metaphysical question of personal identity into a question about the persistence conditions for human animals, and organisms in general (and perhaps material things, such as artifacts, in general). This is not meant to suggest that the persistence conditions of organisms are clear; they are not. But, at any rate and unsurprisingly, the persistence conditions of organisms are widely regarded to be given through spatiotemporal physical continuity. It's hard to sincerely wonder whether the kitten rescued some years ago from the street is the *same* animal as the cat now napping on my lap. The cat has had some changes but is the same animal, in virtue of the fact that there hold certain physical relations through metabolic change, and its present material conditions are tied through lawful causation to its precedent material states.

Animalism is often coupled with an understanding of personhood as a phase sortal: being a person is merely a phase in the life of a human animal. In this vein, Olson argues that 'person' should be understood as a functional kind (1997, 31ff). 'Locomotor' is similarly a functional kind, applying to anything that moves autonomously; 'person' functions in the same manner, as it can be applied to anything that shows the characters of being personal, as, for example, being rational and self-aware, and morally accountable. Endorsement of animalism has prompted the correction of the formulation of the question we have seen before: we should no longer ask what it means to be a person, but 'Who are we, the kind of entity that qualifies for being a human person?'. Olson and animalists ask then not a question about persons, but a *nature* question – this is what they mean by personal ontology.

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[2] Person-stages are intuitively easy to grasp: there is a person-stage for me writing this words and there is a different person-stage of me preparing dinner in a few hours. Details are, however, less agreed upon. How long are person-stages? Do they constitute persons or are they, rather, abstractions, parasite of the unity of the person? Can any person really exist for, say, less than a second? Although these questions will come up during the discussion, I will not pursue their answer explicitly (cfr. McInerney 1991).

The appeal of animalism, and of biological approaches in general, is straightforward: it gives a no-nonsense criterion of identity, one that can actually be tested out and that adheres to (some of) our practices of social interaction between persons; we usually acknowledge that we are animals, and we need the same care and satisfactions many mammals require. It fits easily within evolutionary theory and dispenses personal identity from any mystery. But it is far from being the default choice when philosophers, and non philosophers, debate personal identity. Locke's discrimination of animals and persons, mentioned in the Introduction, is equally intuitive, albeit for different reasons; and in order to understand why animalism falters, it is necessary to explore its major rival, the psychological approach.

3. The psychological approach

The psychological approach to personal identity is by far the most popular choice when debating personal identity, drawing the favors of philosophers and laypeople alike. I will linger on the psychological approach as its ramifications must be understood thoroughly; this will give us occasion to explore the main problems an inquiry about persons is concerned with. Broadly put, the psychological criterion holds that person A at t_1 is the same as person B at t_2 if they are psychologically continuous: if the psychological states of A are in the right kind of relation with the psychological states of B. Such views are called neo-Lockean, as they move from Locke's statement that:

> [...] I think, is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it [...]. in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being: and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done. (Locke 1694/1975, II, 27.9)

What Locke is arguing for here, briefly put, is the idea that sameness of consciousness is the right way to identify persons over time, as through sameness of consciousness one retains self-knowledge and can be aware of past moments and thus take responsibility for them. And this is what matters in persons: their capacity to act and be considered as agents, engaged in situations where practical concerns such as caring for one's future or taking account for one's past actions matter. Thus, Locke rejects sameness of substance (be it material, like the body, or spiritual, like the soul) as an identity criterion, as they do not grant self-knowledge and what follows from it in terms of practical concerns. Locke's stance had explicitly ethical aims (Rovane 1998, chap. 1): by tracking psychological continuity we might track moral agency and moral responsibility, and in general relationships of

practical importance. Marya Schechtman (1996, 73ff.) individuates four such relationships of practical importance: moral responsibility, self-interested concern, compensation, and survival. The thesis is then that continuity of mental life is needed in order for one to care for these practical interests and to be held responsible for one's actions. The pull behind psychological theories of identity lies in the profoundly rooted belief that being a person is a matter of having certain high-order cognitive capacities that allow one to have a particular form of consciousness, self-consciousness, and to be considered responsible for one's actions. Psychological theories thus rest on the intuition that what is most characterizing and decisive in personal identity is the continuation of some psychological characteristics or relations.

The persuasiveness of the psychological criterion is also due to the kind of intuitions emerging from thought experiments. The debate on personhood and personal identity has historically made generous use of thought experiments as a way to test intuitions and theories (cfr. Wilkes1988, Gendler 2004). In the following pages, I will introduce some of the most popular and debated thought experiments, without which the arguments advanced would hardly be comprehensible. Locke started the trend with a thought experiment, popularly called 'The prince and the cobbler', that sparks the so-called transplant or transfer intuition:

> For should the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince's past life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler, as soon as deserted by his own soul, every one sees he would be the same person with the prince, accountable only for the prince's actions: but who would say it was the same man? The body too goes to the making the man, and would, I guess, to every- body determine the man in this case, wherein the soul, with all its princely thoughts about it, would not make another man: but he would be the same cobbler to every one besides himself. (Locke 1694/1975, II, 27.15)

Most people agree with Locke, or find it hard to resist his conclusions: 'swapping' consciousness, the prince is now in the cobbler's body, and the cobbler is now in the prince's body. The transplant intuition is then that 'we' follow wherever our psychological life goes: we might be psychological subjects for which no particular body or tissue is necessary to survive.

The criterion seems to fit neatly with our practices, as what we most hold dear about persons – their character, their memories, their attitudes, etc. – seem indeed to be either a psychological quality or a psychological relation, rather than an organic quality or a biological relation. The practical relations involving persons, too, seem to be psychological: blame and praise are attributed according to one's moral responsibility in a given action; and moral responsibility takes the form of a psychological relation. On the other hand, bodily continuity merely instantiates psychological life, which is not bound by it.

Let's consider a different thought experiment to bring the point home, the brain-transplant thought experiment (cfr. Williams 1970):

> Person A and person B are going to undertake an operation that will put A's brain into B's body, and B's brain into A's body. They are informed that one of the two resultant persons is going to be tortured, while the other will be given a large sum of money. Person A and person B are then asked separately to choose which treatment should be given to which of the resultant persons, and to choose egoistically.

The moral of the thought experiment is usually taken to be this: most persons would say that A should choose A's body to be tortured, and B's body to be rewarded (and, on egoistic grounds, B should do the opposite: select B's body as the tortured one, and A's body to be rewarded). This is so because, it seems, persons locate their survival and their interests in psychological continuity, here understood to be preserved with the transfer of cerebral matter.

4. Elaborations on the criterion of sameness of consciousness

Even though Locke never explicitly stated so, and it might not be the correct interpretation (Behan 1979), the criterion of sameness of consciousness has been often interpreted as a mnemonic criterion. While many more kinds of psychological relations have later been individuated, it is worth stopping briefly on the memory criterion as it presents some issues that will resurface in later elaborations of the psychological approach. A subcase of the psychological criterion, the memory criterion states that A at t_1 is the same person as B a t_2 if B can remember an experience x that happened to A.

Immediately a problem arises. Suppose A is involved in episode x at t_1. At t_2, B remembers episode x, and is further involved in episode y. At t_3, C remembers episode y, but has forgotten episode x. It follows then that B is A and C is B, but not that C is A. The problem may be synthetically stated by pointing out that psychological relations are intransitive, whereas identity is transitive. Now, the particular occurrence of the problem is easily resolved by taking to be sufficient for personal identity indirect chains of memories, rather than exclusively direct memory connections; so that B remembering episode x is sufficient for C to be A, in virtue of the holding of overlapping chains of memories that hold between A, B, and C.

But the cause of the problem is not so easily done away with.[3] While identity is transitive (if A is B and B is C, then A is C), psychological connections are *not*. The intransitivity of psychological

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[3] The memory criterion suffers from other weaknesses that have been object of wide debate, such as Butler's and Reid's argument that memory is a form of knowledge, not to be confused with the object of knowledge; a circularity claim, as memory presupposes identity rather than constituting it; and the difficulties it encounters when faced with interruptions of memory, as they happen in sleep or in problematic neurological cases.

connections has been for a long time a thorn in the side of the psychological approach, one to which they answered both by supplying the relation with overlapping layers that can hold transitively, and by expanding the psychological relations involved in psychological continuity. A further fact to be taken into account is that, since mental life changes (smoothly, usually, rather than abruptly), it cannot be that one inherits *exact* psychological identity, or that psychological identity remains the *same*. Rather, each person-stage, with its mental content, is bonded together by lawful causation and bonds of similarity. Such temporal parts are then different from one another, and the relations that hold between them do not have the unique form of identity. This, too, will cause problems to the psychological account.

The psychological criterion has subsequently been greatly elaborated (Lewis 1976, Perry 1972, Shoemaker 1984, Unger 1990, Nagel 1896, Noonan 2003). In its more recent formulations, it has come to consist in continuity of psychological relations or continuity of mental contents. One of its most well-accepted formulation has been given by Derek Parfit: although his brand of psychological continuity is quite controversial, his elaboration of the criterion is representative (cfr. 1984, 206ff):

> *Psychological connectedness* consists in the holding of particular direct psychological causal connections, such as an experience and a memory of it, an intention and an experience of executing it, and the persistence of a belief or a character trait.
> *Psychological continuity* consists in overlapping chains of strong connectedness.
> *Strong connectedness* is had when there are a sufficient number of direct psychological connections.

The reference to the number of psychological connections characterizing strong connectedness must be explained, as must the reference to the matter of 'normal' causation of such psychological relations. What counts as a good enough number of psychological connections? Parfit argues that strong connectedness is had between two person-stages if at least half of the psychological connections hold between these two phases; he is quite aware of the arbitrariness of such a number (1984, 206-7). Overlapping chains of strong connectedness, in turn, provide psychological continuity – what he calls *Relation R*. Once there is psychological continuity, the relation of being the same person obtains.

Depending on the theory one endorses, one can have a narrow version of the psychological criterion, where the causes of psychological continuity are 'normal' (for example, continuity of same brain or body) or a wide version that accepts any and all causes and mechanisms may afford continuity of mental life. That is, any mechanism that keeps psychological relations going is accepted, even if through memory transplant, brain-tinkering or some other artificial method.

A different problem is tied to the fact that psychological continuity is a matter of degree: it can fade and change over time:

> For continuity, whether psychological or physical, is a matter of degree and therefore admits of borderline cases in which it would be arbitrary to insist that identity either is or is not maintained; just as it is implausible that one grain of sand could make the difference between there being a pile or not, it is implausible that one more surviving cell or psychological connection could make the difference between a person's continuing to exist or not. (DeGrazia 2002, 117)

Psychological connections can change and fail, and even though I am not psychologically continuous anymore with the person I was at 8 years old, I am still psychologically connected to the same child. But is this enough? Consider the thought experiment of the Russian prince:

> In several years, a young Russian will inherit vast estates. Because he has socialist ideals, he intends, now, to give the land to the peasants. But he knows that in time his ideals may fade. To guard against this possibility, he does two things. He first signs a legal document, which will automatically give away the land, and which can be revoked only with his wife's consent. He then says to his wife: 'Promise me that, if I ever change my mind, and ask you to revoke this document, you will not consent'. He adds: 'I regard my ideals as essential to me. If I lose these ideals, I want you to think that I cease to exist. I want you to regard your husband then, not as me, the man who asks you for this promise, but only as his corrupted later self. Promise me that you would not do what he asks.' (Parfit 1984, 327).

Suppose now years pass, and the Russian loses his socialist tendencies. He asks the wife to give him back the document. The wife, Parfit suggests, might feel she cannot; and that indeed she has dealt in the past with a different person than the one now asking for the document back. This case is somewhat different from the previous ones. Here we are not faced with body-swapping, but with regular changes in character. Can it be said that the socialist prince and the capitalist king are the same person? The radical, if progressive, changes in psychological continuity do not assure that personal identity may be maintained. Such changes, we feel, might disrupt psychological continuity.

5. Psychological reductionism and its issues

Psychological approaches often entail psychological reductionism: personal identity consists of nothing but the holding of relations of psychological continuity. This is not a problem, but rather a feature of the theory. The persistence question is posed as a question regarding the link between two (or more) separate time-slices, or person-stages: how are they connected? The psychological approach holds that the holding together of body, brain, physical and psychological states and processes is all the person and her continuous existence amount to (with the body often considered a disposable

element). That is, the fact of a person's identity over time just consists of the holding of certain more particular facts, and nothing more.

A non-reductionist approach, on the other hand, maintains that there is a continuous psychological subject that cannot be reduced to the interrelatedness of psychological states. What non-reductionist theories should show is what this psychological subject *is*. Parfit refuses non-reductionism precisely on the grounds that such a psychological subject, existing beyond the concatenation of mental states and processes, is a Cartesian ego: a 'further fact' that cannot be analyzed. Once again, a thought experiment will show what is meant by this (cfr. Parfit 1984, 239):

> Imagine a tele-transportation device is invented that allows you to travel wherever, even to Mars. It is an incredibly popular device, soon present and used in all places. You step into it regularly in order to work your Martian job. Every time you do, your whole body is destroyed; after a few seconds, an identical copy of your whole body appears on Mars. The tele-transporter exactly replicates every part of you, including your brain and exact mental states and content. Every day you step out of the tele-transporter and head to work.

Holding a reductionist psychological criterion, tele-transportation this way offers no problems: the holding of all the facts that make you up is saved, and so you are successfully preserved. But it can have far more sinister consequences. Consider this variation of the previous thought experiment, the accident on the tele-transporter:

> One day, an accident occurs. You step into the device and feel the familiar *zap*, but nothing happens: you open your eyes and are still firmly on Earth. You get out and ask the maintenance guy why the tele-transporter is not working. But here comes the bad news: it has worked, and you have been re-created on Mars entirely; it just did not work on this side, and your body was not disintegrated as usual. But it was badly damaged: you will die in a week because of the high dose of radiation you were submitted to. Full of anguish, you call the Martian tele-transport station and are put in contact with your Martian double, looking fresh and ready to go off to work. Your Martian doppelganger reassures you: even though you are going to die in a matter of days, he will live and take care of your family and your affairs.

What kind of thoughts does this thought experiment provoke? Most people would feel little consolation in knowing someone else will carry on their life; but given that the doppelganger is psychologically continuous with you, shouldn't you be relieved?

On a reductionist approach, there is no cause for worry. There is no, after all, 'further fact' about who you are: the exact replication of the relevant psychological and bodily states guarantees identity.

If we truly believe that personal identity is given through psychological continuity, and that there is nothing more to being the same person if not having such psychological relations, then we are compelled to call the Martian doppelganger the same person as the man on Earth. But it is here that

our intuitions, that have sustained us so far, fall short. Most of us do not feel easy at the idea that someone else, with whom we share everything, might just be exactly us. In fact, it is impossible for him to be me, as I am here, and he is there. What went wrong?

Nothing went wrong. Reductionism eventually leads to the conclusion that identity is indeterminate, precisely because of the two features of the theory explored: if the identity of a person consists only in the holding of certain relations to a degree, it proves impossible to track identity through time. This is due to the fact that, so described, psychological continuity is a purely formal and replicable relation. In this instance, the replication of the psychological relations concretizes in the existence of a person that is perfectly identical in psychological makeup.

Consider, further, that psychological relations can hold between more than one person, so that a single person might be continuous with numerically distinct persons. Again, this is better explained through a thought experiment, that of fission:

> Imagine person A's brain, composed of two identical hemispheres connected through the corpus callosum, is divided into two. Each hemisphere is placed in a different body, body B and C, resulting in person B having the right half of A's brain, and person C having the left half of A's brain. B and C are now psychologically continuous with person A. At the same time, B and C are also different persons, and as time goes on they will become more and more different.

The thought experiment raises some difficulties. How can A be psychologically continuous, and so the same person, as B and C? The main difficulty is given by the fact that while A is identical to both B and C, B and C are *not* identical to each other. It is impossible to determine *which* one is A. This experiment suggests that one person can be psychologically continuous with more than one person, which is possible; but it is not metaphysically possible for two distinct persons to both be A.

Although the forms of the experiments are different, they call into question the same intuitions: we are asked to imagine psychological continuity with an 'excess' of persons being psychologically continuous. In the tele-transporter experiment intuitions seems to indicate that the replica is psychologically continuous with the person stepping into the tele-transport – until this latter fails to be disintegrated upon entering the tele-transporter. In the fission case, the presence of two different recipients of psychological continuity via brain transplantation enhances the contradiction.

Three options are open to resolve the issue. On the first, one stipulates a non-branching clause, that is, stipulate that psychological continuity preserves identity if only one individual maintains psychological continuity (Parfit 1984, 267). The posing of a non-branching clause is meant to avoid these situations, but it seems to be quite arbitrary, as it is not clear how psychological continuity should determine survival only in the presence of a single person being eligible for identity.

A different option is to resolve that A is no more, that is, neither B or C are A. But it is not clear why it should be so.

The third and more radical option is given by Parfit, who brings the features of the psychological approach to its extreme consequences. He argues that facts of personal identity are impersonal: that is, they «can be described without either presupposing the identity of this person, or explicitly claiming that the experiences in this person's life are had by this person, or even explicitly claiming that this person exists» (1984, 210). Precisely because there is no orchestrating person 'having' such facts, but the person just consists of such facts, these facts can be described without making a reference to the person. If facts about psychological continuity can be described, in virtue of reductionism, without making a reference to the person having them; and if psychological continuity holds to a degree; then inevitably identity cannot hold through psychological relations.

In order to fully understand how we arrived here – how we started from looking for identity to ditching identity altogether - it must be considered that it is one of the features of psychological life in general that it is subject to changes. In order to account for this, both lawful causation *and* bonds of similarity hold between different person-stages, rather than identity. Identity is then forced to take the form of psychological likeness; and similarity will always end in indeterminacy and impossibility between distinguishing someone that is me from someone that is like me. In fact, a most problematic consequence follows from the combination of reductionism, branching, and the holding of psychological relations to a degree. What follows is indeterminacy,[4] not the epistemological but the metaphysical kind: there seems to be no fact of the matter regarding whether or not a person continues. This problem emerges clearly in the incapacity of psychological theories to draw a distinction between someone being *like me* and someone being *me*. There is no fact of the matter on who is who. There are no determinates answers, and the choice is up to us.[5] Parfit does not resist the conclusion; rather, he doubles down on it. He concludes that identity is not what matters in survival, where by 'survival' he means the preservation of what matters, what we care about. Parfit shows then that the logic of the identity relation cannot hold in the cases when psychological continuity can: as it is psychological continuity (Relation R) the relation that is relevant. The difference between someone being me and someone being like me is one Parfit does not deem worth pursuing. In fact, Parfit argues, we should free ourselves from the worry of identity. There are no 'deep facts' or 'further

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[4] Fission experiments are as old as the debate itself (cfr. Martin and Barresi 1995). However, Locke's approach avoids indeterminacy as Locke treats consciousness as a single relation, rather than a bundle of several psychological relations (Schechtman 2014). We will see later how Baker also employs a similar strategy, by adopting the first person perspective as a criterion of identity that cannot be further analysed.

[5] What about the fission cases? Since there is no such thing as identity beyond the holding of certain facts, and since psychological relations can hold to almost any degree, questions such as those posed by the fission cases are 'empty' (Parfit 1984, 285).

facts' about personal identity. Just person-stages, connected by lawful causation and bonds of similarity: this is what personal identity through time is like. What is important in survival is not whether identity is preserved, but whether my psychological connections are continued, even through other means and persons, and even beyond death. One should then rest content to think that the Martian doppelganger will live on: as he is a perfect psychological duplicate, he will carry out my plans, take care of my plants, perhaps even conclude my Ph.D.

But what Parfit embraces as a liberation from the dread of mortality, for others is the death sentence for psychological approaches, at least in their reductionist version. We actually do care about personal identity, even if it may be difficult to articulate what we care about it. Prosecution by different means than our own identity leaves us unsatisfied. The formal relations between different person-stages can give back similarity, at most; and similarity is not enough to sustain practical concerns of the personal kind. Psychological approaches then are found incapable of accounting for the importance we actually give to personal identity: this is what Marya Schechtman calls the *extreme claim* (1996, 52ff), the claim that the lengths to which psychological theorists must go in order to defend their view result self-defeating, to the point that there is no relation that legitimately bears the kind of importance we usually attribute to identity.

The difficulty the psychological approach encounters in making a distinction between someone being like me and myself produces what Robert Nozick (1981, chap. 1; Slors 2004) calls the *closest continuer theory*, stating that A at t_1 is the same person as B at t_2 if B at t_2 is psychologically continuous with A, and there is no other continuer of A who is psychologically continuous with A to an equal, or greater, degree. The existence of a competitor in filling the role one plays in life thus endangers the preservation of one's given existence. Surely, it is an alluring side of psychological approaches that they assure the existence of something like not just a psychological continuer, but a social continuer as well: someone who occupies the same social roles and can re-enter into the same social relations (Johnston 1989). The ease with which we could probably accept a social continuer in the place of the 'original' person for the persistence of this kind of social role guides the intuitive conclusion that the person is preserved. But, as Johnston warns, «persons antedate, outlive, and may some-times be outlived by their personas»: a social continuer need not coincide with the person's life. In fact, similarity hardly satisfies the average reader, or philosopher. It does seem that something truly is lost:

> Suppose that I discovered that someone else had qualitatively the same memories, the same character, personality traits, habits, and so on that I have. Should I care? [...] In fact, regardless of how many psychological replicas of me there are, I would not have the same concern for any of my psychological replicas as I have for myself. We are interested in identity because

we are interested in particular individuals *(de re),* and not just in whoever fits a particular description *(de dicto).* (Baker 2000, 130)

6. Baker's Constitution View

There is at least one other troubling consequence of describing persons under the psychological approach as essentially persons, having persistence conditions set by psychological continuity; it comes from the relation of one's psychology and one's body. If only beings with certain psychological characteristics are persons, and we are persons essentially, then what should be articulated is the relationship between me, a person essentially, and the human animal I am 'hosted' by (and the scientific and naturalistic understanding we have of it). But the articulation of this relationship reveals very quickly a coincidence problem. If I am essentially a *person*, a psychological subject with peculiar existence conditions, then I am to be distinguished from the animal I somehow inhabit. But wouldn't this mean that right now, on this chair, typing out these words, there are two thinking beings: the person, and the animal? Why shouldn't the animal be thinking? It has a perfectly fine brain and the right kind of apparatus to do it. If it so, associated with this living body, there are two entities with distinct persistence conditions, despite being coincident on every other account. The *too many thinker problem* poses a difficult challenge to the psychological approach (Olson 1997, 2003).[6]

Perhaps the most powerful reply to this critique is the constitution view as developed by Baker. Constitution furnishes a way out of the binarism of absolute identity and complete separateness: two entities, A and B, may stand in a special relationship that is neither of separation nor of identity. Constitution is, according to its theorists, a widely diffused occurrence, not restricted to the relation between a person and their body (Johnston 1992, Wiggins 1968). I will sketch out an account of constitution by relying on Baker's *Persons and bodies* (2000), which presents a constitution-based account of persons.

When we visit museums we go there to look at statues, not blocs of marble, and we might comment on the nice cold feeling the marble gives and on the puzzling stare the statues gives back to us. We might conversely say that the statue feels cold and solid, but it is difficult that anyone might say that

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[6] Neo-Lockean persons incur in an array of similar problems, all more or less related to the emphasis they put on the mental as the mark of the personal, and the difficulties that arise from human animals not obtaining said mental capacities in a fashion or another: the *foetus problem* and the *vegetal problem* thus both argue that the psychological criterion is unable to account for our existence in infancy and in psychologically-compromised states such as vegetative states. The issues lie at the extremities of life: if I am a person essentially, it follows from this that I, the person, was never born: for I did not have the psychological characteristics necessaries for being a person when I was an infant, and I have no psychological relation with the infant born. In the same spirit, the argument from ancestors appeals to evolutionary theory to argue that if we are not animals, then neither were animals our parents, their parents, and so on, back to our ancestors, who also were never animals; thus implying a refusal of evolutionary theory that is deemed too high a price to pay to defend the psychological approach (Blatti 2012).

they feel engaged by the way the marble is staring at us. We distinguish things from the stuff things are made of all the time. The marble constitutes the statue, but the statue, we feel, is something different from the marble. How so? The idea of constitution is that there is, in fact, a halfway between identity and not-identity: that some things are in a more intimate relation than that of complete extraneousness without being the same thing. Constitution offers the metaphysical explanation: some objects constitute other objects.

The statue and the marble do share several elements: in the first place, they stand in the same place at the same time, have the same mass, height, etc. What they differ in is the kind of things they can bear happen to them – they have different modal, temporal, and relational qualities (the marble existed well before the statue, but the statue could not exist without it, for example). Further, they have different persistence conditions. The marble is just marble, it belongs in the natural kind *marble* and has the persistence conditions of marble. It could be shattered to pieces and still be marble (up to a certain point, at least). The statue is a statue and it is so essentially, so that if it were to end on the floor it would be a statue no longer. But this doesn't mean that marble and statue are separated. The statue has the same qualities the marble has, but in a derivative way, by virtue of being constituted by the marble. On the other hand, the marble has the characteristics of the statue (being quite precious, for example) in a derivative way. Since the marble and the statue are constitutionally related, they share these features. But, most importantly, there have a relation of numerical sameness that is not quite the same as the relation of numerical identity. Whenever one thing constitutes another, we count them as one because they don't have separate existence; but we are still able to distinguish them.

Baker goes at pains to distinguish her position from that of a psychological approach that gives identity in terms of psychological continuity (2000, 125-30; 132). Psychological continuity gives a reductionist understanding of personal identity given by continuity of formal relations and contents, both replicable. Baker rejects this, as replication of psychological relations leads to indeterminacy, as shown. Baker characterizes her account of personal identity not just through the constitution view, but also by establishing that the criterion for the continuity of personal identity over time is the first person perspective:

> A person is not a separate thing from the constituting body, any more than a statue is a separate thing from the constituting block of marble. Nor is a person identical to the constituting body. The non-identity of person and body, on the Constitution View, is guaranteed by the fact that any body could exist without a first-person perspective, but no person could exist without a capacity for first-person perspective. (2000, 91)

Baker thus holds an essentialist position, where persons are essentially persons; and describes persons as beings that can consider themselves as themselves, having a special capacity for self-consciousness thanks to which «one thinks of oneself as an individual facing a world, as a subject distinct from

everything else» (2000, 60): the first-person perspective. Persons have a first-person perspective essentially, and so will persist as long as this perspective is exemplified. This relation of constitution comes in handy as a way to reply to the problem of having too many thinkers occupying the same region of time and space. A person and a human animal share physical and psychological properties: I am an animal, but derivatively; and I am a person, essentially.[7] Further, by taking the first-person perspective as the criterion of personal identity, replication is avoided: a single I-perspective cannot be duplicated, no matter if all my other psychological states are: «Sameness of first-person perspective does not allow indeterminacy, the closest-continuer theory nor fission and duplication, as a single person-perspective *cannot be shared by two people at the same time*».[8]

Still, what the first-person perspective exactly consists in is not clear. Baker isolates it from any kind of psychological continuity and states that is indivisible; but also admits that the first-person perspective cannot easily be given noncircular conditions of persistence. This, Baker holds, is quite inevitable: why should we have *non personal* criteria for personal identity (2000, 131)? This is an interesting remark, but one that cannot distract us from the fact that once characterized this way, the first-person perspective becomes suspiciously similar to a further fact that cannot be analysed further. Baker might then be avoiding indeterminacy by posing a further entity, just as Parfit purported.

The issue can be posed like this: the first personal perspective as a criterion of personal identity gives no certainties. First-person perspective is always going to be present: but *no one* can know, from their own first-person perspective, whether they are or not the same 'I' as they were before:

> Surely, at any moment I know that I am I, where both occurrences of the pronoun refer to the present subject. The assertion is safe because it is trivial. But Baker is interested in the nontrivial assertion that I (the presently existing subject) am identical to some "I" from the past – and know this. But it does not seem *necessarily* discernible from a first-person perspective that I am identical to some person from the past; massive delusion about identity is possible. (DeGrazia 2005, 44)

Here the first-person perspective adopted by Baker reveals its weakness: 'I' is usually of determinate denotation, but more than one individual could be denoted by it, coherently with facts of semantic and non semantic nature (Noonan 2003). A corollary problem is then that first-person perspective as a criterion is not epistemically accessible from an objective standpoint, as one's continued self-perspective is quite a private fact.

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[7] It is up for debate whether this argument is successful in contrasting the too many thinkers problem, as Olson argues that « The constitution view appears to face a dilemma: if our bodies can think first-person thoughts, then there are too many thinkers, and we can't know which ones we are; if they can't, we expect an explanation of why they can't» (cfr. also Shoemaker 1999).

[8] Other forms of constitutionalist neo-Lockeanism can be found in Johnston (1992) and Shoemaker (1984), who also argue that persons are constituted by animals but not identical to them, although with different approaches.

7. Bare subjects

Baker is not the only one dealing with these problems. In fact, it is a common critique of psychological approaches that trying to avoid the dispersion of psychological identity through a series of different psychological relations can bring on to the *bare locus view*, the idea that there is something that we are that allows no indeterminacy, and resists replication and fission, but that cannot be specified further. Judith Jarvit Thomson calls this a «mental monad» (1997, 173), Johnston a «soul pellet» (1989) and «bare loci of mental life» (1987, 70): a bare subject the undertakings of which we track through thought experiments, but which seems to amount neither to bodily nor psychological continuity. It seems, indeed, to amount to nothing at all, if not a vague concept of ourselves that is put under too much theoretical stress. Consider the tele-transportation thought experiment again. One is at loss as to what the Martian replica is missing: but it was not me. The intuition at play is that there is something that is uniquely *me* and no one else. But accepting this – that there is something that I am that cannot be duplicated or divided, that is me *full stop* – lends another kind of difficulty for the psychological continuity approach. In fact, the continuity of psychological contents would no longer be necessary: I would continue to exist as long as I exist (whatever that means), even if psychological connections to my past, my thoughts, and my contents in general disappeared. [9] Caroline West (2010, 93) argues that thought experiments only go on to show that the perfect candidate of our intuitions is an immaterial soul devoid of any specific feature. On the same line, Thomson argues that we are persuaded we can imagine switching bodies and having such adventures as those proposed by thought experiments; but, in reality, it is doubtful we can even imagine them successfully: «Compare my drawing a picture of a banana and saying "This is how tigers would look *if* tigers were bananas." Have I now imagined tigers being bananas?» (1997, 168).

This is precisely what Parfit (1984, 216) warned against, *the further-fact view*: the idea that there is something else involved in personal identity that is neither psychological nor physical continuity: «When the belief in Cartesian Egos is in this way cut loose from any connections with either publicly observable or privately introspectible facts, the charge that it is unintelligible becomes more plausible».

But the fact that the bare locus view is a real threat should not coerce us into making a decision between it, and reductionism (*pace* Parfit). In fact, it seems dubious that things actually stand this way, that we either accept reductionism or we are committed to believing that we are 'separately

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[9] This bring us closer to a third criterion advanced: The Simple View, as Parfit calls it, is an approach that argues that persons are simple entities that cannot be further analysed, and the relation of being the same person is a primitive one; the persistence criteria proposed by other approaches are regarded to be merely evidential (Chisholm 1976).

existing entities' distinct from human brains and bodies. We need not believe in further facts to argue that two entities sharing the same characteristics are, nonetheless, different things.

Interestingly, we get the same nihilistic results coming from a different perspective, that of animalism. Bernard Williams (1983) takes the classical switching-body-with-torture-and-reward thought experiment, and provides an alternative point of view:

> Someone in whose power I am tells me that I am going to be tortured tomorrow. I am frightened, and look forward to tomorrow in great apprehension. He adds that when the time comes, I shall not remember being told that this was going to happen to me, since shortly before the torture something else will be done to me which will make me forget the announcement. This certainly will not cheer me up, since I know perfectly well that I can forget things, and that there is such a thing as indeed being tortured unexpectedly because I had forgotten or been made to forget a prediction of the torture: that will still be a torture which, so long as I do know about the prediction, I look forward to in fear. He then adds that my forgetting the announcement will be only part of a larger process: when the moment of torture comes, I shall not remember any of the things I am now in a position to remember. This does not cheer me up, either, since I can readily conceive of being involved in an accident, for instance, as a result of which I wake up in a completely amnesiac state and also in great pain; that could certainly happen to me, I should not like it to happen to me, nor to know that it was going to happen to me. He now further adds that at the moment of torture I shall not only not remember the things I am now in a position to remember, but will have a different set of impressions of my past, quite different from the memories I now have. I do not think that this would cheer me up, either. For I can at least conceive the possibility, if not the concrete reality, of going completely mad, and thinking perhaps that I am George IV or somebody; and being told that something like that was going to happen to me would have no tendency to reduce the terror of being told authoritatively that I was going to be tortured, but would merely compound the horror. Nor do I see why I should be put into any better frame of mind by the person in charge adding lastly that the impressions of my past with which I shall be equipped on the eve of torture will exactly fit the past of another person now living, and that indeed I shall acquire these impressions by (for instance) information now in his brain being copied into mine. Fear, surely, would still be the proper reaction: and not because one did not know what was going to happen, but because in one vital respect at least one did know what was going to happen - torture, which one can indeed expect to happen to oneself, and to be preceded by certain mental derangements as well. (1983, 51-52)

This thought experiment brings interesting results. It mimics thought experiments employed in defense of the psychological approach, but its results are quite different, as we assume a different perspective.[10] In particular, it yields the intuition that, even in the face of psychological disruption on unprecedented scale, we still fear for ourselves. Why is this? Williams argues that one's future pain is not something that requires psychological continuity: «one's fears can extend to future pain whatever psychological changes precede it» (1983, 63). Such an argument can be extended to cover

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[10] It has been argued that Williams makes a question-begging use of pronouns in this experiment, by continuously describing the situation to the victim through the use of 'you'. I am rather of the opinion that the use of the pronouns is to be understood as part of the *description* of the experiment as given by the scientist, rather than a description of the thought experiment; but it makes little difference as long as the point Williams wishes to make is be understandable.

less drastic cases: in fact, most of us can imagine surviving as comatose patients, driven mad by insanity, or stricken by dementia, to mention some common instances.

Two points might be extracted from these reflections. First, and this is the conclusion driven by Williams, that personal identity is held through bodily continuity. But this result is immediately annihilated when one reflects that the same thought experiments can equally well point towards psychological continuity. The second point is then that thought experiments suggest not that psychological life holds priority, but that we hold a conception of ourselves as surviving in spite of both psychological and bodily continuity.

8. The multiplicity of the concept of a person

It has been suggested that these difficulties are tied to the numerous meanings that the concept of a person has. The *problem of multiplicity* (cfr. Shoemaker 2007) states that our everyday judgments and concerns about persons are often tied to different considerations, that might not all be satisfied by one single relation. That is, we might ask different kinds of questions regarding one individual, and each question can pick up a seemingly different aspect of their existence. The same problem can be stated by saying that 'person' has several meanings, and we interact with persons usually in different capacities: as a human being, as a rational agent, as a moral agent, and so forth. Such richness in concerns about persons might be taken to show that there is no single relation of interest. Shoemaker holds that for any practical concerns there is a different relation involved, and none of them is the unique relation of personal identity; and this is in fact also the solution proposed by Quante through his discrimination of four meanings of identity. If this is correct, then the effort to discriminate between the various relations, and find *the* relevant one might be misguided. The bare locus view would be the natural outcome of trying to find a single notion into which to cram relations and concepts that are in fact varied.

This position has been particularly developed by Marya Schechtman in her 1996 *The constitution of selves*. Here, she individuates the problems that emerge in tracking psychological relations as the relation of identity as problems that are due to the fact that psychological relations admit of transitivity and admit of degrees; but the relation of numerical identity that we are looking for through psychological relations does not admit either transitivity or degrees. Numerical identity is not transitive: it is all or nothing. Try as you might, she argues, psychological relations cannot be made to match numerical identity, and attempts at doing so ultimately lead to the extreme claim. The psychological criterion seems to fit our intuitions quite well, but it cannot deliver what it promises: it cannot survive being hammered into the logical form of identity without being deformed. While some philosophers have continued with growing sophistication in their attempts to match psychological

continuity and logical identity at the expense of gradually losing the intuitive plausibility of looking for psychological relations, others have opted for a different theoretical angle, suggesting that at least two different senses of personal identity might be at play. If matching the logical form of identity with the psychological criterion of identity requires such effort, the reasoning goes, the problem might lie in using our intuitions about practical interests to guide our metaphysical exploration, and vice versa. Once this is recognized, the two matters – our practical interests and our metaphysical needs – can be investigated separately. The next section will elaborate better on these themes and introduce a new way of dealing with the problem of personal identity.[11]

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[11] Note that animalism faces the same problem of indeterminacy that affect the psychological approach: animalism, too, can incur into indeterminacy, because indeterminacy is present whenever there is no indivisibility; since bodies have parts, they too can come apart (Parfit 1984, 234 ff.; Thomson 1997, 133).

1.3. Metaphysical identity and practical identity

1. The question of re-identification and the question of characterization

So far, I have presented the two main approaches to the problem of personal identity, and the main difficulties they encounter. Animalism grants a solid metaphysical stance but fails to cater to our intuitions, which seem to tie our interests in personal identity to a psychological approach. On the other hand, a psychological approach does not fit well with numerical identity. The recurring difficulties encountered by both approaches have been taken by some theorists to indicate that the question of persistence has been ill-posed. Marya Schechtman develops this position to great lengths by arguing that there are in fact at least *two* questions that can be asked about personal identity, and they are quite diverse in goals and structure.

On the one hand, there is the question we have been dealing with until now: what makes person A at t_1 the same entity as B at t_2. It is a question of a metaphysical kind, and concerns the strict numerical identity of persons as objects that have their own trajectory through space and time. Its goal is the *reidentification* of the person.

On the other hand, we might ask which characteristics *truly* belong to a person, making them the person they are. The kind of identity involved here is quite different from the one explored by the reidentification question: it is the structure of one's identity in terms of self-reflection, values and authenticity (what Quante dubbed the problem of the structure of the personality). It concerns those actions, values, beliefs that receive reflective endorsement and with which the person truly identifies. Which actions, experiences, values, and character traits can be ascribed to a particular person? Which of these characteristics make her the person she really is? What shapes her sense of self, what traits or experiences are core to who she is, and what are instead more superficial, accidental, less relevant? Characterization revolves around one's practical rationality and the subjective evaluation of worth, and in particular, of what makes life worth living. The kind of survival involved is clearly quite different than the one pursued through reidentification. A person who has fallen into an irreversible coma still has her numerical identity intact; but the characterization sense of identity is gone. Consider again the Russian prince. He starts out in life as an enthusiastic socialist, and later becomes a conservative aristocrat. We might then wonder if he is the same person as before. From the point of view of the reidentification questions, he appears to be. But there is also a clear sense in which he is *not* the same person. A different example: consider a situation when a man has been hypnotized, and under hypnotic control commits a series of crimes. Should we consider this man responsible for his crimes? There is a sense in which he is the same person that committed the crimes; but, in a very relevant sense, it was also not him perpetrating them. The question of characterization is precisely

interested in how and which characteristics, from actions to beliefs, from values to character traits, should be attributed to a person: which characteristics make up one's identity. And which, consequently, one judges to be relevant to one's identity: *this* is what matters in survival. We are often engaged in answering such a question through our life, as we try to define ourselves and make sense of others. The idea is that these characteristics are the ones relevant when talking about persons: it is to them that we refer and that inform our judgments of identity.

Once this distinction has been made, Schechtman is in the position to allot different intuitions to different questions. She argues that intuitions and arguments supporting a bodily criterion of personal identity concern the metaphysical sense of personal identity: through a bodily criterion of continuity, what is tracked is the sameness of human being through strict numerical identity (1996, 69). On the other hand, intuitions supporting a psychological criterion are tracking the *practical* sense of identity: what matters in survival is the psychological makeup of the person and its development. The *relata* then are different:

> The reidentification question seeks to define a relation between two distinct person-time-slices that makes them slices of the same person [...] The characterization question, on the other hand, seeks to define a relation that holds between a person and particular actions, experiences, or characteristics that are hers. (1996, 73)

Once freed from the onus of giving metaphysical answers, psychological relations can satisfyingly track the relations of practical concern. Identity thus *does* count in survival: it is just to be thought differently than through the logical form of identity. The relation required for the question of characterization is not constrained by the same logical form of numerical identity; indeed, facts about characterization admit of degrees: «it is this ability to admit of degree that links the question of what makes an action part of a person's history at all to the question of what makes it *truly* hers». The idea is precisely that the more the action, experience, thought is properly *mine*, the more I am morally responsible, self-interested, compensated for it or likely to survive through it.

Consider moral responsibility: we consider a person to be more or less responsible for something depending on the degree to which an action can be considered truly theirs. The characterization question seeks to understand to which degree an action or a characteristic belongs to the person: we understand responsibility and characterization to be linked. Similarly for self-concern: the degree to which one is more disposed to make efforts and sacrifices for a given cause is an expression of how much it is important to them: the specific cause will then belong to them in a more 'internal', personal way than some other issue they are only superficially interested with.

In the same manner, one is compensated by something to the degree they are invested and committed to it. Consider, by contrast, the way the reidentification question poses the matter of compensation:

the effort is in determining whether the person (to be more precise, the person-slice) A, which did a given sacrifice a t_1, is the same as the person(-slice) B, which receives compensations at t_2. If they are the same numerical person, then the compensation is well-awarded (or the blame well-deserved), regardless of any changes occurred in their personality between t_1 and t_2. Suppose I, aged 18, steal a loaf of bread undetected. Ten years later, security videos of me stealing at the local Lidl surface. Me being the same person numerically, I am convicted of the theft and sentenced to prison or community-work hours. The re-identification issue at work here cannot account for any changes occurred in the meanwhile – any improvement, say, of my sense of shame, so that I would never steal again. Indeed, it cannot even account for the fact I might have stolen the bread in order to feed my family, for instance, rather than just for satisfying my criminal tendencies. It cannot account for the way I related to the theft at the time and after the fact. This is fine: it is simply not meant to do this kind of work. Re-identifying someone as the material author of a deed is hardly enough to judge matters of moral responsibility, supposing one has a grasp of moral issues that goes beyond the basics laid down by Hammurabi. The working of our moral intuitions, at least, points this way. Of course, theories of justice might vary amazingly in the way they handle this fictional case; but the point here is not to decide whether my 28-year-old self is responsible or not, should pay or not, for the bread stolen ten years ago. The point is to acknowledge the subtleties and shades that are at work in matters of moral responsibility and in what I take to be characteristic of me, or not. Once we have some sense of this, we can discuss as long as it is needed how to solve the problem – but it must be seen as a problem, first and foremost.

Of course, it seems that such characteristics are distributed along a continuum: some of them will belong to the person in a stronger, proper sense, and some will belong to them in a more accidental and superficial way. All the characteristics that are part of a person's history are presumed to contribute to making up her identity. Some, however, play a more central role than others and are more truly expressive of who she is; while others are objects of literal, material kind of attribution. The answer to the characterization question is then a relation of attribution that can be a matter of degree: an attribution can be more or less true, relevant and have more or less importance in one's identity. Furthermore, this relation of attribution is not hampered by problems of intransitivity, as the object of investigation is the kind of relation holding between one person and characteristics that belong to them; a relation to which issues of intransitivity do not apply.

How can this help with the issues we have been facing?

These two qualities make it so that the question of characterization fits well with the logical form that, as we have seen, is proper of practical relations, and endorses the supposition that it is facts about characterization, rather than about logical identity, that underlie practical concerns. The idea is

that the characterization question offers a better kind of relation that can accommodate practical concerns, and better captures what we are truly interested in posing the identity question. By understanding the kind of relation through which an action or characteristic can be truly attributable to a person, it is possible to determine when judgments of practical involvement are warranted. The practical relation of identity can be defined as follows:

> *x* is at time t the same person as *y* is at a later time t* if and only if [*x* at t stands to *y* at t* in some relation(s) r in virtue of which] *x* ought to be prudentially concerned, at t, for *y*'s well-being at t*; and *y* is responsible, at t*, for what *x* does at t; and it is natural and right at t* to treat *y* as if she were *x*. (Olson 1997, 66)

An inquiry about persons can, then, take two different forms: persons can be seen as objects in the world, on par with everything else, or as subjects, agents with a stratified inner life. Specifying what aspect of persons we are concerned with allows us to make sense of, and place, the different intuitions we have about personal identity.

Schechtman's approach is still missing a piece: in order to be of any use, it has to specify what makes a characteristic truly attributable to a particular person: to define a person's identity one must not only be able to know which characteristics are part of his history, but also their role in that history. The problem of how to determine the way a given characteristic belongs to one's practical identity is one that echoes with much work done in moral psychology and theory of action. Schechtman develops her own narrative approach to answer this problem, which will interest us in the next chapter. For now, we focus on the effects of this split on the debate, and the way the connection between metaphysical and practical identity has been characterized.

2. Practical and metaphysical identity *vis a vis* biological and psychological approaches

It can be seen how questions of reidentification and characterization both purport to reproduce *and* resolve the very same division we found between bodily and psychological criteria of personal identity (DeGrazia 2005, 82ff). By clarifying first whether one is inquiring into metaphysical or practical identity, the conflicting intuitions and arguments can be accommodated separately, putting an end to their mutual interference. It is just very reasonable that, framed the problem this way, one should consider that metaphysical identity – numerical identity – relies on bodily continuity; and that practical identity relies on psychological continuity.

The consequences of such a division are far-reaching. Metaphysical identity and practical identity stand now apart. This marks a change with respect to the assumption that being the *same* person over time is the relation that structures our practical concerns; that is, that metaphysical identity justifies practical concerns. This is precisely what caused trouble in the first place: trying to track practical

concerns through the form of logical identity. But it is also the more natural way to think of the relationship between these two aspects; quite simply, I have reason to be concerned for myself if I know that it will be *me* that is implied in some future happenings: practical identity so far has been *dependent* on metaphysical identity.

With Schechtman's move, things change: interest in metaphysical identity fades into the background since our interests in personal identity lay elsewhere. Such a divorce implies what Caroline West (2007, 58) calls the *practical irrelevance thesis*:

> The relation(s) among person-stages that structures our person-directed concerns need not be or coincide with the relation(s) that makes different person-stages belong to the same person. I will call this claim the *practical irrelevance thesis*, for it says that our practical reasons for identifying and identifying people as the same over time are irrelevant to the question of who – or what – we are.

The thesis is also called the thesis of *the independence of the practical*, with a different emphasis, but to the same effect: severing this link, these two issues – re-identification and characterization – become irrelevant to one another: that is, metaphysical answers do not have practical import, and vice versa: the solution to one (what am I?) should bear no relevance on the other (who am I?). Person essentialism becomes uninteresting, as a practical-psychological thesis does not entail an ontological thesis straightforwardly.

We had, in truth, already met a similar position: through a different path, Parfit as well had distinguished and separated the practical question from the metaphysical one. Parfit's argument proceeded from metaphysical grounds but was guided by similar evaluative considerations, as he too was concerned with what matters in survival. He, too, started out with the standard notion that identity underlies our practical concerns, but following it found that metaphysical identity disaggregated when tracked through psychological relations. He concluded, then, that metaphysical identity is not what matters in survival.

A similar position can be found in the biological approach; Olson advances the «bold conjecture» that numerical identity and practical concerns need not meet: «it is for ethicists to tell us when prudential concern is rational, when someone can be held accountable for which past actions, and who deserves to be treated as whom» (1997, 69), rather than metaphysicians; we should not conflate metaphysics and values. He argues that the pull of the psychological approach depends upon an unjustified mixing of metaphysical and practical questions. He acknowledges the strength of our intuitions about the connection between psychological continuity and practical judgments; what he denies, however, is that these intuitions, when properly analyzed, tell us anything important about the conditions of our persistence. What our responses to these cases actually show us, Olson suggests, is

that moral responsibility and other practical relations track psychological rather than biological continuity. But this only shows that *identity* tracks psychological continuity if we assume that the practical judgments *typically* associated with identity *must* be associated with metaphysical identity; but they need not. In assuming that reflection on our practical judgments will yield an account of our identity, Olson says, psychological theorists conflate ethical and metaphysical questions. But being the same person, in the practical sense of identity, is not a metaphysical relation; being the same animal is. When biological and psychological continuity diverge, the correspondence that usually holds between practical relations and identity falls apart. Here Olson uses Parfit's argument that identity is not what matters in survival to lend plausibility to the idea that these practical responses might not track identity per se, but only psychological continuity. As theorists of the psychological approach have been trying to show, psychological continuity does not seem to be inherently connected to one's bodily persistence: metaphysical identity, Olson concludes, is neither necessary nor sufficient for practical concerns.[12]

A complementary position is defended by Christine Korsgaard (1989). Korsgaard argues that, even lacking a metaphysical relation underpinning all the time-slices of a person, there are practical considerations that assure the unity of the person at a time *and* over time. The lack of a metaphysical unit is irrelevant in the face of the practical necessity that we *have* to act – to choose how to live our life. Inevitably, there will be conflict among one's wishes and possibilities, conflict that needs to be resolved if one is to live at all. The standpoint from which one weights actions and consequences implies a pragmatic unit. While we might have different wishes and possibilities of action, when we deliberate, we have reasons to prefer one course of action over another: some actions are expressive of yourself more than others, and among many desires, we are able to choose the one course of action that we feel closer to. Deliberation, the endorsement of a given reason over the plurality of desires, involves – indeed, requires – a practically necessitated unity. And as long as one only has one body to act with, it is the body that is the unified, basic agent.[13] And not just unified *at a time*: since even

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[12] It could then be argued then such a metaphysical concept of person alone is hardly a concept of person at all, as some do: «divorced from all these usual connections with our emotions and motivations, the question of what are the persistence conditions for human animals is no longer of any interest to most of us. Or, at any rate, it is of no more interest than the question of what are the persistence conditions for a species of mid-sized mammal». Since, stripped of any personal fact it loses most of its theoretical interests, as it would try to track a concept that bears no practical importance to us. Under this reading, those interested in metaphysical identity look for a different question – exactly what Olson does by looking into 'personal' ontology.

[13] It must be understood that Korsgaard's practical stance only incidentally resolves in a kind of bodily continuity. She argues that the body as the basic unit of agency should not be taken as a necessity, but as a contingent fact: under the right practical conditions, we might form bigger agential units, and extended our concern beyond the boundaries of our body; families and sport teams are an example of

choices done at a given time are immediately carried into the future, a person needs to coordinate their action not just at a time, but also over time. So, some degree of identification with the future is required even for just choosing now. Thinking of ourselves as unified agents through time, we need to identify closely with the reasons motivating our action now and in the future: «If you understand yourself as an agent implementing something like a particular plan of life you need to identify with your future in order to be what you are even now» (1989, 112). So, even granting that there is no metaphysical unit holding together a person, it must be admitted that the succeeding psychological subjects must be pragmatically unified in order to carry out choices and actions. In fact, the use of metaphysical facts is secondary: «You normally think you live one continuing life because you are one person, but according to this argument the truth is the reverse. You are one continuing person because you have one life to live» (1989, 113).

An interesting outcome of Koorsgard's position is that the continuity of practical identity is assured under the authoriality of the choices made. In order to identify with our actions, we take an authorial attitude, understanding ourselves as the causes of our actions. As long as they are authored by the person, even dramatic changes to the metaphysical makeup do not seem to disrupt the continuity of practical identity. Korsgaard exemplifies this principle by way of a thought experiment: if one, unsatisfied with oneself, allows some medical tinkering with their cerebral tissue that results in a dramatic change of personality, we have no reason to be concerned that they are no longer the same person. This may seem wrong, as we are used to the idea that we might change ourselves through an internal effort; changes brought about through external means, such as surgery and other technological means, seem to lack *authenticity*. But if we take Korsgaard's considerations seriously, what matters to me in personal identity will dictate what I can or not survive, rather than the mechanism of change being 'internal' or 'external'.

All such positions are faced with the same issues: how to characterize the relationship between metaphysical considerations and practical considerations involving justificatory and axiological interests. The challenging match of numerical identity and practical concerns leads to a Parfitian outcome; the alternative route, severing the dependence link between practical concerns and metaphysical identity, manages to preserve the importance of identity, although characterized as *practical* identity. It can be argued that such a practical identity is a metaphorical form of identity,

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such agential units. Technological development, as well, might overcome the limits of embodiment (1989, n. 22): That is, technological developments could perhaps at some point in the future provide us with more than a body – we could, perhaps, end up having various disposable bodies we can access to depending on our needs. She argues for bodily continuity, then, only tangentially.

relevant for our practical interests but unfit for metaphysical matters; or that it is precisely practical identity we refer to when arguing about persons, while metaphysical identity is of little importance, being concerned with something we are only contingently related to, the human animal.

The next section will take up the problem of the conditions of personhood. We thus leave aside, for the moment, preoccupations with practical and metaphysical declinations of personal identity; but it will be clear soon enough that this key issue impends on the conditions of personhood as well.

1.4. Criteria of personhood and the normative status of the person

1. Person-making characteristics

We have so far been interested in the issues of personal identity covered by the third and fourth questions of Quante's classification. It is now time to go back to the first question, so far left unattended: What is a person? The question concerns the conditions of personhood and is often rendered as, Which properties and capacities are necessary and sufficient for an entity to be a person at a given moment?

Typically, the question is answered by selecting and listing properties and capacities considered central to personhood. Such lists include capacities and abilities such as self-consciousness, autonomy (or self-deliberation, or free will), intentionality, capacity for conceptual thought, capacity to have second-order attitudes, language or linguistic competence, moral agency, and like capacities. The selection is clearly influenced by the philosopher's sensibility and position on a range of connected topics (such as philosophy of mind, moral theory or theory of action); consequently, the number and kind of characteristics invoked might be slightly different from the ones presented. Still, the list above is illustrative enough of the kind of characteristics considered to be 'person-making': subjectivity and agency, and their corollary capabilities, are clearly at the very heart of our concept of person. And, while most philosophers go to great lengths to avoid unjustified speciesism in the descriptive content of the concept of person, it is difficult to suppress the suspicion that criteria of personhood are strongly tied to our life-form and the social, cultural and historical context where they are individuated. An effort is made, in any case, to make such lists be sufficiently generic to be viable to *any* kind of person, not just human persons, and to make them sufficiently trans-cultural, in order to dampen possible ethnocentric derives.

The property approach to personhood conditions is a thorny one. Complications arise on several levels. For example, to what degree and in which manner should these characteristics be had in order to qualify as a person? Is it necessary to have these properties in the most complete manner, or is partial or gradual possession an adequate condition? Does partial possession of the required properties translate into a partial form personhood, affording differential treatment (Singer 2000)? Or is being a person a «threshold property» so that one is a fully-fledged person whenever or however one overcomes the given threshold (Laitinen 2007)? We might also ask how should one possess such properties: is actual possession necessary, or may it be the case that one is a person if they are suitably related to such properties? Suitable relations may be thought of as having a potential for such properties; past possession; or being in a suitable relation with persons that do possess them.

The difficulties go on and are at least partially related to the fuzziness the concept of the person exhibits. A fuzzy concept is one that is connected with a cluster of properties rather than to any precise subset. The fuzziness of the concept of a person emerges not just because of the theoretical difficulties it provokes, but also in our practical application of the concept outside of philosophical venues: we tend to consider persons even those human beings who lack some, or even most, of such capacities. In fact, one of the problems of a property approach to personhood is that it might be too strict – it might exclude from personhood some entities that we *would* consider persons, such as young children or individuals with disabilities that prevent them from having (or developing) the right person-making characteristics; or individuals who no longer make the cut, such as persons that have suffered serious cognitive decline or other impairments. The preoccupation with the kind of relation the person should have to these properties is clearly tied to the way human beings start out in life: quite devoid of any person-making characteristics – and how they sometimes end up being, again devoid of them in their old age or in illness.

Such lists and their content are not, then, purely speculative. They are sensitive to our moral intuitions, or moral preoccupations, at least; and we *do* feel compelled to work out a way to include into personhood fellow human beings that apparently lack the necessary and sufficient characteristics. Why?

So far, the problems of personhood and personal identity have been related to practical interests, such as self-concern, compensation, etcetera. But personhood is also tied to a different (and related) set of practical concerns, ranging from pre-natal genetic therapy to end-of-life treatment, and all in between. When we consider these cases it becomes evident that being a person means, in addition to all that we have said so far, to enjoy a peculiar normative status: to deserve a certain kind of treatment that is respectful of one's personhood. We thus say that persons *deserve* our respect and talk about the dignity of persons.[14] Such a normative status has an institutional dimension as well, as persons are bearers of certain rights and duties. The concept of a person is not just purely descriptive, but has a normative import. Not qualifying for personhood comports then a series of practical consequences that are often problematic and lie at the center of ethical debates.[15] Now, the issue is the relation between such characteristics and the normative value of personal identity.

2. Moral status and person-making characteristics

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[14] Such a normative status is at the centre of ethical debates, even though sometimes these matters are discussed using a lexicon which appear to be different, as the term 'human being' is employed. The concept of person should not be fully conflated or restricted to the *word* 'person'. We might express the same normative relevance of personhood by saying that someone is 'a human being', for example.

[15] This is not meant to imply that *only* persons enjoy a moral status; we should not «romanticize personhood» (DeGrazia 2005, 46) to the point of dividing the world according to who is and who is not a person.

The problem lies in understanding where the moral, or more broadly normative, «reason-giving nature of personhood» (Laitinen 2007, 8) comes from and how it is justified. Unfortunately, the question of what, precisely, in persons demand such respect and grounds such normative status is not of easy resolution; some, like Daniel Dennett, hold that nothing grounds it apart from social significance, 'person' being an honorific term (1976, 176).

For the less skeptic, the elements at stake are, in the most basic form of the problem, three: first, the moral status itself, our explanandum; second, the person-making characteristics and their relation to the moral status of persons; and, third, the role other persons play in attributing or negating the moral status, and their legitimacy in doing so. This last element I will synthesize under the term 'recognition', the array of social practices and responses, and recognitive and normative practices and attitudes (such as attributing responsibility, asking and giving reasons, giving respect) into which persons are immersed. Recognition is not an act of categorization, but a matter of according persons the respect, dignity, and care they deserve as persons (Ikäheimo & Laitinen 2007). This recognitive aspect is to be understood as a social claim: in order to be a person, one needs to be involved and be a participant in practices where they are regarded as persons; whether this is a constitutive aspect of personhood, or rather a consequence of being a person, is to be defined.

Given these three elements, the problem can be presented like this: it is part of the concept of person that persons are afforded a special kind of treatment, one that is respectful of their dignity and their moral status. But what grounds such moral status? It could be derived from the possession of the person-making characteristics, in which case the moral status is something we respond to; or it could be that it is assigned through recognitive attitudes, in which case it is something we contribute to. Both options present problems.

Let's tackle the issue by starting from conditions of personhood, which until now have been considered from an intra-subjective point of view: which characteristics, and how, should one possess in order to be a person? But the introduction of a normative dimension forces us to ask what the relation is between having such characteristics and having a moral status.

A first, straightforward answer would argue that the moral status depends exclusively on the possession (under some form) of these characteristics. Having such characteristics would be grounds for receiving a special kind of treatment; in fact, they would demand it. This answer requires further justification by means of laying out why some characteristics deserve such and such attitudes.[16] This is a *monadic* concept of a person: being a person requires no relations, just the possession of the right properties. Here the moral status of a person is entailed by the person-making characteristics.

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[16] The legislative source may be constructivist, such as a social agreement; a religious belief; or a realist interpretation that sees such characteristics as morally relevant per se (Laitinen 2003).

A *dyadic* concept of personhood, instead, holds that personhood presents a constitutively inter-subjective dimension. In particular, reciprocal recognition is a constitutive element of personhood: being recognized as a person is taken to be *part* of the concept of a person. Under this description, being recognized as a person (and being able to reciprocate this stance) is necessary for personhood, so that recognition is part of the normative status of the person (Laitinen 2007).[17] Being the object of recognitive practices is constitutive of being a person, *and* of the moral status as well.

The issue then lies mostly in the kind of interplay present between person-making characteristics, moral status and recognition. The debate offers a generous range of positions, from strongly individualist ones to exclusively social ones; but typically most accounts are mixed, acknowledging that personhood requires both given capacities and being an object of recognitive attitudes.

It is important to see what is at stake here. The socio-relational component implied by recognition is both difficult to deny and difficult to handle. Tying the normative significance of persons to some socially expressed attitude, rather than only and directly to person-making characteristics, compromises the deep-rooted intuition that the normative statues of persons obtains regardless of historical contingencies. If the moral status of persons depends not just on intrapersonal characteristics but also on being recognized as a person, then the matter requires careful handling, as historically we know of quite a lot of occasions in which (what we would consider) persons have been negated recognition and the normative status of personhood on arbitrary bases. A feeling of moral repugnancy usually follows the possibility that the concept of a person could be subject to historical contingency. It surely would be preferable if the moral status of persons could not be denied under different regimes or for fickle reasons such as political or economic gain.

On the other hand, the first hypothesis entails a different risk: that human beings not in possession of such characteristics may then not obtain the corresponding moral status. We would then exclude from personhood a range of individuals that do not fit the criteria of personhood; or, as it usually done, tailor a way to put them into a suitable relation with such characteristics (Rovane 1988, chap. 1), at the risk of creating *ad hoc* exceptions intended to cater to our moral intuitions. Indeed, Wagner's (2019) harsh diagnosis is that such ontological considerations proceed from moral ones:

> Cognitivists begin with a set of presuppositions about the unique moral status of persons, look for an ontological category that maps onto these presuppositions, and then draw normative conclusions from the ontological category they have put forward. The problem, then, is that Cognitivism begs the question by attempting to draw normative conclusions from an ontological condition that is covertly based on normative presuppositions. (2019, 658)

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[17] The constitutive import of some relations to personhood is not to be confused with the fact that some of the person-making characteristics are relational, as they cannot be developed alone: developmental dependence, sustenance dependence or exercise dependence might be necessary for developing and exercising person-making characteristics, but the intersubjective dimension of recognitive attitudes cannot be reduced to a causal role (Quante 2020).

It is hard to shake the suspicion that, indeed, we often engineer accounts tailored on requests of an ethical kind. It is clear that such accounts must be quite carefully engineered in order to avoid the risk of being too liberal, or too arbitrary. In qualifying how such individuals enter into personhood, they make reference to other persons' capacities and attitudes, and thus are open again to the accusation of being arbitrary (on the inclusive side, rather than on the exclusive side).

An alternative and radical solution would be to admit that all human beings are persons in virtue of their belonging to a given species. Should we then bite the bullet and admit unabashed speciesism? This solution hardly seems able to justify our normative practices further, as it, too, seems arbitrary – and also falls short of giving a truthful account of persons. It would need to omit the factual existence of such recognitive practices, and maintain that a human animal born alone on a strange planet would qualify as a person just in virtue of its belonging to our species (Quante 2002, 92–118; Wilkes 1988, chap. 2).

Such problems open the way to understanding how ontological questions and normative questions intersect in matters of personhood; a connection already emerging from the way psychological approach has been superimposed to ethical considerations tied to the structure of our personality. The issue of the dependence of the moral status on metaphysical characteristics is clearly related to the one encountered in the previous section regarding the connection between metaphysical and practical identity. Here, the question is whether a given set of characteristics (what some would call the essence of the person) justifies the normative status of persons; or if it is tied and dependent from something else as well. The conditions of personhood spark far more problems than these; still, having introduced the concept of recognition and the dyadic concept of personhood, we might now explore a different, but strictly related, aspect of personhood.

1.5. Conventionalism

1. Conventionalism about personal identity

The import of the social dimension into the existence conditions of persons lies at the core of another issue: whether conditions of personhood and personal identity may be socially constructed. The view that persons are socially constituted and that this may happen differently in different social contexts goes under several names, such as relativism, conventionalism, or practice-dependent accounts. I will primarily employ *conventionalism* in the following.

A conventionalist position about persons holds that, just like nations, flags and headmasters, persons are at least partly constituted by conventions; or, if one is conventionalist about personal identity over time, conventions are taken to be at least partly constitutive of personal identity over time. Such conventions are identity-governing conventions: they determine the bounds of personhood and personal identity, rendering persons «practice-dependent conventional constructs» (Braddon-Mitchell & Miller 2004); and persons are involved in the very practices that partly constitute them. 'Conventions' can be used as a generic term to refer to more or less explicitly and formally regulated social practices that directly or indirectly affect persons and their existence conditions. What these practices consist in and how and to what point they constitute or determine the conditions of existence and persistence of persons is the matter of debate.

Because it involves 'external' factors, conventionalism may be understood as a dyadic approach, with its most extreme fringes arguing that persons are *just* the product of social practices (Sider 2001; Dennett 1976). But conventionalist positions rarely are so radical. They purport to show not that facts about, say, human nature or psychology are irrelevant to personal identity; but that they are not the only facts involved.

So far, the biological and the psychological approach have treated the question of the criterion of personal identity as a fact «out there», to be resolved through «independent justifiers» (cfr. Johnston 1989): that is, as something that obtains regardless of the practices around it. This is certainly the case with the animalist's position as it finds personal identity to be best examined as a natural kind, that of the human animal.[18] The same can be said of psychological approaches, insofar as the psychological relations are thought of as a naturally occurring fact and only 'normal' causes for psychological continuity are admitted. Conventionalism, on the other hand, introduces the idea that 'external' relations are involved in determining the continuity of personal identity or personhood. In the last section we have already seen the problem this position raises: if a social element is added to

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[18] If we were to undertake an analysis of the concept of natural kind, or better yet of the concept of species, we might reach different conclusions, as there is a notorious difficulty in mapping philosophical natural kinds onto biological categories.

the mix that makes a given individual a person, the threat of contingency and the ultimate failure to justify our inclusion or exclusion of some individuals inches closer. We will come back to these matters.

The focus of the following will be on conventionalism about personal identity through time, according to which the continuation of personal identity relies at least in part on the person-tracking practices, personal or social: if the resulting person is treated as the person she was prior to the event, identity is preserved. The practices at hand can be self-regarding (or self-directed), or other-regarding (or other-directed). Self-regarding practices are the first-personal attitudes and practices of the agentive, prudential, cognitive and affective kind that one employs in their self-conception; they are personal, individual. Other-regarding, or public, practices are the social practices one is caught into, conventions proper. These kinds of practices are not subjective: dispositions and states of the single person are not directly relevant in their realization and presence. Self-regarding and other-regarding practices, though, are more than superficially connected: social practices and cultural conventions can influence an individual's self-understanding both directly and indirectly, constitutively or causally, by determining the patterns of concerns, responsibility and ownership, for example (Braddon-Mitchell & Mill 2004). So conventionalism about personal identity can take two, not mutually exclusive, forms.

In the first form, persistence through time is determined by the social, institutional or legal practices and beliefs about persons operating in a society. The thought experiment of the body series offers a good idea of socially shared conventions working in the concept of personal identity:

> Sometime in the future, a way to clone persons whenever their bodies start to decay is developed: a body double is prepared for every person, and consciousness gets transferred from the dying organism to the brand-new one, identical to the one just left behind. There are no complications in having your consciousness regularly transferred in a body double ready for the occasion; in fact, this technique becomes so popular and works so efficiently, that it is assimilated into everyday routine, a perfectly well-known, uncontroversial way to keep on living, not too different from getting one's teeth cleaned. In such a society, getting cloned in the morning before heading to work is an accepted way to keep on persisting as the same person.

In such a society, the continuity of consciousness, with the occasional body-swapping, counts as surviving. Note that the point is not that the inhabitants of such a society have *found out* that personal identity is preserved by this procedure but rather have incorporated this procedure into the concept of survival. In such a society, being cloned once in a while is not a source of anguish, doubt, or worry: it has been perfectly integrated into standard practices about persons. Here conventions about

personal identity would be different than in our society; per Nozick's hypothesis, conditions of personal identity are changed.

The second form of conventionalism is that of *personal* conventions: that is, every single person has specific conditions of persistence through time due to their particular qualities. Thus, for example, to keep with Nozick:

> What is special about people, about selves, is that what constitutes their identity through time is partially determined by their own conception of themselves, a conception which may vary, perhaps appropriately does vary, from person to person. (1981, 69)

Braddon-Mitchell and Miller (2004) defend such a view, which they call conativism, according to which «the same-person relation (henceforth SP-relation) in some sense depends on desires, behaviours, choices, and other conative states, as well as organised systems of such behaviours and choices in the form of conventions». The idea is that one's beliefs, practices and desires are relevant in determining how persons persist through time. Since they privilege private, self-directed conative states, they hold that every person has a say on their own identity conditions; indeed, any person-phase can decide the relation of being the same person that will hold between her and the successive person-phase. The idea is that there is *no* unique relation to being the same person: it is decided on a case-by-case basis. For any case, there is a fact of the matter of the relation that holds; but the fact of the matter is secondary. There are, however, constraints on the kind of relations that can be established as identity-preserving: such relations should withstand ideal rational reflection, and if they are in possession of the relevant knowledge. For example, a person cannot anticipate being a bat, even in the presence of the relevant conative relation (caring for the bat) – because there is something that is being a bat that is *not* being a person. These requirements are put in place to avoid cognitive errors. However, they are loose enough: they do not compel persons to organize their self-directed practices in the same manner because there is no conation that is more fundamental and better than others – desires are what they are, everybody has their own. Importantly, relying on conations does not mean that the way one survives is just a matter of choice: this is because conations are not voluntarily chosen – nor are conventions (more on this later).

This last remark cannot elude the problems conventionalism of this kind encounters. The most relevant issue is a problem of incompatibility that presents itself in mixed views, where both social and personal conventions and practices are involved. The incompatibility arises when individual and social conventions are at odds or at any rate fail to coincide perfectly. Suppose (the example is found in Braddon-Mitchell & Miller 2004) that person A considers themselves to be psychologically continuous with their future person-stage; and an accident leaves them brain-dead. By their standards,

they have stopped existing; they do not survive. But suppose they lived in a society where standard conventions on personal identity run through physical continuity, so that their other-directed practices are structured to keep treating A (what appears as A's body) as continuers of A. Given this, A in a vegetative state really is A; or are they? So the problem is that if the matter of continuity is jointly settled by private and public attitudes, they might sometimes lead to favor different relations as identity – this is nothing else but a manifestation of the problem of multiplicity we have already encountered (Shoemaker 2007).

Conventionalism is also faced with a broader issue: the anxiety that giving too much space to conventions in defining conditions of personhood and personal identity might open the door to unrestrained relativism, especially concerning ethical matters. We go back to the problem found in the interplay of recognition, person-making characteristics and moral status. The threat is the same: if social practices play too significant a role in defining what is a person and for how long, justification of practices about persons becomes more difficult. Surely, conventionalism puts a historical, contingent understanding of personhood and personal identity that may twist some mouths, as these concepts are involved in the justifications for our ethical practices.

Carol Rovane, for example, argues that conventionalism (or relativism, as she calls it) is to be objected to from an ethical point of view: processes of mutual recognition are fundamental to our interpersonal relations, so that «according to the ethical criterion, the class of persons is the class of agents who mutually recognize one another as facing, in all of their relations, the same ethically significant choice concerning whether and when to engage in agency-regarding relations» (1998, 49). If we admit that persons in different social contexts may have different personhood and personal identity criteria, and thus be different, determinations of personhood and personal identity would cease to be recognizable across social contexts and could not act as a basis for mutual recognition. Rovane further argues that the idea that we might not recognize each other goes against «our commonsense belief that it is in the nature of persons that they can recognize one another as persons, even across social contexts» (1998, 49). The relativist position has to deny that we recognize each other as persons across social contexts and is thus revisionist in a manner Rovane finds unconvincing.

Two points might be briefly argued with respect to Rovane's position. First, arguably, we do not always (or did not always in the past) recognize each other as persons across social contexts; I think the point may be made by opening a history book. It seems to me unwarrantedly optimistic, *and* revisionist, to deny that an element of social variability is present in commonsense concepts of person and that this has done serious damage. This may be at odds with the other, equally commonsense notion that Rovane invokes; but commonsense is a two-edged sword.

Second, while conventions might render personal identity unstable across social contexts, and imply the exclusion of certain kinds of individuals, they too go both ways. If they can be used to deny personhood to those who, we think, would merit it or do have it, they are also involved in expanding the reach of personhood and personal identity. We have already seen at least a case where this happens, or comes close to happening: accounts that deal with the personhood of human beings that do not fit the criteria but are, nonetheless, treated as persons. Conventionalism appears precisely in such borderline cases rather than in standard ones. I will take up again the matter of the ethical dangers of conventionalism for personal identity later on.

2. Indeterminacy de dicto and de re

Conventionalism is often invoked in (or provoked by) the resolution of some puzzle cases regarding identity through time. Here, it seems that conventions do in part determine survival: will I survive tele-transportation? Is brain transplant effective in maintaining personal identity? It depends – on what? Well, on whether you think you survived, if you believe that personal conventions can affect identity, or perhaps by the fact that the practice of tele transporting has been well-established for well over a century now and is a popular way of transportation no one gives a thought to, if we were to model our reply on social conventions. Conventionalism thrives where the existence of certain facts about personal identity still allows some elbow room for uncertainty; most agree that most of the time survival is *not* conventional (Johnston 1995, 25). It is marginal cases that bring it about; but they might allow further generalizations. The idea is then that sometimes it is social practices and conventions that *determine* identity, when identity is indeterminate. But is the idea that identity may be indeterminate, in the first place, that is object of doubt. What kind of indeterminacy is at stake?

Semantic indeterminacy appears as the first candidate. We have a case of semantic indeterminacy when the meaning of the word is not determinate enough to be applied with precisions. As the term is vague, statements containing it will share its vagueness and be indeterminate in truth-value. The conflict would then be due to semantic confusion, much like Locke originally held by arguing that 'person' was to be distinguished from 'man' (or, we would rather say nowadays, 'human being'). If this is so, then the point is simply to reach an agreement on what we mean when we say 'person', or on the different meanings that 'person' has.

Semantic indeterminacy calls for linguistic conventionalism. If the indeterminacy is to be found in the way we describe situations, or the way words capture their referents, then linguistic conventionalism is simply the idea that different linguistic conventions may change the way we describe a situation. We might choose to say that A has survived a given accident, or choose to say A did not survive, depending on the concept of 'survival' we have, for example, or the concept of 'A'

we have. Such conventionalism would only be *de dicto*, concerning the way we speak or categorize stuff in the world; not the stuff itself. Under this reading, what it takes for us to persist through time is up to us insofar as it is up to us, as a linguistic community, to choose which beings we pick out with our person-referring expressions.

This strategy seems the one pursued in setting apart metaphysical and practical identity, as they are thought of as two different answers to two different questions, that of re-identification and characterization. It is the appropriate answer to the problem of multiplicity, as it offers different relations as separated relata to different problems, and not one relation underlies our judgements of identity. The multiple candidate view, which I a response to the multiplicity problem, for example, states that there are multiple candidates for being the reference of '(same) person', but it is only the reference that is governed by conventions, while the candidates have non-conventional identity conditions (Merricks 2001, 175-77). The eventual outcome is pluralism, as there is not one concept of personal identity, but rather two (at least), each having their own intuitions, and criteria (Sider 2001, 200).

Surely considerations of multiple-candidates seem to lead to conventionalism, but linguistic conventionalism cannot *cause* persons to survive or not. By adopting a different concept or criterion of personal identity we cannot change the sorts of adventures that we could survive; we might instead stop using our personal pronouns to pick out beings who cannot survive a given adventure, and use them instead to pick out beings who can survive it. But our criterion of personal identity boils down then to a convention of reference.

There is a different problem: this approach wilfully ignores that our differing intuitions seem to nonetheless to be about the same thing, to have a common reference. The issue at hand is *not* misunderstood: there is a sincere disagreement on whether persons could survive without physical continuity or without psychological continuity (Rieber 1998). Despite every single individual having different aspects under which questions can be asked about them, they are still a unitary individual, a single individual. And about this single individual there is one general question regarding their conditions of existence *simpliciter*. Persons in their entirety, not as sums of relations, are the object of our concerns; and we are concerned about a given person, we care about persons as individuals that have an intrinsic significance for us, rather than being concerned about 'the animal', the 'agent', the 'legal person', the 'moral person' etc. All such aspects regard one person intrinsically (Shoemaker 2007; Schechtman 2014).

The true problem lies in *de re* indeterminacy, which we have already encountered. The idea is that identity might in some case be truly (and not just linguistically) indeterminate is controversial.[19] Even more controversial is the idea that the presence of certain conventions and practices might determine identity in uncertain cases. As Merricks remarks, one «does not fear death by paradigm shift» (2001, 173). That is, if personal identity is governed by conventions, that would mean that a change in conventions could put out of existence persons, which seems absurd. Equally, it might seem less credible that existence at a time might depend on conventions: does my existing right now hinge on conventions?

But this absurdity can be somehow lessened.

In the first place, conventions are not as shallow and flimsy as Merricks' remarks make them out to be. This must be understood if the rest of the discussion is to make some sense. As we have seen, social and interpersonal conventions, practices and attitudes are deeply rooted in our life-form. Indeed, some of them might be hard-wired (and be exhibited by non-persons, as well); they might be, for example, the product of our evolutionary physical and psychological history and thus be quite fixed, as a survival instinct (this also stands for personal conventions: we might have some self-directed attitudes that, for example, are the result of experiences we had in our infancy and have irreversibly shaped the way and conditions under which we conceive of ourselves). But even conventions that are not scripted in the organism or brain are hardly malleable – especially as they regard the person, a central element of our societal organization, sheltered by a thick jungle of often mutually supporting conventions, ranging from the more institutional to the more informal and spontaneous ones. Our complex and wide-ranging system of practices, beliefs, institutions, and all the elements of the social play, might well be open to revision: we are aware, after all, of the existence of revolutions as well as of longer historical transformations. But such socio-cultural shifts are hard to come by and effected through the long work of both subjective and objective conditions. They presumably also involve the radical re-thinking of the very basis over which society is built, the re-evaluation of existential matters and their public understanding, and much more. Even in an epoch of supposed secularization and growing materialism, we still are very much under the influence of our Christian beliefs, from our philosophy to our commonsense understanding of the world, to our public policies: an empirical remark that should keep us from thinking of conventions as decorative, skin-deep additions to our 'natural' life. While certain conventions certainly are like that – for example, the convention of putting the fork on the right side of the table might be upturned quite easily, I suppose -, some, and especially the person-centred ones, have deeper roots. They are part of our form

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[19] Johnston (1989) argues that the concept of person is indeterminate: it so sensitive to small variations that if its indeterminacy is not assumed, it will only lead to *sorite* arguments.

of life. We have power over such conventions in the measure we have power to change society; and such paradigm-shifts may well be deadly.

Secondly, although fear-mongering about relativism usually suggests that on conventionalist positions anything goes – that we may end up by declaring a parrot a (non-human) person if it is treated as such –, most conventionalist positions fall short of such extremism. They do not deny that non social facts concur in determining the existence at a time and over time of persons; facts that pertain to the psychological or physical properties of persons. Rather, they hold that these facts are by themselves not enough to determine wholly the existence of persons, as they are not themselves personal. Of course, the existence of persons *does* comprise of such facts, but the relevant practices also have to obtain. The existence of, say, a conscious, rational entity is not by itself enough to establish the existence of a person. Persons are here regarded as necessarily participating, or being involved into, practices and conventions that in part constitute them; changing which the persistence conditions of persons will also change.

Stephen White's metapsychological relativism (1989) offers a good approach as to just what sort of other facts may intervene. White argues that metapsychological 'external' relations are routinely involved in determining identity. Some of them are also what we would call 'external' relations or facts, such as medical, technological or legal facts, such as «the legal title of a person at different times, social and legal relations, the contractual rights and obligations of a person at different times, and certain technological capacities facilitating or supporting survival […]» (1989, 313). White argues that such relations are «associated with such non-metaphysical affairs as moral responsibility, legal title, certain practical relations, and social conventions» (cfr. also Rorty 1976, 3-4).

Rather than distinguishing between internal and external relations concurring to determine continuity of personal identity, White claims that we should distinguish between the mode of access the person has to present and future actions and events. The mode of access to normal psychological relations (such as that holding between A's intention of doing X a t_1, and A's implementation of action X at t_2) is autonomous, as a normally functioning person has knowledge of such a relation and control over it. By contrast, a scientist implanting in my brain false memories gives rise to a non autonomous mode of access, as it is not enough to be a functionally normal individual to access to them; the technological mechanism is also required, and the person has no control over such elements. Now, autonomous and non-autonomous relations may be both internal or external; this is irrelevant to the way they enter into determining personal identity. If I choose to take a tele-transporter that will destroy my present body and recreate it, along with all my psychological relations, in a different place, this is an external relation that is taking place; but, as long as I am ready to regard the tele-transported person as myself, to which I can access because her actions are fruit of my intention, the

relation is autonomous and, in White's theory, identity-preserving. (The notion appears then to be roughly the same as the authorial view argued by Korsgaard). If my brain is tinkered with, changing my intentions to the point that I quit academic philosophy, the relation is internal, albeit non-autonomous, and the process is not identity-preserving. The rationale seems to be that the process is successful as long as the relations we care about most are preserved. If I decide to step into tele-transporter, and I am prepared to regard the exiting replica as myself, including her in my egoistic self-concern, then there is no reason the person coming out from the other side should not be regarded as me. The artificiality of the process in no way hinders its results.

White thus argue that it is possible to explain the differences in our intuitions through differences present in non-autonomous access relations. He argues that non-autonomous access is present in «a significant number of our most important sources of access to our future selves» (1989, 310). Usually the relevant relations taken into considerations are thought to be internal. For example, in the fission case, with two candidates to being the same person, both candidates have equal claim to the same autonomous relations, which are stipulated to be transferred with no difference between the two hemispheres; but non-autonomous relations might instead be different. To make his point, White suggests to think what would happen in a case of multiple fission that produces thousands of replicas. There would then be ten thousand replicas of me going around. In such a case, a previously existing external relation would stop existing: the relation that I held to my natural and social environment. As I am now replicated ten thousand times, it would impossible for my replicas, and my friends as well, to keep up social relations, to take my job or my role in my family. The consequences of this are far-reaching, as

> People of significance to us could not maintain personal relations with each of our replicas. Nor could we maintain the pattern of concern for this many future extensions which characterizes our relations to our future selves. e. Hence, our ability to predict our future actions and experiences on the basis of our knowledge of our environment would be lost - as would our ability to control such actions and experiences on the basis of our present control of the environment. the replication involved would destroy the major sources of our non-autonomous access to our future selves. (1989, 312).

As being treated as the same person is one of the person-directed practices that determine continuation of personal identity, personal identity would be untenable under these circumstances. On the contrary, White argues, a single replica that could replace me in any circumstances would be able to take my place with minimal discomfort, and others would be willing (presumably) to accept her as myself, and assure continuation of personal identity.

It seems White here is actually arguing for a closest continuer version of continuity, rather than for personal identity proper. But, contrary to Nozick, he denies that *only* intrinsic relationships matter for determining identity: if we take the first-person perspective as being what decides the continuity of

personal identity, we risk once again ending up in the bare-locus view, that is, referring to purely subjective and unanalysable facts. White then explicitly denies that only intrinsic features can determine whether a future person will or not be the same as the current person. But he also stresses that is indirectly, mostly, that these conventions operate: by being internalized in one's own self-image, which is shaped by non autonomous facts: other persons' behavior and attitude condition our own and our access to ourselves. By stating that some artificially enacted relations can intervene in personal identity, White is arguing that what matters is how the person chooses to continue.

We tend to privilege biological and psychological facts as we regard them as more intrinsic features. It should not be forgotten, though, that such facts are already heavily influenced by, and indeed entrenched with, other kinds of facts and relations, which are social in nature. Medical facts are an obvious example, as they are developed in the first place in order to deal with biological and psychological features, and we are exposed to them in such a magnitude that it is impossible to actually pry apart natural features from external ones. Such external facts are not added on artificially to 'intrinsic' features, but are strictly knotted within them. This should be taken into consideration when refusing to consider 'external' facts in identity relations. It is not the case that the social dimension *creates* or modifies such facts, but rather, that the social dimension is already working on facts about human nature and sensibly altering them, making *personal* facts out of them (Johnston 1989). These are social facts that may change from social context to social context, and thus the meaning of being-the-same-person may change accordingly. Thus, there is no need to argue that the social practices can extend or cut short personal identity as one may extend a coupon. Facts about human nature for human persons are arguably still relevant; they do not exclude, by their mere presence as constituents of personal identity, that other facts may also intervene and be different depending on social context.

This last problem concludes this brief discussion of conventionalist positions; a lot of questions about conventionalism will remain unanswered here, while some will receive an answer later on. I have dedicated some space in exploring conventionalism as an option because it is quite clearly linked to the arguments that have brought about the discrimination between metaphysical and practical identity. Conventionalist positions tend to focus on what matters in identity – either individually and socially; If *what matters in identity* is itself relative to social context, then practical identity will have conventional traits. On the other hand, if we take 'what matters' to be fixed in content beyond cultural and social manipulation, then practical identity will not be conventional, but tied to the obtaining of

certain relations. Certainly, as long as practical identity is kept separated from metaphysical identity, practical identity may be conventionalist about its persistence conditions.[20]

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[20] It should be noted that conventionalism, though, is not neutral in regard to metaphysical matters: if conditions of personhood imply, for example, having a soul or being a specific substance, then existence over time cannot be governed by conventions: this would mean that conventions can destroy a soul or suppress a substance. That is plausibly *not* the case (Merricks 2001).

1.6. Some methodological issues

1. Application and role of the concept

We have so far been occupied with sketching some of the main conceptual lines the debate is articulated around; and in doing so, we have unearthed some of its implications, assumptions, and difficulties. We have now enough elements to turn our attention to one aspect of the structure of the debate itself. The discussion has revealed conflicting intuitions regarding the persistence of persons and an abundance of profoundly different person-concepts. Thought experiments attempt to give such intuitions a more coherent shape than their inchoate, commonsense form; but intuitions, too, yield differing results. On the other hand, there seems to be lacking a positive strict proof for the correctness of any approach.

Denis Robinson (2004) argues that the various person-concepts involved seem, indeed, to be addressing the same issues, and to be about the same thing – 'persons' – while being distressingly different. Such concepts are not, though, incommensurable: they *do* cover the same conceptual terrain. How is this predicament possible?[21]

Robinson takes the situation to be due to the overlapping of two aspects of a same concept: the conditions of applying a concept, and the consequences (conceptual and practical) of applying it, which he calls the role of the concept, which is also partially constituted by its consequences:

> Sometimes, I think, we use "same concept" so as to give priority to application-conditions, sometimes so as to give priority to a concept's role. Generally (though it's context-dependent) the more evaluative, and especially the more normative, a concept, the more we prioritize role in concept-individuation; the more descriptive, the more we prioritize application-conditions. (2004, 531)

Here under a different disguise we re-encounter the deep entanglement of descriptive and normative aspects in a concept as 'person'. Such entanglement renders concept-individuation difficult, as it swings from more descriptive to normative considerations, and back, depending on the context and scope guiding inquiry. Under this analysis, then, these two aspects of a concept provide competing criteria for concept-individuation. Person-concepts are situated in a continuum between the descriptive and normative poles, rather than being about different things. There is a tension between

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[21] Robinson argues that two conditions must be clarified in order to understand the difficulties inherent to the debate. On the one hand, there is the no-fault condition: the fact that there are really *different* person-concepts that *are* genuine and equally legitimate person-concepts (and not misguided concepts about something else). On the other hand, the genuine disagreement condition: the fact that they all have, or purport to have, the same reference; and there is sincere disagreement on which person-concept is correct, even as they reference the same thing. That both conditions should be present at the same time seems paradoxical and it's what spurs Robinsons' analysis.

what is the application-condition for the concept 'person', and the role the concept 'person' plays, conceptually and practically.

Robinson argues that rather than trying to argue for one or the other approach, we should ask in the first place what approach we are pursuing. The first would look out for application-conditions, that is, the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be a person; the second for the role the concept plays. Note that neither choice immediately excludes the animalist or psychological approach from being valid. *Both* the animalist and psychological approach can offer application conditions and an appropriate role. We would then still be able to choose either one; but we need at least to understand what we are trying to define. This is not such a different distinction from that of metaphysical and practical identity; although it does not distinguish them categorically.

Robinson's analysis offers the occasion to challenge the method so far employed, that of conceptual analysis, to which thought experiments are corollary. While this is not the place to discuss the merits and shortcomings of conceptual analysis, it is worth stopping briefly to consider the way its use structures and influences the discussion on persons. As we have seen, most of the debate is structured around, and worked through, conceptual analysis and thus, intuition-based methodology, especially through thought experiments; real case studies being rarer. The data of conceptual investigations are intuitive judgments, that thought experiments ought to bring into relief. The end result of a conceptual investigation should then be an explication of the concept that fits with such intuitive judgments. But here, it is not clear whether a priori conceptual necessity can help us further. There seem to be *multiple* candidate concepts for person and personal identity, all of which comply with our semantic practices (our use of the concept of personal identity) under some aspect. Conceptual analysis is bound to fail us insofar as it seems we hold (and act accordingly to) an array of different person-concepts, sustained and grounded in intuitions we cannot assure to be theoretically pure.

Further, as conceptual analysis is a priori, it is not concerned with practical considerations, which are a not small part of the role of the concept of person. In fact, putting into relief the role-concept of person evidences how its practical consequences partly concur to constitute the concept: a concept of person that results in the mistreatment and oppression of individuals would not be a concept of person many of us would be willing to accept. This immediately locates it beyond the limits of conceptual analysis. Ultimately, then, conceptual analysis cannot help us out of this dead end: in order to make progress, we must employ a different method to steer our efforts.

2. On thought experiments

It is worth stopping briefly to examine, after this argument, the role of thought experiments in the debate of personal identity, where, as should be evident by now, they thrive (as do critiques of such

experiments, on which the following discussion is based: Gendler 2004, Wilkes 1988). Thought experiments are used as a way to test our theories, and to stretch our concepts, in order to see where our intuitions lead us. They should help defining what is conceptually, rather than factually, necessary. But their usefulness is not without drawbacks, and their generous use in the debate on persons has been object of several critiques, some of which we should be aware of.

The first point we have already seen, in discussing Bernard Williams' variation of the classic body-swapping thought experiment, described from a third-person perspective, and from a first-person perspective (1970). The way the thought experiment is presented (and not just which elements are taken under consideration) may produce a substantial shift in the kind of response we might expect. In the case at hand, adopting a first person perspective or a third person perspective in a body-swap type of thought experiment may change one's felt situation and response in intuition: third-person perspective is the familiar way the thought experiment is presented and brings about the usual kind of intuitions. But first person perspective is quite unsettling and suggests that, rather than me switching bodies, I will experience a series of traumatic and violent acts: my brain will be meddled with till I forget my identity, and torture will follow. Re-description provoking instability in responses certainly raises an alarm regarding the mechanism of our intuitions, and the range under which affective, emotive, imaginative and cultural reasons may influence us: «The method of science fiction has its uses in philosophy, but [...] To seek what is 'logically required' for sameness of person under unprecedented circumstances is to suggest that words have some logical force beyond what our past needs have invested them with» (Quine 1972, 490).

Johnston similarly warns not to generalize from our everyday concept of how people continue, to apply it to every imaginable case: «our intuitive reactions to the puzzle cases should be able to be taken as manifestations of our grasp of those necessary and sufficient conditions, and *not as overgeneralizations* from the everyday run of cases or manifestations of a particular conception of people» (1987, 60). Such efforts bewilder us and brings us to opt «for one or another partial extension of our ordinary practice of reidentification». This tendency is made stronger by the fact that we tend to take what are evidence of continuation as criteria of identity (this holds for both bodily and psychological criteria), and sometimes the two cannot be separated as clearly as we would like.

Finally, an extensive critique of thought experiments can be found in Kathleen Wilkes' *Real people: Personal identity without thought experiments* (1988). Wilkes argues that thought experiments are in most cases severely undescribed, often painting scenarios which lack information both about premises and consequences of the imagined case. Thought experiments rely on the modification, exaggeration or creation of certain features or elements of reality; but in order for the selected element to stand out and be manipulated, the background conditions should remain stable and be accurately described.

When this does not happen, the enhancing of a single features thus is disjointed and cut off from the larger background into which it exists, and which is portrayed as unaffected. By not giving enough information on the background and surrounding conditions and consequences of the modified or added features, thought experiments are unconstrained to the point of implausibility and ineffectiveness. Fission cases, for example, ask us to imagine a person splitting into two different persons: but no detail is given on how this should happen, or what kind of person we should have in front of us that can split in a way that human beings can't. The results so obtained from thought experiments are inconclusive, as we are not able to weight the elements in play. It is plausible that in reality such happenings would leave us without a clear way to react. In theoretical imagining, they strain reality to the breaking point: several other consequences of hypothetically and manually engorged situations are ignored, to the risk of assuming relevance or irrelevance to the thought experiment's elements. As much as they have contributed to further theoretical analysis, rendering theory more sophisticated and bringing out unexpected implications, they still fall short of marking a turning point: our reactions to hypothetical cases, as has been shown, is highly equivocal, and we don't share the same consistent intuitions (Unger 1990).

In fact, thought experiments often conflate conceivability and possibility: but being imaginable or describable is not enough to establish a phenomenon from which to draw successfully conclusion (think again of Thomson's example of turning tigers into bananas). As always with intuitions, we are left dubious on whether conceivability is a sign of possibility or mere familiarity; imagination makes for an uncertain guide in metaphysical and empirical matters. We should distinguish thought experiments that explore a plausible theoretical possibility from those that are prompted by sheer ignorance of the relevant features involved. The world in which these experiments lead us is so different from ours that conclusions drawn from drastically different conditions may be misleading, and perhaps bear no relation to our concept of person, developed in actual and present conditions. Thought experiment thus often distract us from the employment of more empirical thesis on what is that is brought about in matters of survival, and by describing 'impossible' situations and events, can only be of limited help on what is taken to be of importance.

Reasonably enough, Wilkes also requires that thought experiments should fall in line or be coherent with scientific knowledge available on the subject, and in any case not violate laws of nature – which, she notes, are interrelated and interdependent to the point that one law could not be made an exception of without affecting the others. Thought experiments that require human animals duplicating, splitting, and the like, are thus in the first place impossible on a theoretical point of view, and thus uninteresting at best, misleading at worst. While this may be an extreme point to make (as thought experiment can be quite instructive and help better understand the nature of reality), it avoids the

dangers of employing tailored thought experiments that satisfy our intuitions, and rather help creating thought experiments that stimulate them in new directions. Ultimately they need some disciplining; conformity to our real world and scientific knowledge's seems warranted if they are to pry apart factuality and conceptual or logical necessity.

The lesson we should take from this is that thought experiments may go in *either* (indeed, any) direction, not that our intuitions aren't useful; they rather show us the elbow room personal identity affords. But they do require careful handling: while they have always been, in philosophical theorizing, precious sources of knowledge, they also show great cross-cultural variability (Buckwalter and Stich 2013), often reiterating unacknowledged cultural and philosophical heritage rather than challenging it. Thought experiments are instructive, as they throw light to different aspects of the problem and suggest new point of views or new issues. At the same time, they can stretch our intuitions far beyond their usual reach, blurring the edges of what we would actually do, think and feel in extreme situations: something we are not very good at predicting.

3. Looking for a starting point

Come to this point, it is hard to think there is *positive* proof that either approach, biological or psychological, is right; both are sufficiently internally coherent and both satisfy commonplace intuitions, albeit in different ways. An obvious strategy would be to rely on *more* general considerations to settle the matter. We could test how well either approach can fit, for example, with a well-established theory of mind, or the theory of evolution, or some other field the insights of which are suitably relevant to our problems. We would then have reason to favour the approach best fitting with our current knowledge. What kind of fields should we look at? Rovane (1998, 61) suggests that an account of persons should figure, and be consistent with, three disciplines: metaphysics, science, and ethics; three theoretical enterprises which give different perspectives on persons. Any account of persons, she argues, should be able to properly place persons in each of these fields, that is, in a modal/logical order, in a natural order, and in an ethical order.

Unfortunately, she also comes to the conclusion that both the animalist and the psychological approach are metaphysically consistent and compatible with a scientific account. An animalist approach is an easy fit for both metaphysics, by equating 'person' with a natural kind, and natural science, 'person' being a term for a product of evolution, the human being. A psychologist approach, as well, has a metaphysical account and fits within the natural sciences, in particular with functionalist accounts of the mind. As metaphysical and scientific plausibility does not seem an option to sort things out, Rovane concludes that the only general consideration that can help discriminate between

the different approaches is an ethical one. That is, we should sort out which approach does best with our ethical practices, broadly constructed as comprehending practical concerns.

Clarification of the debate can only go so far in its resolution. Rather, revisionism seems inevitable. By revisionism is meant the fact that the person-concept emerging from the inquiry may be in some ways different from our common-sense concept of person, and may have some unexpected characteristics. It follows from the fact that it hardly seems plausible that all our common beliefs, intuitions, and stray thoughts on persons can be satisfyingly be accommodate in a single account. Conversely, it's difficult to imagine at this point that there may be a theory of person that won't entail some embarrassing answers. When our concepts and practices are revealed to be epistemologically and evaluative incoherent, taking our intuitions about personal identity seriously mandates substantial revisionism and thus some major clean-up of our person-concepts. A revisionary move seems to be needed in order to make the concept more homogenous across a number of (theoretical and practical) fields. How much revision is acceptable and what precisely should be the standard baseline against which to measure how much our concept is straying, is up for grabs (Donagan, 1990; Baillie, 1993). I argue that the concept of person should be analysed in a way that best suits our person-directed practices; that it is role conditions that should be pursued. It is the criterion around which our practical concerns are organized that we should follow and take as our personal identity criterion. Such a practical criterion will then have to take into consideration our future-directed and retrospective concerns; our patterns of anticipation of blame and praise; and our patterns of anticipation and experiences (such as those had when an event causes a memory; an intention, an action). (Johnston). Two reasons motivate this choice.

The first is a methodological concern that we should adhere to our existing practices in order to avoid the kind of confusion and uncertainty that so far the case method has brought about. Person-directed practices are in fact the only testament we have on what are persons; by taking our practices as the starting point, the risk of rendering them incoherent is minimized. A revisionary account will, in any case, result in the need to re-structure some of the practices that involve persons; but a revision that should result to be incompatible with most of our practices would be unsatisfying, as then we would have ended up defining something, but not the concept of person as we know it. Johnston argues to the same effect that the concept of person resulting from theoretical analysis should not be epiphenomenal with respect to our practice – they should not be separated or different from the kind of concept that governs our judgments. If conceptual revision is not to go on blindly, the concept may not just be purely 'described', but, rather, has to be answerable and make sense of our practices, not last emotional and affective ones. By choosing to refer to practices, we employ a factual, rather than conceptual, method; one where our primary experience of persons is safeguarded. By starting, and

returning to, such phenomena, we have better chances to work out a theory of persons that works with our ordinary experience of things, and might also be viable for further regulating practical matters. Under this view, theories of personal identity that contrast too starkly with our practices are not viable. If the resulting concept should, for example, render senseless, impossible or untrustworthy our ordinary way of re-identifying persons, it would be clearly both of little use and unsatisfying. Indeed, we should ask ourselves if we truly have worked out a concept of person and personal identity. Testing the criterion will mean testing whether it adheres to the kind of affective, evalutative responses, and whether it fits the social, moral, evaluative and institutional role.

Second, arguably 'person' cannot be described fully without making reference to its practical role, especially in ethically relevant cases. This is also a methodological point, in fact complementary to the first. Suppose a descriptive account of the concept could be had, detailing a criterion of personal identity. We should then argue that such an account justifies, or better yet demands, certain practices and concerns. But a metaphysical description could not command our ethical practices and commitment: the mere metaphysical fact that a given person A did x at t, is not enough to prompt any further action, be it praise or punishment. This relation is ethically inert. Only if we are already interested in things such as responsibility are we prompted to make, out of this fact, a further practical consideration. It is because we value justice and well-being, that we care about what one has done and, in turn, take action ourselves. Equally, facts about biology and psychology cannot command any action nor interest per se; they do insofar they have a place in our practices and concerns (Robinson 2004, 3). That is, they are not *personal*, not any more than a severed finger is, and they alone cannot be decisive in matters of personal identity. They do have importance for person-directed practices, of course: they acquire personal relevance as they are involved in person-matters. But this is only possible insofar as our interest in persons is already piqued. Assigning responsibility is important ethically, not because there is a metaphysical relation underlying that. The fact that the metaphysical relation is indeed present is a fact that is *covered* by the response, but does not dictate it.

The point is then that because we are interested in the first place in practical matters that we concern ourselves with persistence conditions of persons: they are practically relevant. This practical relevance cannot be deduced from metaphysical matters (West 2010, 103). On the contrary, a metaphysical description with no use for our practical concerns would be discarded as a metaphysically accurate, but irrelevant to our concerns about persons, and therefore we would have no reason to concerns ourselves with it. Suppose a metaphysical description for persons where available, and showed that there is nothing that matches our concept of personal identity. Should we adopt the concept? Merely stipulating that a given criterion is the right one around which organize our practices will not make it so.

The seemingly absence (or difficulty in tracking) of the relevant metaphysical that should underlie our concerns does not mean we should ditch the practices and concerns that seemed to be tracking them: such practical concerns are justified by the fact that we care about our objects of concern prima facie, in a non-derivative manner. We care about our friends not because we believe there is a particular continuity of psychological or physical sort going on, but because they are our friends. The supposed metaphysical elements underlying such care and concerns are derivate from reflecting on our practices, but they are not their justifiers and could not modify our practices: «metaphysical pictures of the justificatory undergirding of our practices do not represent the real conditions of justification of those practices» (Johnston 1997: 260–261). Such practices are indeed justified by their being our friends, and not as they are believed to be the sum of psychological facts or further facts. Ordinary facts are enough to justify our practices, even lacking metaphysical foundations.

These considerations do not by any means state that such facts are irrelevant to questions of personal identity. To the contrary, person-directed practices require the satisfaction of certain factual conditions that allow one to participate in such practice in an adequate manner. Merely treating anything like a person will not make anyone a person, exactly because our person-directed practices have been, not surprisingly, tailored on factual conditions. Being a person is precisely the concept of being able to do or react in some ways, abilities and dispositions that are clearly rooted in factual conditions.

4. Revisionism in a practice-based account

Two problem arise. The first is that is that is not clear how a practice-based position might at the same time help revision the concept. The second is that a practice-based position might weaken our ethical stances, depriving them of a stronger kind of metaphysical support (that is, justification by mere metaphysical facts).

Let's start from the first question. It might seem that a practice-based position might not have need to be a revisionary one, as well; if anything, it might appear as a conservative approach, as the concept is defined through our existing practices. To this it must countered that, while practices should be our theoretical benchmark, and theoretical concepts that result or make our practices incoherent should not be had, it does not mean blind, uncritical adherence to whatever our practices happen to be. Practices are not always consistent. Much like intuitions, they are encrusted with centuries, if not millennia, of dealing with persons under different circumstances, beliefs, needs and ideologies. As much as we should try not to render previous person-concepts incomprehensible (to «keeps our cultural history intelligible» (Robison 2004), there should be an effort to attain coherency and homogenous application conditions (Johnston 1989). Rather, it is called upon to evolve with the time

and practices, and our power of manipulation of the relevant facts. As the social situation evolves and changes, and so our life form, we might expect the concept to change as well. Importantly, revisions in the concept will involve change in the patterns of care and concern. That is, a successful revision of the concept should guide practice, and command or suggest or justify change in interpersonal behavior and attitudes, to the effect that «rather than claims to be believed on their merits, philosophical views of personal identity will perforce have some of the character of moral or prudential exhortations» (Robinson 2004, 528). Revisionism about certain part of our person-concept can be taken to answer to practical concerns, as «proposal to extend our practice» (Johnston 1989) in cases where identity is indeterminate. Philosophical reflection might then steer practical concerns rather than just describing their effects (see also Brennan 1988). The relation between concept of person and practices is involved in is thus mutual, as the concept is responsive to practices and practices may be modified according to the concept; we can be revisionist regarding our own practices, too.[22]

5. Practice-based accounts and ethical concerns: Joas' affirmative genesis of value

All such arguments will fail to result persuasive if their consequences seem unacceptable. One of the consequences of such a practice-based position is tied, once again, to ethical concerns. It seems that by admitting to the relative relativity of the concept of person, we find ourselves in the predicament of how to justify our ethical practices in light of a missing metaphysical justification. Which brings to the discrimination problem (Sider 2001): the risk of being incapable of critical attitudes towards discrimination, oppression, and abusive situations involving what we recognize as persons; and thus, watering down the relevance of the progresses made in the universalization of the value of personhood, as our concept of a person is not stable across contexts. After all, why not think that in the past they had a different concept of person, one that did not include certain kinds of individuals, due to their ethnic identity or social status?

It seems then that we are forced to either turn back to metaphysics in order to give justification to our ethical commitments, or face with their historical and social contingency. This last option leaves us unable to assume a critical stance towards mistreatment of (perceived) persons both in different historical and social contexts. As a consequence, the category of person, as an ethical kind, is blunted:

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[22] Under this aspect then it might be understood as a form of conceptual engineering. Conceptual engineering ask not which cases are covered by a concept, but how a concept should be modified or what new concept should be adopted in its place, given the practical context in which the concept is used – for example, given the goal of promoting social equality (Haslanger 2012). Critical assessment of the concept might lead to their modification, refinement or replacement in light of some other scope. As from assertions of personhood and personal identity derive ethical and political consequences, we might feel that the practices should be extended to cover marginal cases.

we might adopt it as a normative tool in a restricted number of social contexts, but cannot aspire to universal application. We might resist this unpleasant conclusion in two ways.

First, we might follow Rovane's refusal of relativism, which was justified precisely on this basis. By refusing relativism in analysis of the ethical kind person, we exclude it in our conclusions about the ethical kind itself. But this doesn't seem to me to be a viable strategy, for two reasons. Rovane refuses relativism as it would render impossible mutual recognition across social contexts, and thus reciprocal ethical treatment between persons. This is in itself an ethical consideration, and begs the question of why we should care to mutually recognize each other across social contexts. Second, it is a fact that there are several person-concepts, relative to socio-cultural context; denying this would run against the practice-based method adopted. The existence of different criteria of personhood and personal identity through history and in the world is more of a fact that needs to be dealt with, than a speculative problem.

The second way out is open to us through the concept of affirmative genesis of values elaborated by Hans Joas. In *The sacredness of the person* (2011), Joas defends an affirmative account of the genesis of values that might wedge itself in between two dominant positions: the Kantian effort to ground morality through rational argumentations that could produce unconditional, universal and ahistorical validity claims; and the negative Nietzschean genealogy, that undermines value universality on the basis of their historical genesis. Joas purposes to show how it is possible to make universally valid claims in face of the historically contingent genesis of values, and thus to move beyond the opposition of historicism and normativity. He does so by reconstructing the historical settings and social and cultural conditions from which universal values have emerged, and exploring how the origin and the justification of such values are intimately bound together. The hypothesis leading the study is thus that genesis and validity, discovery and construction are mutually supporting in the constitution of values and their universalization.

The affirmative genealogy Joas proposes exposes the socio-historical origins of values as a way to understand our commitment to them. He argues that values emerge not from choice or rational reflection, but from certain intense, life-changing experiences – such as war, colonialism, racism and genocide -, and the associated overwhelming emotions accompanying them, both negative and positive, such as enthusiasm, violence, fear, powerlessness, joy. Powerful, and especially traumatizing, experiences, and their associated emotional load, unsettle our ordinary dealings and understandings of the world: they are value-constitutive experiences that Joas describes has having the character of 'revelations'. Accordingly, they are not practically inert, but prompt feelings of obligation, of commitment to given practices and ideals that are fuelled by a sense of subjective self-evidence and affective intensity, of the kind characteristic of the sacred. Values then are called forth

and motivated by the strength of such experiences: the normative, justificatory and motivational force of values is inherent to the process that brings them about.

In order to make sense of such experiences, Joas argues, we recur to narration: by narrating, we appeal not to a strictly logical or historical order, but rather to an articulation of values by means of giving an *explanation* of their origin that is also a *justification*. The narration of such trauma constitutes the genesis of orientational new values, attachment to which is positively motivated by the traumatizing experiences.

Value communication exhibits its own logic: it is neither a rational-argumentative discourse appealing to purely cognitive validity claims, nor the raw clash of baseless choices we have no way of rendering intersubjective plausible. The commitment to values is motivated by the affective intensity through which they were born; it not consensus, then, that must be reached in value communication, but the articulation of values in such a way as to obtain persuasive plausibility. Narration, again, is presented as a communicative tool that enables a process of generalization of values that does not denies the affective dimension from which they are born, nor does it requires a forced intellectualization of value traditions. Rather, it demands a confrontation of different traditions, and the effort to articulate one's value within and with respect with social contexts and traditions. Values move within a field of tensions at the other extremes of which there are institutions and practices: legal codification, articulation of traditions, and integration into customs and everyday practices are required in a complex, evolving process of negotiation and universalization. In the face of competing value systems, value-communication through narrative articulations render possible to share and generalize values. The confrontation of values then happens through a shared dynamic interactions of value systems that can mutually transform them and help further generalize them.

As per the title, Joas takes as an exemplary case study of the genesis of values the process that has brought about the progressive sacralization of the person and the codification of human rights. Joas explicitly refuses the Weberian idea that the history of human rights as the "charismatization" (or "sacralization") of reason, to which human persons take part exclusively as carriers of such reason. What would then happen happens to those who are not rational: children or the senile or the mentally impaired? We *do* care for these categories of persons, and the moral intuition leading us cannot be reduced to an appeal to supraempirical reason. Human personhood is not primarily characterized by reason or cognitive capacities: rather, he argues that what has taken place is a sacralization of the person herself as a cultural transformation. Human rights are the result of a series of socio-historical movements, and social, cultural, and economic and moral factors that slowly and haltingly shaped the sacredness of the person. He retraces the cultural and moral shift that started with the change in the culture of punishment in the 18th century, through the abolition of torture; the abolition of slavery,

too, is explored as an example of how widespread experiences of violence have generated practical consequences and value commitments of a universal kind. The globalization of trade, the emergence of transnational movements and organisation and the accompanying enhanced sensitivity towards global suffering are all elements to which Joas makes reference in explaining the various, not always linear, ways in which the discourse on human rights has developed. The 1948 Universal Declaration for Human rights is taken as a successful case of value generalization where, rather than relying on a philosophical justification, the common experience of the atrocities of the war acted as a prompt to a complex negotiation of geopolitical interests and cultural traditions.

Joas offers a way to universal values that leads neither to the relativism of a negative genealogy nor to exclusively normative positions and their justificatory shortcomings. To the problem at hand, that of preserving the normativity of the concept of person in the face of its relativity, Joas' sensitive analysis of the constitutions of values offers a way to understand the normativity afforded through, and not in spite, of the historical birth of values. We need not deny the relativity of the concept nor its evolution in order to also insist on the normative commitment it fuels. Rather, we might take this as an occasion to recover the practical and political roots of a concept, too often forgotten in its theoretical analysis. By understanding the concept of person as a product of historical, social and political decisions and circumstances, we also can grasp it as a concept in evolution, where there is room for improvement, rather than a fixed concept to examine.

1.7. Bodily matters in practical identity

1. What about the body?

So far, an unproblematized connection has been drawn between practical concerns and psychological matters, so that it may seem that a practice-based account will result in one that is markedly psychological in kind; but this is the place to point out that such relations of practical identity are not and should not be conceived to be exclusively psychological. Throughout the discussion the role of the body appeared positively set in the metaphysical camp: biological approaches take the body as the entity to track through time and space and purport to answer to the metaphysical question. Psychological theorists have often been content with this, as such accounts give an impersonal view of the body, where the body is seen as a possession – a prized one, maybe, but little more than that; a useful container of mental states and psychological connections that can be detached and re-implanted, contingently connected to one's psychological states. This is due to the fact that the debate would like to be concerned with conceptual necessity rather than factual necessity. It may be the case that all and every mind and psychological connections we know of are embodied; but this is seen as a contingent, rather than necessary, feature of psychological connections. Indeed, the thesis of the independence of the practical states precisely that the metaphysical matters of personal identity are subordinate to practical relations; and insofar the metaphysical place is that occupied by the body, bodily relations are subordinated. This holds true even more for one's *particular* body, supposedly interchangeable with other people's bodies with minimal discomfort. While it seems that it can be acknowledged, on this view, that the body is more or less grossly shaped by psychological inclinations, it is less often entertained how it is that the body shapes the psychological dimension – by constraining it, or by defining it.

The body has been seen as the perfect fit of the metaphysical problem, then, insofar as it can be counted with every-day objects: a concrete mass that admits of no degrees, unchanging save for the usual metabolic changes, publicly observable, static (rather than alive), and practically inert. In fact, as DeGrazia argues, it is only by giving as a disclaimer that they employ materialism as conceptual background that these theorists escape dualism: «The requirement of embodiment, motivated only by a background assumption of materialism, is all that stands between the psychological view and substance dualism» (2005, 25). But dualisms seem to be smuggled in all the same, in the permissiveness and light-earthed way psychological connections are used, and the details of embodiment overlooked. It looks to me that Walker's critique of thought experiments here applies: thought experiments are often not detailed enough on matters of embodiment, thus leaving them in the background without acknowledging their importance nor sorting out the small details that may be

crucial to their full understanding or application. These kinds of thought experiments also give a perplexing portrait of minds, often reified as they were objects that can be moved around.

But there are exceptions. While in the first installation of her work on personal identity, *The constitution of selves*, Schechtman argues for an independence model between practical identity and metaphysical concerns, later she comes to change her position. She notes in fact in her *Staying alive* (2014) that the complete independence from metaphysical matters brings about a paradoxical result: we would not have any reason to be concerned about *that* individual anymore:

> If the relation that defines the unity of the individual is truly independent of the relations that provide a basis for our practical judgments, however, there is no obvious reason that these practical questions should be asked about *that* individual (2014, 5).

The reason is as simple as it is compelling: in order for our concerns to be around a given individual, we must be able to individuate the individual: a relation that logically needs preserving. Separating practical identity and metaphysical identity severs this connection. Any account of identity should be then inherently practical, as the relation that assures the unity of the individual must be connected to the relation that structures our practical concerns, on pain of becoming unhinged. (Which is what happens in Parfit's case). So, Schechtman articulates a *practical concern desideratum*: that «facts about our literal identity are *inherently connected* to practical concerns» (2014, 5), and offers a complex defence of this claim. This is a development that we will consider later on.

For now, let's consider two different points that relate the body to practical identity: first, because the an exclusively psychological reading of practical interest is vastly reductive; second, I will introduce a more radical point, that is, that psychological relations are embodied.

2. The body as a seat of practical concerns

The easier way to re-instate interest in bodily matters in a practice-based accounts would be to insist on the fact that the body participates in such practices, and that there are practical concerns about the body or involving the body that are not in kind different from psychological practical concerns. It is not just that the body functions as the *appropriate locus* of giving worry – that is, that the body can function as the physical placeholder for relation of care, something we were already aware of. Rather, I mean to show that the body has its own value-laden, care-related relations: that biological relations form a good chunk of what we care about and value over time. David Shoemaker (2007) has quite different purposes from ours here, but offers an appealing starting point, with a variety of excellent examples of the kind of bodily involvement we are concerned with.

The first case brought about by Shoemaker is about compensation, which is certainly a relation of practical importance. It is often described as a kind of psychological relation, but Shoemaker argues that the kind of relation involved in attributing rewards and compensation depends by the kind of matter at hand. Wronging someone's feelings is a psychological kind of burden, that is, it is tracked by psychological relations: should I offend A, and should A's brains be then posed in B's body, I should apologize to A's brain (in B's body). But if I poison A, and A's brain is again place in B's body, it is nonetheless A's body that needs compensation – through antidotes.

The next case, perhaps the most intuitive, regards the kind of relations we have with friends, which are not just psychological ones. Care and loving relationships hardly only ever rely on psychology: they can also rely on bodily feelings and bodily matters. Lovers of course fulfil the description best, as loving someone is not just a matter of loving their mind, but their body as well. (I'm trying in making a general and trivial point, not to legislate love relations). Attraction, undoubtedly one strong element of love, is at least partly based on looks. Hate and rejection also take a great part of our practical relations, and sometimes they are based on the kind of body one has – as in racism, misogyny, etc. Here, a barely 'biological' characteristics acquires an extremely relevant practical importance. On the reverse, biology is also used to justify one's sexual and gender orientation – something else that is of primary practical importance. If we really are 'born this way' – if sexual orientation, for example, has biological origins – then it won't follow psychological relations.

Shoemaker's third example regards the intimate relationships holding through biological relations. Both at the start and at the end of life we feel concern for individuals whose psychology can be underdeveloped or compromised. Nonetheless, we keep caring for them. Is this just an inertial affection we feel for who they were – or hope for who they will become? But how to explain the significance these individuals – helpless and psychologically tenuous at best – may have for us? The point to be made here is that it is not psychology we are concerned about here, but rather it is a biological call we are answering, so to speak: «[t]he special concerns of parenthood are tied tightly to our biological natures» (2007, 24). The same goes for the other extreme of life. Such biological concerns are in no way any less significant, loving, and interesting than those concerning higher faculties. On the other hand, one need not recur to children in order to see this: adults, too, need physical attention under several headings. As much as we would like to think of ourselves as temporary embarrassed souls, we do need constant caring in, and biological relations can create a particularly strong bonding (DeGrazia 2005, 60).

Finally, Shoemaker points out that «facts in the social world often follow biological continuity, not psychological relations»: the person is tracked in institutions through bodily relations, from the cradle to the grave, so to speak: the legal identity is defined in terms of animal identity. Social treatment,

the way we are treated by others, tracks *biological* continuity: despite psychological changes that may occur, one keeps being the same parent, daughter, partner, owner, etc. they were before. In fact, it seems that the social treatment one receives is tied to both psychological continuity and biological continuity, as we rely on our bodies in order to identify one another and further. Further, our bodies lay at the centre of some socio-institutional practices that are involved in our psychological understanding of practical identity. They are object of disciplining, education, correction, and normativity, well before our psychology has reached maturity – indeed, it is dubious whether we could reach psychological maturity without an intense physical training, starting from language and up into schools. The body is the object through which others see us, and through which we see ourselves, the focus of a myriad of social practices and self-practice.

Of course, most of these points could be dismissed by arguing that these relations follow biological identity as a way of simplifying matters and keep things as straightforward as possible, while underlying remains the sensation that they could be rationalized through the employment of psychological relations. It is open to the psychologically-inclined theorist to argue that this body is invested with significance only in light of concerns that are already personal, and so the body proper has only derivative importance in practical concerns. Maybe; certainly it is a statement that seems not consider at all whether practical concerns may be modified by the form of their embodiement, rather than being pure distilled psychology; and that would need to be substantiated by an effective translation of all such concerns in psychological terms without loss of significance. Shoemaker's evolutionary comment also at least hints at evolutionary reading to the question that is interesting, especially when coupled with Joas argument regarding the way values are born.

This brief discussion gives the occasion to highlight how the body is at crossroads of a series of very practical concerns that are also crisscrossed with metaphysical concerns. The body does not seem to be excluded in a clear-cut way, although its relevance might be subordinate to psychological relations: it is vividly present in the practices that interest persons most, albeit not always coherently represented (cfr. Esposito 2014).

3. The person as a psycho-corporeal entity

There is a different approach that also gives back importance to the role of the body in practical concerns and practical identity; it is an approach that looks at the role of the body from within the phenomenological tradition, in combination with an embodied notion of cognition and consciousness (Mackenzie & Atkins 2008). Kim Atkins (2000) is exemplary in this matter, arguing that the very structures of the practical concerns make them entail the body and, to be more precise, the embodied perspective on practical concerns.

Atkins appeals to a phenomenological perspective to object to positions that – such as Parfit's, and many others – see the first-person perspective as an exclusively psychological feature; the argument extends to comprehend psychological relations in general, of which the first-person perspective is a peculiarly strong form. Atkins argues that the first personal perspective is inevitably embodied: it is, in fact, a bodily perspective. It is because «my body is, metaphysically speaking, part of that world of which I am conscious that my bodily capacities can articulate the world in particular ways, and so can concretely structure a field in which I can act, and thus live» (2000, 336). Atkins appeals to the perspectival nature of experience to make her point: our experience of the world is constructed and constrained by faculties, perceptual and cognitive, that are corporeal. Put in another way, the kind of body we have, the way it enables or constrict us, shapes our understanding of the world and our place in it in a much more intimate way than the psychological approach supposes. It is the body 'the object' through which we act and through which we are seen: as such, our psychology is in no way just put atop of our body: it is innervated through and through with it.

> There are not separate entities: ''the subject'' (with its power of psychological insight) and ''the body'' (with its blind biology). There is only the original unity of one's carnate existence: a ''body-subject,'' that is the practical expression of the primitive motility, sensitivity, and receptivity of human embodiment - ''I,'' the body-subject, the ''thinking thing,'' is not a metaphysical entity in the sense that the concept 'person'' is typically used, but a practical unity of subjective and objective dimensions, of first- and third-personal perspectives; in short, a bodily perspective. (2008, 86)

A particular embodiment results in particular ways of doing, acting, and thinking: so that it is embodiment that structures the subject: «without the continuity over time of my same body there wouldn't be a perspective, an 'I', at all. Personal identity presupposes a *necessary* connection between personal identity and bodily continuity».

Further, our embodied condition is a fundamentally, constitutively intersubjective one: not just the first-person perspective matters, but also the second-person perspective, that is, the way our self-conception is shaped by other persons and the way such interactions render me intelligible to myself. She concludes: «Therefore, my sense of who I am and what is 'mine' cannot be isolated from my social setting. My identity is not an object, either public or private, but a self-understanding determined in relation to a material and social context» (2000, 341). The continuation of one's identity then relies on this relational, intersubjective structures, rather than being a self-enclosed matter. The first-person perspective is anchored in more than one's psychological life, and is held together by an

intersubjective process. Atkins concludes that psychological self and bodily identity cannot be divorced. On this view, psychological identity without bodily identity is no identity at all – it is mere similarity, at best (incurring in the same fate as psychological similarity: the unsatisfactory answer). It is because practical relations are embodied that the body is entailed in practical identity, as a matter of conceptual necessity. Through this point we seem to finally cut across the recurring binarism that cuts across the debate - between biology and psychology, metaphysical matters and practical ones, body and mind.

Importantly, Atkins' argument has to be distinguished from an animalist position *simpliciter*. She argues that identity is «constituted *as* numerically identical in the processes of self-awarenes […]. The stability in one's sense of self is articulated through the active integration of one's various mental and bodily attributes and their relatedness to one's experiences past, present and anticipated, into a continuing sense of identity» (2000, 338ff): the body is presupposed and necessary for personal perspective to come about, but the identity of the person is something achieved through integration rather than just being a body.

Atkins' arguments are also different from the rare arguments that have been put forwards by theorists of the psychological approach to comment on the plausibility that psychological relations might be conveyed bodily. Parfit for example writes:

> If some person will be R-related to me, this person's body should also be sufficiently like my present body to allow full psychological connectedness. This would not be true, for example, if this body was of the opposite sex. And for a few people, such as some of those who are very beautiful, there should also be exact physical similarity. (1984, 96)

In such cases, it is stated that one's physical characteristics may matter to the person to such an extent that they might feel that, losing those, they may lose something central to their identity. For example, a basketball player, upon being transferred to a different body, obviously no longer has the kind of physical properties that allowed him to be a basketball player.

They are also different arguments that those that consider that bodily identity influences psychology by way of indirect connections, that is, because of the way we are treated because of our bodies. These arguments hinge on the notion that our body as an object seen by others and socially sanctioned in respect to cultural norms is what how we see and model ourselves through others, and is incorporated in our self-perception, and thus into practical identity. While both these claims are compatible with Atkins' positions, and indeed implied, the point she is making is that the psychocorporeal perspective is constitutively bodily. It is not just that, under this theory of mind, psychological continuity requires continuity of body as a substratum, or that without them our psychological connections could not be

had. In short, it is a different theory of mind that is at play here, not the functionalist one, but a theory of mind as embodied.

Atkin's position allows to problematize the automatic association of the metaphysical with the bodily and of the practical with the psychological. While the distinction between metaphysical and practical identity is clearly useful in allowing to put into better focus where the interest in the matter lies, this division of labor also has pushed into the background the role of the body and embodiment in practical matters. Arguing that the body is present into such considerations as an object of care and interest allows to start dismantling the equivalence of the practical with the psychological; but such arguments can still be dismissed by countering that it is psychological relations, once again, that are of relevance in one's body. Atkin's argument is less easy to resolve through this move, as she argues not just that the very structure of our practical interest implies bodily matters, but that one's embodiment is constitutive of one's practical identity. Such a position can be supported thanks to a notion of the mind and of psychological processes as embodied. Indeed, if Rovane was correct in asserting that the plausibility of the concept of person is to be tested not just in its ethical applications, but for its compatibility with metaphysical and scientific positions, the paradigm of embodied cognition offers a credible complement to Atkin's position. For this reason, I turn now to give an overview of this influential paradigm.

4. Embodied cognitive sciences

Embodied cognitive science is a by-now well established if debated paradigm in cognitive science, providing a strong competitor to computationalist, representationalist conceptions of mind and cognition. Classic cognitive sciences see mental processes as amodal and computational processes taking place in the brain: cognitive operations take places through representational states that are internal to the agent. Embodied cognition instead promotes a notion of cognition where the physical body of the agent, in interaction with the social and natural environment, plays a constitutive role. Embodied cognition is part of a more general 'embodied turn' in cognitive sciences that finds its philosophical roots in the ecological psychology of James Gibson (Gibson 1966; 1979) and the phenomenological tradition. The works of Martin Heidegger (1975), Edmund Husserl (1929), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) have played a particularly important role by establishing a pragmatic view of the way we relate to our environment: «In almost all everyday engagements, I understand the world in terms of pre-reflective pragmatic, action-oriented use, rather than in reflective terms of an intellectual or overly cognitive attitude of conceptual contemplation or scientific observation». And, further, in constructing a view of cognition as « physically interactive, embedded in physical contexts, and manifested in physical bodies», that has been a source of inspiration for much work in the

embodied turn (Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991; Dreyfus 1992; Jeannerod 1994; 1997; Noe 2004 Zahavi 2005; Thompson 2010). Albeit less widely recognized, the tradition of early American pragmatism also plays a role in the construction of this alternative paradigm, and has been increasingly employed in clarifying and integrating these approaches (Gallagher, Johnson 2016, Menary 2007). The works of Charles Sanders Pierce (1958), John Dewey (1981, 1983), William James (1976, 1981) emphasize the relation of organism and environment in all kinds of activity, starting from perception up to cognition, while also deconstructing the body-mind dualism that underlies it.

The attempts to decentralize cognition from brain processes and re-instated the involvement of peripheral systems results in a concept of cognition that is not just embodied, but also embedded, enactive, and extended.

Cognition is embedded, in the sense that the environment contributes to cognitive effort, shouldering part of it through resources (material and social) that are not located within the agent's nervous systems.

Extended cognition further adds that not just is cognition embedded, but is constituted by the environmental elements that enhance it (Clark and Chalmers 1998; Menary 2008). The claim can be read in the sense that the elements of the environment are parts of the individual's nervous, internal cognitive system, or that the cognitive structures are actually in the external environment (Clark and Chalmers 1998; Wilson 1994; Wilson and Clark 2001).

Enactive cognition, finally, states that cognition emerges from, or is constituted by, sensorimotor activity: perception consists in perceptually guided action and that cognitive structures emerge from the sensorimotor patterns through which action is perceptually guided (cfr. Zeng & Yang 2019; on the three brands of enactivism, see Ward, Silverman, and Villalobos 2017).

The 4e paradigm is clearly a wide-ranging one, embracing many fields, from neuroscience to psychology, philosophy and linguistics; it is accordingly vast and far from homogeneous in the definition of its concepts. I will here distil two main points that constitute the theoretical tenets of this paradigm.

The first concerns conceptualization, the idea that «the peculiar nature of our bodies shapes our very possibilities for conceptualization and categorization» (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 19; Shapiro 2011). The properties of an organism's body limit or constrain the concepts an organism can acquire. That is, the concepts by which an organism understands its environment depend on the nature of its body in such a way that differently embodied organisms would understand their environments differently. This thesis has been famously defended by Lakoff and Johnson (1980; 1999), where they argue that basic concepts, like *front*, *back*, *up* and so on, emerge from physical experiences (1980, 57). That is,

it is from our navigating and experiencing the world through physical bodies that basic concepts are acquired; and these basic concepts form the ground over which more sophisticated, abstract concepts can be formulated through metaphorical extensions. While it is not clear whether this thesis can be defended for all concepts (Barsalou (2008), the idea that concepts are rich in sensori-motor content has found some kind of empirical evidence in neurological investigations (Buccino et al. 2005).

The second thesis is that of constitution, that is, that the body (and, perhaps, parts of the world) does more than merely contribute causally to cognitive processes: it plays a constitutive role in cognition, literally as a part of a cognitive system. Thus, cognitive systems consist in more than just the nervous system and sensory organs: the body and the world, also, constitute cognition, rather than being simply causal factors to it. Cognition is the product of interactions between brain, body, and world, and in particular of the coupling of organism and environment (Chemero 2001, 142). The concept of *coupling* is the concept that the behavior of objects that are co-dependent are to be understood as constituents of a single system, which is held together by the interactions of its parts (Clark 2008).

We will have occasion to come back to the 4e paradigm in the course of the discussion; here I just want to highlight two points that can be drawn from this brush with embodied cognitive science. The 4e paradigm is not established as a dominant paradigm, despite its growing popularity and the empirical findings supporting its theses; per se, it cannot strong-arm psychological continuity into biological continuity. Nonetheless, they rise interesting points that have been widely discussed in philosophy, and certainly have consequences for reflection in the personal identity problem, in particular for the notion of the body, the self, and social cognition.

The body is conceptualized here not just as a vehicle of thoughts operating in the brain, but also as a co-participant in cognitive activities, shouldering part of the cognitive load off neural structures and onto non-neural structures. Embodied cognition would then make a need for a body indispensable, as the body appears not just as the medium through which the world reaches us, and we it, but as the constituent, even physically, of our cognitive apparatus. It would also dismiss any attempt to conceptualize cognitive processes, and the mind, as the kind of thing that can be moved smoothly across bodies, as their roots are in the motor-perception system, innervated well beyond the skull.

This re-conceptualization of the role of the body in cognitive activities is tied to a revision of the concept of self and its relation to embodied dimension. The concept of the minimal self is developed in relation to the notion of the embedded body: it is the concept of a "person's phenomenal experience in the here and now" (Hafner et al., 2017, 1; Gallagher, 2000), the sense of ownership that attains to one's ownership of one's body. The concept of minimal self refers to a basic form of identity, that is, «a sense of synchronic self-coincidence that comprises an intact first-person perspective and immediate feelings of self-presence [...]. The minimal self is a pre-reflective, pre-linguistic, primitive

form of experiential self-consciousness: it is the first-person perspective in its most minimal form, that is, of simply having a point of view on the world.

Now, so far, the concept of self has not been mentioned in the discussion, albeit intuitively and conceptually it is connected to the concept of person and personal identity. Just what connection obtains and how between the concept of self and person is a matter of debate, and certainly these two concepts have frequently been used interchangeably, with some confusion. The main distinction that can be found in the literature, and the one on which I will draw on here for now, can be found on the temporal extension and social dimension that the concepts of self and person have. That is, we can distinguish selves from persons insofar as the concept of person has a social and normative dimension, which requires a certain temporal extension. Selves can be characterized as subjects of experiences, more or less temporally extended; persons, on the other hand, have a not just social but also public dimension, as well as moral and institutional ones (for this position, see for example, Strawson Schechtman 2010; Quante 2019; Velleman 2007; Zahavi 2005; Stokes 2015).

1.8. Conclusions

I started the analysis by individuating four different problems tied to the concept of person: their conditions of personhood, their unity, their persistence, and the problem of the structure of personality. I have then presented the two main approaches that can be found in debate of personhood and personal identity: biological approaches and psychological approaches. I have presented some of the problems they manifest, especially with concern to the psychological approach and its results. Following Schechtman's (1996) approach, I endorsed her criticism of psychological continuity and presented the division between metaphysical and practical identity as a tentative resolution of some the problems emerged. I then surveyed the criteria of personhood, and examined the way they interact with the normative status of the person, and with its social dimension. The subsequent discussion on conventionalist positions brought us back to the division between metaphysical and practical approaches. I have then argued that the issue should be tackled following Robinson' analysis of the concept, as presenting more dimensions on a continuum; and that a practice-based approach seems the one more likely to shape an account of persons responsive to our concerns. The analysis has been devoted mostly to bring out the issues that underlie each position, its advantages and disadvantages, and show further the continuous interlacing of sets of problems that time and again come up in different divisions. The division between practical and metaphysical identity, and its subterranean division of mind and body, has been somehow problematized, as has the relation of practical identity and embodiment.

While so far I have detailed some of the conceptual problems and requirement of personhood and personal identity, I will now take under analysis one particular approach to practical identity, the one developed by Schechtman through *The constitution of selves* (1996) and *Staying alive* (2014), in order to see what space there is for the role of the body within a practical and narrative account of personal identity.

Chapter 2. A narrative approach to personal identity

0. Introduction

The goal of the chapter is to establish some plausibility for the notion of narrative in the debate of personal identity, and in particular to establish whether narrative theses can possibly support a notion of practical identity that allows for the notion of the body in practical matters – not as a cause or an object but as a constituent of practical identity. I take a somehow tortuous path to this end, taking Schechtman's work both as representative of narrative theses in general, given its importance and influence; and as an interesting evolution of these very same narrative theses.

The first section opens with a review of Marya Schechtman's *The constitution of selves* (1996), where she argues that individuals come to be persons through a process of narrative self-constitution. The exposition of Schechtman's account allows to introduce the concept of narrative as a criterion of personal identity, within a larger narrative paradigm in the human and social sciences of which an overview is given. Next, I give a tentative description of some elements of the concept of narrative that can be isolated. The second section then presents the continuity thesis, that is, the idea that narrative forms can be found in experience, and in particular in the experience of action. The work of David Carr and Paul Ricoeur concerning the relation of narration and action is examined as a way to point out where the complications of the narrative approach lie. Then, two objections to narrative theses are considered: the first on the anti-realism of narratives, and the second on the place of narratives with regard to embodied experience. This last point concerns in particular the plausibility of implicitly narrative forms of experience. The third section follows Schechtman's work some more, reviewing her *Staying alive* (2014), in which she presents an upgraded version of the narrative self-constitution thesis, the Person Life View. She offers a revision of the model of practical and metaphysical identity, and gives a sophisticated account of the person as the locus of interactions of bodily, psychological and socio-cultural dimensions. In the discussion, I argue that while this interactionist model of personal identity based on the notion of the person life is enticing under several aspects, it also lacks in giving more than an evanescent notion of her ontological standing. I suggest that by spelling out the workings of the locus of interactions, and in particular how its different strands interact, it is possible to obtain a clearer notion. This requires to go back to the unresolved issue of the relation of narrative and embodiment and, finally, to ask what kind of model of narrative actions is available.

2.1. The constitution of selves

1. The constitution of selves

As seen in Chapter One, Schechtman's *The constitution of selves*, works on a substantial reformation of the theoretical fieldwork of personal identity, by distinguishing a question of metaphysical identity from one of practical identity. The reidentification question seeks to define a relation between two distinct person-time-slices that makes them slices of the same person. The characterization question, on the other hand, seeks to define a relation that holds between a person and particular actions, experiences, or characteristics that are hers. The mistake of theories of psychological continuity had been to look for reidentifying an object, defining identity as relationship between time slices and hence by making psychological life intelligible as momentous units, and whole lives as collections of momentary units. This move, according to Schechtman, distorts what makes psychological views appealing in the first place, and looks for metaphysical identity rather than for characterization. The question on characterization concerns what actions, values, behavior are rightly attributable to a person: the answer must be given in terms of the relationship between the person and psychological elements, rather than through the relationship between synchronic moments. An account of characterization should tell us whether a particular action is something that merely occurs in a person's history (seemingly a minimum requirement for any kind of responsibility), something that is quite solidly hers, or something that flows naturally from features absolutely central to her character.

With this in mind Schechtman outlines the positive part of her account by articulating the narrative self-constitution view as a way to answering the characterization question. The basic idea is that one's self-conception, that allows one to constitutive an identity, requires that an individual thinks of themselves, of their life, as having the form and the logic of a story; that is, the story of a person's life. In any narrative, not any part is fully intelligible without the context into which is given. Mutatis mutandis, no time slice can be understood as separated and isolated from the sequence in which they take place. The logical form of the story of a person's life, according to Schechtman, mirrors such narrative structure: just as individual incidents and episodes in a narrative take their meaning from the broader context of the story in which they occur, so individual events and actions in a person's story are not free floating or merely concatenated to each other, but concur to a whole that is one's narrative. Saying that one's self-conception is narrative means, that one's understanding one's interpretation of individual episodes is in terms of their place in the unfolding story. The accent is put on the holistic dimension that single actions, beliefs, experiences bear to the whole they are part of. This approach then does not take start from singular moments and try to reconstruct the person by bringing them together – but rather, starts from the narrative that is ongoing in one's life, and from

there it argues that single moments can be abstracted; which is the precise opposite of what was done in the psychological approach.

Schechtman argues that experience is structured over time in a way so that the present actively incorporates the past and the future thanks a narrative self-understanding:

> Persons experience their present as flowing from a particular past and flowing toward a particular future, and this way of relating to the present changes the character of experience altogether. The claim is that understanding psychological flow in narrative terms generates the deep diachronic unity of self-consciousness that is taken to underlie the capacity for forensic actions on this view, involves conceiving of our lives in this holistic way, experiencing them at each moment as ongoing wholes. [...] The fact that persons experience their lives as unified wholes makes it rational for a person to have a special kind of concern for her own future. (Schechtman 2014, 200)

That is, it is the way past and future experience conditions present experience that brings about the unity of consciousness and structure the diachronic relation between a person and singular moments. We do not live as if the next moment should be tied to the present moment, but as if, in fact, it already is. Decisions taken in a given moment are intrinsically projective, future-directed, but are also, usually, derived from one's past experiences, choices. The very knowledge that the future awaits and can be shaped changes the way we perceive and work through the individual moment (at whatever point the moment is taken to happen or how long it is).

The phenomenological dimension of such narratives provides an important point for Schechtman: persons are conceived as inherently diachronic entities, that show both prudential concern (and other practical relations) for future actions and past actions insofar as they are actively incorporated into the present experience:

> It is the way in which experience is structured over time that generates the deep connections among different moments of a life that make a person a strongly appropriate target of forensic judgments, and so the attribute of being such a target should not be thought of as something that applies from moment to moment, but rather as something that inherently applies over a stretch of time during which the structure of experience generates a diachronically as well as synchronically unified locus. (Schechtman 2014, 202)

Now, this very same way of experiencing our actions and present changes the way we experience them. The feeling of satisfaction when hard works pays off, for example, is a strongly narrative

emotion: but already, in the work I'm putting it now, I'm enriched by the future satisfaction. Should the satisfaction go amiss, the bitterness will be double precisely because of the work I put into it. It is precisely this nexus between present and future experience that makes rational for a person to have a special kind of concern for their survival. As persons think of themselves in such a way, Schechtman argues, it is rational that they should care for their future: they are now going on through a given present precisely because they want their future to be in a certain way. This allows and creates a deep diachronic unity of consciousness. The deep intuition behind such a view is that what makes something the right kind of entity to be responsible of past actions and concerned for the future is not just an attribute that one possesses at that given moment; but it's the fact that past and future are actively incorporated in present experience. This, Schechtman argues, «fits nicely with our pre-philosophical intuitions—the more the different elements of a person's life hang together the more definite she is as a character, and so the better- defined her identity». So, the more one will understand themselves narratively, and the more coherent this narrative is, the more their identity will be integrated and defined.

The kind of 'narrative' Schechtman refers to is an autobiographical and largely *implicit* narrative: it is constituted mainly by the underlying psychological organization, an active and dynamic set of organizing principles rather than a «a static set of facts» or features she possesses. The sense of one's life as unfolding according to the logic of a narrative is an organizing principle of our lives, as a basic orientation through which, with or without conscious awareness, an individual understands himself and his world». It is the lens through which we filter our experience and plan for actions, rather than a way we think about ourselves in reflective hours. Indeed, the main point of a narrative approach does not involve actually articulating the story of one's life to oneself or anyone else, but only organizing experience according to an implicit narrative direction – a self-conception of who one is, where one is going, and why.

Now, Schechtman argues that it is precisely through thinking of oneself as one persisting subject, and acting accordingly, that individuals can come to constitute as persons. Such self-constitution does not happen on its own: coming to become a person is not just a matter of appropriate self-reflection or phenomenological experience. Being a person is «an intrinsically social concept» (1996, 95), and admittance into personhood and a world populated by persons requires more than the simple satisfaction of given criteria. The concept of self – any concept of self – by itself is not enough to interact personally: one's self-concepts must also be «in synch» with what others reckon a person is, because «to be a person is to be able to engage with others in particular ways». The concept of a person so given is culturally pregnant, and grasping this concept and being able to apply it to herself, as well as to others. Being a person then for Schechtman requires conceptually and inherently to be

«connected to the capacity to take one's place in a certain complex web of social institutions and interactions - to act as a moral agent, enter into contracts, plan for one's future, express oneself and in general live the life of a person» (1996, 95). There is then an 'objective' side to narrative self-constitution, and it is given by the narratives that others give or make of you. But the point is that to be recognized as a person one must then cohere in some sense with this social sense meaning of personhood. The subjective dimension of personhood – being conscious or having subjectivity and cultivating towards life one kind of orientation – dovetails perfectly into the objective side of personhood. It is within the limits and resources of the shared and inherited concept of personhood that one can build one's personal identity: «The kind of subjectivity required for personhood is precisely that necessary for the kinds of interactions definitive of personhood, and it is organizing one's self-conception according to these objectively determined constraints which generates that kind of subjectivity».

2. The articulation constraint and the reality constraint

These are not the only constraints that Schechtman puts on self-constitution. Not just any narrative will do the work; in order for a narrative to be self-constituting, narratives must adhere to some criteria, albeit not too strict.

In the first place, Schechtman establishes that at least some degree of coherence and intelligibility must be had for a narrative. Coherence is described as acknowledging the mutual influence that different temporal parts of one's life has; this is «a minimal requirement» of personhood (1996, 102). Coherence between narrative parts underlies narrativity intelligibility, by the way one's beliefs, experiences, values, emotions hang together and can be understood. Both coherence and intelligibility are ideals of self-narration that can be gained and approached to different degrees. In addition to these, Schechtman gives two constraints in order to select which narratives can be taken as identity-defying: these are the articulation constraint and the reality constraint.

Schechtman requires that identity-constituting narrative respond to an articulation constraint, that is, that they be available to local articulation: the person should be able to justify or explain what he does, believes and feels on some local level (1996, 114ff). No one could justify completely one's actions, nor do it accurately, as Schechtman well knows: not just personal difficulties or the structure of the mind may render this impossible, but also, there are constraints of practical nature, such as time, that forbid us from articulating full life narratives. Still, what is needed is that the person be able at times to explain what they are doing and why, and how it fits into their lives. One's self-narrative then is implicit, but not unconscious: it can on principle be explicated to some degree.

Of course, sometimes we cannot simply give any narrative form to the incidents of life, both internal and external, in a way that makes them intelligible; and sometimes, a person's explicit self-narrative can be contrasted with what appears to be their implicit self-narratives. That is, in some cases, the way a person thinks of themselves narratively diverges from what others can make of their actions. For example, a man may sincerely declare to love his brother, but continuously behave in ways that offend him or provoke him: here the actions he takes seem to reveal something like an unconscious, implicit and dominating narrative of, say, resentment towards his brother; but this is not recognized by the very author of the actions, and indeed such a man could give very different explanations for what others see as a hostile behavior. How are such cases to be handled? Should we consider that this subterranean hostility as part of the man's self-conception, as it serves to explain his actions coherently? Or should the authority on his self-conception prevail, that is, should we accept his explanations of his actions, and his own narrative on himself?

Schechtman's answer is that this unarticulated hate is to be considered part of his narrative, although this is a last resort: «we attribute unconscious affect and motivations to people when their actions and emotions can only be made intelligible by doing so» (1996, 116). This is because the unspoken grudge against his brother is going to direct the man's actions, and otherwise figure actively and importantly in the course of action and experience one has. The hostility towards the brother is still very much part of his self-conception even though it does not figure in the story of the person themselves. We employ such underlying story, then, because it is needed in order to make sense of the explicit trajectory of the life. The degree to which such unconscious elements and psychological dynamics are important to one's self-conceptions, though, vary: Schechtman argues that precisely because such elements are unavailable to the person, and therefore not endorsed not denied, they do not play such a relevant part in one's self-conception.

But the question of authority has not been really resolved, just postponed: what emerges properly is the issue of just how implicit and available to articulation, and to whom, narrative self-conceptions are. The notion of implicit narratives is of course very close to the notion of unconscious ones. Schechtman cannot of course deny that unconscious elements exist in the psychological life; but how to understand them within a narrative self-conception? She ultimately argues that unconscious elements are active in one's self-conception, but as they are unconscious, they are more rigid and automatic. This is a quite different interaction from the kind that is available and in action between elements of the narrative that are conscious, even if implicit, that are described as dynamically interacting. Unconscious elements are taken from the control of the agent, and unavailable to scrutiny – at least on part of the agent themselves. They thus contribute to personhood in a lesser and less powerful way – they belong to a lesser degree of personhood, so to speak. The relevant notion here

is one of scrutiny: it is the lack of awareness of such elements, rather than their depth, that makes Schechtman exclude such elements. As they are not open to scrutiny, they cannot constitute a story, because they cannot be affected by other actions and events (even as it can affect them). They are not on the receiving end of any narrative influence, and thus not integrated, and not fully expressed. This kind of unconscious presence is nothing to worry about as long as it remains relegated to a small portion of one's life and action, where they cause «local unintelligibility» (1996, 119). But if the amount and extent to which one's person story is not articulated and impossible to articulate, this can compromise the overall degree of personhood.

The reality constraint requires that one's narrative should be coherent and acceptable with basic features of reality: a narrative cannot be self-constituting if it involves unacceptable premises (for example, by admitting impossible feats, behavior contrary to basic physics, etc.) (1996, 119ff). The reality constraint really concerns facts about human beings and their environments: identity-constituting narratives must cohere with these kind of facts. Stated more clearly, an agreement must be reached on some basic, fixed points that allows the person to successfully interact with others. As we have seen, the objective side of personhood requires living in the same world as other persons, in order to access the kind of activities and interactions proper of personal, social life. So it is the very fact that we must interact that leads to a reality constraint.

The reality constraint indicates clearly how tight the connection is between human identity and personal narrative identity: facts that are real of the person are facts that are real of the human. We can directly observe personal facts by observing human facts. In order to avoid being plagued with the objection that there seems to be too-many-thinkers in one place, as the animalist argument goes, Schechtman argues that there is no equation between human and personal identity, while admitting an «intimate connection» between the two: «The move from discovering that a particular human being took some action to discovering that a particular person did is so close that it seems almost like no move at all» (1996, 131).

Still, there *is* a move, that once again marks the difference with psychological theories. In the psychological view, the subject was free to float between bodies and mind only questioning themselves and pondering their own identity. Schechtman instead does something different. The change is due to the objective side of personhood we have detailed earlier – that is, the social and interactive nature of personal identity. One such important feature of this interaction is the re-identification of persons taking place on a common sense basis: and the simple correlation of one action, one body, one person «is—and must be—a reliable means of determining which person did. If there were no generally trustworthy link between personal and human identity, it is not at all clear that it would be possible for the institutions that support personhood to continue» (1996, 134).

Schechtman does allow that in some cases one person may inhabit more than one body; but the possibility is far more remote and abstruse that is in the case of the psychological view. Because the reidentification of human bodies plays such an important role in our social interactions, the narrative self-constitution view demands that it plays a central role in the constitution of persons and personal identity; but not in a way that implies that bodily continuity is necessary.

Schechtman's notion of personhood and personal identity remains, in any case, a neo-Lockean view. The emphasis of her account is on the way such narrative identity permits a diachronic unit of consciousness that allows to make sense of the way practical relations are important in identity. It is a cognitivist view, and one that does allow for an important role of the social dimension of personal identity, but it doesn't go overly conventionalist. Schechtman's interest in practical relation is due to the fact that they are what makes persons intelligible as «beings with forensic capacities». Thus, it excludes from personhood those that cannot self-narrate in this way, such as infants and the cognitively impaired.

3. Narrative agency

Schechtman's account, albeit neo-Lockean and thus mainly psychological in its thrust, presents features that render it promising for a notion of practical identity in which the body takes a more prominent role. The embodied condition of persons appears in this account as a negative limit to what is conceivable to happen to persons, but not as a constitutive dimension of the person; more of a factual concession than a statement to be defended out of conceptual necessity. This is only reasonable when one considers that it is an account that takes as main criterion of persons a kind of self-reflection, narrative self-constitution. Still, the account presents also a notion of action that would require further detailing, especially on the embodied dimension, as it plays an important role. Schechtman writes that «To have a narrative self-conception on the view I am urging is thus to experience the events in one's life as interpreted through one's sense of one's own life story, and *to feel the affect* that follows upon doing so» (1996, 112, emphases mine), and that «In order to have a narrative self-conception in the relevant sense, the experienced past and anticipated future must condition the character and significance of present experiences and actions» (2007, 162). One's narrative self-conception is indispensable in order to be an agent, as Schechtman argues, because if one had not this sense of being a persisting agent whose actions will have consequences for the future, and that one's actions should cohere with one's belief, then one cannot be responsible, especially morally. Indeed, Schechtman writes that

> we can see that the inclusion of a particular action in a person's self-narrative situates it in his
> life in such a way that he has agency with respect to it. What it means for an action to be part

of someone's narrative is for it to flow naturally from the rest of her life story— to be an intelligible result of her beliefs, values, desires, and experiences, and although it may not be the case that an action must always have this kind of relation to the rest of a person's life in order for him to have agency with respect to it, these features are certainly generally considered part of what determines the degree of moral responsibility assigned. The more an action seems to stem from a coherent and stable pattern of values, desires, goals, and character traits, the more it seems under a person's control. (1996, 159)

We can from this detail Schechtman's notion of *narrative agency*. Narrative agency takes form as the capacity to understand oneself as a person that persists through time; to be able to direct one's life based on a self-conception one has of oneself; to be able to locally explain actions and experiences in light of this self-conception; to integrate the present experience with past and future experience. Narrative agency is developed along with one's very practical identity. Contrary to psychological continuity, it paints a denser picture of the relation of the different person-stages. Narrative coherence, the degree to which the experiences, actions and moments of the person are integrated, requires more than mere causation between one moment and the next; it requires that they make sense in light of each other and of the overarching narrative of which they are part.

While this point is argued at length and persuasively, there is less detail on the structures of narrative agency, and more precisely of the way narrative self-conceptions are translated into actions: how narrative self-conceptions allow, or generate, or prompt, actions that belong to one's narrative. That is, obviously, apart from the fact that one can reflectively reconnect or integrate them into one's narrative: but it is in the everyday that one's implicit narrative governs and shapes actions. Albeit the idea of this is quite intuitive and clear, the mechanism of transmission is left unsketched. To explore this level requires an inquiry on how narrative self-conceptions affects one's agential structures. This, as we will see, remains a thorny point in the discussion of narrative approaches to personal identity. On the other hand, this connection of narrative and action, narrative and characterization, and practical identity, is one that has a long story in philosophy. The next section provides an overview of the narrative paradigm in the human and social sciences, and provide more detail on its relation to action.

2.2. The narrative paradigm

1. Narrative: a «travelling concept»

The narrative approach articulates the claim that a fundamental connection is to be found between the way we understand our everyday life and the way we understand stories; between life and narrative. This claim can be understood in a variety of ways. The notion of narrative has been adopted throughout many philosophical positions, from Aristotle to Kierkegaard, as offering a privileged access to the understanding of action and ethical life. But in more recent years it has been put to use

generously and variedly in a number of fields of the social sciences and the humanities, where narrative approaches have bloomed under the most different theoretical circumstances. I will give just a brief conceptual and historical recap of the notion of narrative paradigms (cfr. Hinchman & Hinchman, 2001; Kreiswirth 2005; Herman 2007; Hyvarinen, Korhonen & Mykkänen 2006; Alber & Fludernik 2010) in order not to lose sight of the central point followed here; but the importance of this conceptual scenario for narrative theses of personal identity is important, as it substantiates much their usefulness, if not their plausibility.

The start of this *narrative turn* can be traced back to the interest developed by Russian and then French formalists and structuralists in the notion of narrativity (Barthes 1977) as a trans-cultural phenomenon, beyond its literary aspects, and the epistemological debate in philosophy of history that took place shortly thereafter. Here the notion of narrative was employed as a way of constructing a model of explanation and understanding alternative to the nomological models, that seemed particularly unsatisfying to historiographical matters. In this debate can be found in nuce the questions and problems that would characterize the narrative paradigm: on the one hand, the idea that there is a special connection between narratives and narrative expression, and the human experience, be it historical or psychological; on the other hand, the idea that narratives are fundamentally faulty in expressing or articulating human experience, and thus should be considered with suspicion rather than being legitimated as epistemological tools or psychological structures. This deep seated division can be traced throughout the numerous, variegated debates in which the concept of narrative has been employed. It is not surprising then that the use of the notion of narrative branched off in two different directions – the linguistic turn, where the understanding of narrativity as a linguistic construct emphasizes the fictionalist and creative aspects of narrative (White 1981, Mink 1987); and a different series of position that instead doubled-down on the privileged relation between narrative and human experience in its various form, and in particular on the ontological basis of the relation of experience and narrative. The notion has been developed initially by philosophers from within the hermeneutic tradition, such as Paul Ricoeur and Charles Taylor, for which the dimension of narrativity was intimately connected to the notion of self-understanding and self-interpretation (Taylor, 1989; Freeman 1993; MacIntyre 1984; Cavarero 2000). From here it was a short step to introduce narrative in the debate on identity and subjectivity. Seen through the narrative lens, identity could be understood as a temporal and dialogical construction: one's identity is told in a process that mediates socially available narrative models and intersubjective interactions.

From here, the concept of narrative has been 'travelling' in numerous, heterogeneous directions, eventuating in something like a narrative paradigm, or narrative turn, spanning several disciplines.

The 1970s saw the development of narrative approaches in psychology, cantered around the role narratives play in the mental life of individuals and society, individuating how they shape self-understanding, the understanding of others, and how it enriches psychological and social conduct and intelligence, and in particular how psychological development proceeds through narrative means (Bruner 1987, 1991; Sarbin 1986; Frank 1995; McAdams 1993; Widdershoven 1993). The idea is that narratives are fundamental in developing the capacity to function socially and in particular constitute a special access to social cognition: through narratives children are socialized into the complex social world and learn to handle sociointeractional situations, acquire and apply norms, and enter in contact with concepts that they learn practically (MacIntyre 1984, Trevarthen, Hutto 2008, Wollheim 1984). Here the concept of narrative is once again strictly correlated to that of action and the understanding of action: the idea is that story templates concur fundamentally to shape our understanding of other persons, of social relations, and of the social world in general. These claims have been substantiated by empirical research conducted on the evolution of human cognition from the ontogenetic point of view: inquiries conducted in sociobiology, cognitive archaeology and cognitive anthropology have focussed on reconstructing the way narratives have been developed as an evolutionary tool and just how much the human being is a *homo narrans*, a «storytelling animal» (Boyd 2009, Gottschall 2012, Cometa 2017). The structure of narrative, in particular, has been seen as «a kind of cognition-enhancing logic in their own right, whereby states and events can be arranged into understandable and manipulable patterns; spatiotemporal relations can be established between regions of experience and between objects contained in those regions; relatively distant or intimate perspectives can be adopted; participants can be assigned roles and situated within networks of beliefs, desires, and intentions» (Herman 2012).

This brief overview of the various meanings and employments of narrative throughout human sciences is meant to situate the narrative approach to personal identity within its proper conceptual horizon, which sets the range of interest in the notion of narrative. Theories of personal identity that have taken a narrative approach exceed the phenomenological or hermeneutical tradition. Indeed, narrative theories of personal identity differ vastly in presuppositions, goals and reach; they inherit the same conceptual richness that the concept of narrative is associated with. They can be found almost anywhere through the lines that run through the debate on personal identity: approximate taxonomies can be made to at least distinguish between philosophical theories of personal identity that adopt narrative as an epistemological tool, as an ethical concept, or as an ontological connection; and narrative approaches have been developed as psychological or bodily, epistemological or ontological.

2. What is narrative?

It is only logical that one should at this point ask in what, precisely, a narrative consists in; what, exactly, qualifies as a narrative; what unifies a single narrative over time, as well. Of course we all have a more or less intuitive notion of narrative – it is what we have been using and what has carried us forth so far. But once one begins probing at the question, *What is narrative?*, it will become evident why most philosophers that have engaged in or employed narrative in their works have kept quite away from defining it – the conditions for identifying a narrative, even the minimal conditions, are far from clear, debatable and the whole discussion is likely to end in frustration. Daniel Hutto comes to this conclusion and plainly states that «Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is no agreed definition or criterion for sharply identifying narratives — and certainly none couched in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions» (Hutto 2007, 1). We start this section then knowing already that whatever we may find will hardly be definitive and there is little hope to reach a unitary definition; nonetheless, there is some sense in trying to unpack the conditions of narrativity and isolate its most characterizing features. It will help further clarify precisely the intuitive notions that we have of what a narrative is, and offer some theoretical considerations around them.

It is just natural then to turn to the field of narratology in search for the definition of the notion of narrative. Indeed, this is what several authors have done in order to see whether there is any congruence or fit between what narratives are, and the concept of narrativity that is employed in narrative theories. I do not think I will spoil any fun if I anticipate that this is often done, and to a certain success, in order to show precisely how they don't fit; how the use of 'narrative' in narrative theories shares very little or too little with the notion articulated in its 'proper' field. This, as we shall see, is the first step towards a larger and more threatening objection to narrative theories per se.

A good place to start is a brief confrontation of some definitions of narrative from eminent narratologists:

> [...] any representation of an event, that is, a process in time, as a narrative. Hence, according to this perspective, the claim that something is narrative says little more than *b* is understood in the light of *a,* which came before it, and *c,* which comes after. (Porter Abbott 2008, 8)

> [...] narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in time sequence neither of which presupposes or entails the other. (Prince 1984, 2)

> [...] the first necessary condition for what constitutes a narrative representation is that it refer to at least two, though possibly many more, events and/or states of affairs. But not any series of events or state of affairs: it must be around a unified subject a sequence: having a time order, perspicuous and retrievable (even if not outright explicated; but the reader must be able to derive a reliable temporal order from it. (Carroll 2010, 119)

> [...] at least two events must be depicted … and that there must be some more or less loose, albeit non-logical, relation between events. (Lamarque 2004, 349)

All these quotes attempt to give a definition of what the minimal conditions of narrative are. We find immediately some of the common elements shared across narrative definitions. Let's sort them out.

Firstly, common to all definitions, a narrative is taken to involve at least two states of affairs. While a single state of affair alone could not effect any narrative, notice that the form of narrative we are familiar with – a beginning, a development, an ending – is not necessary. Two events may suffice. Secondly, the state of affairs involved must share a kind of subject or unity. That is, such states of affair are not completely unrelated: they share something, they are connected somehow by sharing a subject or some other kind of unity that binds them together.

Thirdly, such events are in a temporal connection of sort – most likely but not necessarily a temporal sequence; simultaneous events can be put into narrative form as well. Temporal succession or relation is an important point of narratives, especially as we often think of them as involving a change of affairs; but it is not enough. In fact, the elements so far individuated may be sufficient even for just annals, where we have mere time ordering, and chronicles, which require in addition a unified subject. A narrative *implies* a chronicle, a time-ordered sequence of events, but a narrative also requires more than just simple temporal ordering and a given subject as a principle for connecting events and/or states of affairs (Goldie 2012).

What matters is the narrative connection – how such events are connected together and how they take their significance from the way they are connected; what makes out of a sequence of events a narrative. The relation between the two state of affairs is the fourth element common to all definitions, but it is defined differently – although they all refer to a connection that is not, or not just, logical. It seems also to be a temporal connection, that involves how state of affairs in different points of time relate to each other. This is the well debated problem of narrative logic or narrative structure (Goldie 2012; Currie 2010; Velleman 2003).

Three candidates are usually appealed to in order to explain how the kinds of connections that have to hold among event descriptions or combinations that allow for narratives to work: the thematic connection, the causal connection and the teleological connection.

Causation is obviously fashionable as it elicits the sense of change proper of narratives (Carroll 2001): narratives usually involve or represent changes in state of affair and thus some underlying causal process ongoing. Carroll argues that what is indispensable for two events or state of affairs to be narratively linked is that they be causally linked so that the first state of affair is at least necessary for the second to occur. But this requirement may be too strong and exclusive:

> But causation in this sense – the sufficiency sense – is too strong a relation to hypothesize as the relevant connection operative in *all* narratives linkages. Were the relation causal on this

understanding, that would suggest that earlier events in narratives causally entail later events. And although this may obtain in some cases, it does not obtain in all cases, nor does it seem to me to obtain in even most of the typical cases.

If earlier events are casually related to later events, that would mean these same earlier events also entail, necessitate later events; but this is certainly not the case of what happens in narratives. It is not the way narratives work that the earlier events strictly determinate the later ones. Of course, some kind of causal relation is allowed, as if they bore no causal relation to each other at all, this would seem to bring about a chronicle rather than a narrative. So, it seems that «the earlier event in a narrative connection is *at least* a necessary or indispensable contribution to a sufficient, though non-necessary, condition for the occurrence of the relevant later event in the narrative complex» (Carroll 2001). The earlier event, so goes the reasoning, allows later events to take place, to be possible causally – but they do not predict nor determine such events. In this sense the events must be connected in a non-exclusively logical relation – the connection must not be of the kind that logically constrain or determine the unfolding of future events. The mere dripping of water from a faucet, or the tick-tocking of the clock, are not narratives. Thus, while causation plays an important role in holding narratives together, the narrative connection cannot be only casual.

Another typical candidate for narrative connection is of a functional kind. The events make sense because of the role they play in the economy of the story, and the narrative hangs together in virtue of the fact that «events are explained by their contribution to later culminating experiences or events». This is, indeed, an important aspect of narratives. It is appropriately put together with a teleological connectivity, as it stresses how, in most narratives, events take place and are ordered following connections that are justified by the telos of the plot – they are functions of the goal of the narrative, and their meaning resides in the conclusion of the narrative (Christman 2004, 70; Lamarque 2004, 73ff). Yet again, as for causal connectivity, some narratives reject this teleological tendency; as present as it is, then, it is not a general condition of narrativity.

Thematic connectivity is another candidate to narrative connection (Lamarque 2004, 75ff; Christman 2004, 70). Narratives often present themes (or morals, or ideas, or values): they offer a thematic structure and feed into it. Lamarque, who also identifies such a thematic principle, describes themes as «an organising principle that brings unity and significance to the work's subject… Themes are conceptions that bind works together, encapsulating a work's significance and what I called its moral seriousness» (2004, 75).

Despite offering all insight into different dimensions or role of narratives, no one captures the proper sense. The persisting difficulties in defining a notion of narrative has helped develop alternative approaches, such as the gradational approach developed by Gregory Currie (2010; cfr. Ryan 2007).

Currie proposes to abandon an approach based on necessary and sufficient conditions of narrative, and instead consider narrative structure as a property that can be possessed to different degrees. A given sequence of events can be more or less narrative depending on the kinds of connections and elements it presents. Here a substantial concept of narrative has been given up in favour of a more relaxed approach isolating minimal conditions, that acknowledges that elements and functions proper of narrativity can be found in different ways and degrees. Our close familiarity with narratives that brings us to often assume narratives must have some features when they don't. Not all narratives have structural features such as beginning, developments and ends, or as parallels and oppositions, nor do they all employ the narrative devices and elements we are familiar with. Currie's approach allows to abandon a binary approach to what is narrative and what is not; it opens up a conceptual framework where both extremely sophisticated narratives and «short and unambitious» micro-narratives can both be understood as narratives, although to a greater or a lesser extent, depending on the quality and quantity of narrative elements and structures they employ.

There is at least a further element that needs to be added to the notion of narrative. This is the notion that there is no narrative without narration: narratives are told or represented in some way. The discursive or linguistic nature of narratives is not the point. Narratives are not necessarily literary, and can be found in a number of media, or be represented without taking any physical support at all: they can be sung, danced, painted, etc. (cfr. Nelson 2003). Rather the point made is that narratives are not just given by the sequence of events – but need to be represented, told, narrated as such. The sequence of events itself may furnish the content of the narrative, but does not satisfy narrative requirements per se – it needs to be *put* in narrative form.[23] This features is then strictly tied to the artefactual nature of narratives, and of course to the matter of the narrator, or author. The narrative connection does not inhere to the facts themselves, but is worked out by whoever is doing the narrating and weaving the different elements together. The element of production of narrativity also ties to the role of the narrator or author of the narrative, who is telling the story: the fact that, as Goldie notes (2012, 3), some narratives do not always imply the existence of a narrator (such as movies, and operas), does not mean they actually have no narrator. There is in any case someone who is telling the story, be it the dancers, the author of the play, or what have you. So insistence on the existence of a narrator has a factual dimension to it; but certainly helps remembering that narratives « ...are human artefacts, not natural or even platonistic entities waiting to be discovered. And if they are narrated, they need an actual person, not merely a fictional character, to do the narrating, to tell the story. Goldie eloquently says that the process of narrative is not « like the process of the ripening of a tomato

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[23] The point might also be made by referring to the already ambiguous nature of the very term 'narrative', that can be employed in three senses: narrative could refer to the product of narration, the story told; to narrative as the act of narrating; and finally, the text of a story can be called a narrative (Wilson 2003, 392–93; Lamarque 2004).

in the sun» (2012, 10). Saying that narratives are intentional is going on in this direction by saying that, by contrast, the content of the narrative is not. The bottom line of this argument is then that some kind of agency is involved in the narrative, as narratives are kinds of artefactual representations.

This point affords a useful transition back to the problem of personal identity, and in particular to the continuity thesis mentioned in the first paragraph. Why? Because it brings to the fore one of the point of most contend in narrative theses: the division between the notion of narrativity as inherent to human experiences; and the contrary position that argues that there is no special connection between narrativity and life, and rather narrative confuses and obscures action and experience. These are two extremes between which a number of theories of narrative collocate. The first position holds that the narrative connection is a kind of connection that belongs, or can be found, to the order of action and experience; it is first an extra-linguistic fact, the form of the configuration of events in experience, and only later a logical-linguistic form. This idea forms the core of a continuist position that I will call the continuity thesis (cfr. Cattaneo 2008, chap. 3).

2.3. The continuity thesis

1. Continuity between narrative and experience

The idea that narrative structure is to be found in experience, outside of texts and narrators, is highly controversial. So, of course, it has been argued for extensively: arguably it is the attractiveness if not the soundness of this intuition that has made the fortune of the concept of narrative as offering a privileged insight into the workings of consciousness, mind, or experience. It is often the privileged connection of action and narration that is explored, and this can be seen by the generous use the concept has found not just, as already remarked, in philosophy of history, but also in action theory, in particular in the explanation of action. Narratives provide explanations to an action by providing a story about it, rather than by expounding on the casual process that brings the action about (Carr 2008; Velleman 2003). The idea on which narrative explanations hinge is that the narrative mode is close enough to the structure of action itself to be able to explain the action by giving a storied account of how the action came about; once again, then, it exploits a continuity between action and narration. The story itself provides something of a context within which the action makes sense: it posits the action into a series of events in which the agent was engaged, and describes the circumstances they faced; it suits very well the point of view of the agent, but might also be given from a third-personal point of view.

The way narratives relate an action to a context, both temporal, spatial, and material, has made them particularly favoured in feminist studies, gender studies and racial theory (*), as well as in 4e cognitive sciences, where narratives are seen as tools that allow to engage in and understand social scenarios without recurring to internal representations (Gallagher 2012; Popova 2014; Hutto 2008; Caracciolo 2010). Indeed, it is within this general framework that narrative and embodiment have been touching, mainly by way of the interest in which narratives shape one's dealing with the social and cultural environment; but also how narrative sense-making has emerged from participatory form of sense-making, akin to the one developed in enactivist tradition (Caracciolo 2010). Narrative then is seen as a promising concept to untangle the complexity of mental and social life, but also to bridge the gap between more sophisticated forms of cognition and more practical dealings with the world. The form the continuity thesis takes throughout these different fields is far from homogeneous, and the exploration of how narrative and action are connected is still very much ongoing. A heated debate remains on the plausibility of the continuity thesis, and I will offer an overview of the main objections it encounters at the end of this section; for now, I want to detail better its principal tenets by way of a limited analysis of the positions of two authors whose work has laid the ground for much of the successive discussion. David Carr and Paul Ricoeur have both worked extensively on the narrative configuration of experience taking as a starting point the phenomenological experience of time, and

under many aspects their works may be seen as complementary. But it is the differences that emerge from their approaches that makes a comparison particularly useful: their respective analysis of the connection of narrative, experience and action allow to articulate better what are the deep issues with which the continuity thesis is confronted.

2. Paul Ricoeur: Time and Narrative

Paul Ricoeur's *Time and narrative* (1984), while too complex and far-reaching in its themes to expound here to any degree of satisfaction, is well worth exploring in its fundamental features, as he offers a *sui generis* continuist position that strikes an articulated balance between narrative and experience. Ricoeur's central claim is that time enters human experience as it is narratively articulated, and vice versa, narratives are meaningful because they draw on the traits of human temporal existence. Ricoeur's starting point is given by the phenomenological analysis of time, which reveals its fundamentally paradoxical, problematic character: experiential time does not appear as having a coherent, smooth and integrate structure, but is experienced as a mixture of both concordance and discordance. Our experience of time is made up both of meaningful connections, and accidents, inconsequentiality, and contingency; we experience both order and the lack of order (Ricoeur 1984, 13). Ricoeur's central thesis is that on such basis a pure phenomenology of time is impossible: time's aporetic character cannot be apprehended intuitively, nor solved conceptually. The «aporetics of temporality» can only be mediated and solved through a «poetics of narrativity» (1984, 84): it is discursive narratives that allow to make sense of time, by resolving the flatness of cosmological time into lived, human time.

But this articulation does not proceed straightforwardly from action to narration, from time to narrative: its development can be traced through three different phases, all strictly conceptually dependent on one another. The three stadia, that he names in Aristotelian fashion mimesis I, mimesis II, and mimesis III, entail and generate each other in a circular model, that describes how narrative is composed through temporal human experience, and itself composes an inseparable part of how experience is construed and lived.

The first phase, mimesis I or mimesis praxis, concerns time and action as they are experienced in everyday life. Ricoeur argues that the world of action and experience is not yet narrative – but it is pre-narratively organised structurally, symbolically and temporally: the semantics of actions, the socially symbolic mediation of human events, and their temporal dimension all concur to the "prenarrative quality of experience» (1984, 74), the basic configuration of human action that will be re-elaborated through narrative (64). Any action requires a network of action-concepts that is understood practically and implicitly (rather than theoretically and thematically) of the structural

elements of action that make up our world, and that form the basis on which narrative re-elaboration will proceed.

In the first place, then, Ricoeur individuates the elements that compose the semantics of action. First, action has goals and means, and an anticipatory tension towards them; rather than a passive waiting (for the goal to happen), action exhibits a practical commitment to do the thing yourself, to get it done. Second, it has causes that are reasons, and which intervene in determining action in a way quite different from the way natural causes and natural elements intervene. Third, actions have agents, to whom responsibility can be attributed; and circumstances that can get in the way of action or ease it, and are practically relevant to its completion. Fourth, action is also interaction, action with others. And, fifth and final, action has a result, an outcome.

At this level, action is already symbolically organized, albeit implicitly: it symbolically mediated, by which Ricoeur refers to the fact that actions are not a collection of movements, but take place through and are mediated by signs, norms and rules, present implicitly and immanently. Symbols and meanings are not internal resources of the individual psychology that have to be applied to actions through a cognitive effort in order for action to become intelligible; action is already intelligible as it is deployed because the practical field is structured through public, shared meanings. The symbolic mediation accounts for the quasi-textuality or quasi-redeability of action: actions seem to speak for themselves. Finally, human action is pre-narrative in the way it is disposed along temporal lines: an action always carries within itself the past, in the motivation of the action, and also the future, in its projectual, future-oriented character (1984, 59-64).

Now, this practical understanding of action requires competency to handle all elements of actions together, as they are strictly correlated in meaning. It is from the pre-understanding of the world of action that allows to understand the order of action that is implicated in narrative activity in order for narrative composition emerges: mimesis I «is the level at which the experience of everyday action is immanently geared to be processed into narrative». Thus, on the whole, mimesis I refers to the pre-narrative structural, symbolic and temporal features of the ordinary world of action. Narrative structure is grounded in «the very capacity of action to be narrated and perhaps the need to narrate it» (1984, 54).

A further level of intelligibility is attained through mimesis II, mimesis creation. Here Ricoeur places the process of emplotment, the configurative act through which a *synthesis of the heterogeneous* takes place, «poetically» resolving the discordant concordance, the aporias of time and experience that are found in mimesis I. The *mise en intrigue* mediates between events and story, unifying the chronological with the non-chronological: here the implicit narrativity of our stream of experience is processed into a coherent plot, as various events and actions are grasped together, they are «brought

under one understanding and knotted together in meaningful relations, integrated and synthesized» (1984, 56). The order of action, previously only implicit, is now explicitly taken into consideration: it is directed toward a goal, or a conclusion, that unifies the sequence of events and gives a theme, a point. The sequence of events, already *de facto* related, is framed in an overarching's story, one into which they acquire a different meaning, and are brought in new symbolic relations where the discordance of experience is not abolished but integrated and re-signified. The plot juxtaposes various heterogeneous elements (agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, unexpected results) as well as temporally distant elements. It does so by means of a unifying theme or thought, by imposing a «sense of an ending» to the story (1984, 66). Starting and finishing points, as well as developments and progress, emerge from the chronological passage of time through this suturing, that brings together personal, social and practical meanings of action. Emplotment is thus a «hermeneutic rendition» of experience.

All these elements also appear in the re-figuration of experience that takes place at the third level, mimesis III, which «marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader» (1984, 71). The organization of events into a plotted story constitutes a further level, as what was pre-signified in experiential dimension action is given a new meaning which enhances its readability and the possibilities of its interpretations. In this phase, by narrating the story of our life and interpreting ourselves through it, we extrapolate our character and characteristics and build the sense of a durable character, a narrative identity. Such a narrative identity will then come to affect actions and experiences, entering the pre-figuration level of praxis, mimesis I, in a constant interplay between phases that forms the «constitutive dynamism of the narrative configuration» (1984, 66). Such co-constitutive relationship makes it so that there is a circular and dynamic.

Mimesis II emerges as the pivotal moment in the process, as it is here that narrative mediates between action and identity, re-adapting action and self-understanding in a continuous process. In fact, it is from the configuration happening at mimesis II that mimesis I and mimesis III operate respectively a pre-figuration and a re-configuration; but such dependence is not one-way only. At least three dimensions of this conceptual dependence can be individuated. First, the general capacity to identify action through its structural aspects is dependent on mimesis I; emplotment is an evolution of this pre-understanding of action. Second, the recognition of the symbolic dimension and its further elaboration also depends on there already being a meaning of action, one that will further be developed and transformed through emplotment. Third, the fundamental temporal character of action grounds the very capacity for narrative, and exhibits a demand or a tension to be told, to be narrated. In short, Mimesis II also depends on mimesis I, for plot-construction and narrative understanding results intelligible only insofar as one can already master the dispositive of action; the practical

understanding of action is *presupposed* by the logical connection of the poetic plotting. Configuring narratives would be impossible if human experience did not already possess a figuration, albeit one that is still only proto-narrative and that will emerge as narrative only in light of the emplotment.

The understanding of action present in mimesis II rests on the implicit temporal structures present in the symbolic mediation occurring at mimesis I; but it also transforms its element into a different composition (1984, 189, n.24). The plotting ensues a semantic innovation and opens new dimensions of readability and interpretation. Symbolic resources of the practical field are also employed and changed in the plot; its implicit symbolism is not only made explicit, but also transformed as it is accorded, integrated, with other elements into emplotment. What this amounts to, Ricoeur argues, is that it brings forth a passage from the paradigmatic order of action, to the syntagmatic order of narrativity: what would otherwise result in the simple juxtaposition of action-sentences becomes enriched and transformed through the employment of elements, such as the discursive and syntactical elements that are proper of the syntagmatic order. The elements of actions that occur synchronically in action acquire the diachronic character of told stories, where they are semantically integrated in a sequential connection, the plot.

So it is here that is found the plot proper. As time is not already laid out in such an order in our experience but presents itself as discordant and aporetic, Ricoeur concludes that beginnings, developments and endings are not *in* experience itself, just as the narrative connection is not a phenomenological datum. Such elements are derived from the poetic form and only through narration, that allows to overcome the aporia not practically but poetically. So narrative structure is possessed primarily by the plot, the poetic composition, rather than being immanent to action. Still, it is the intra-temporality of experience that offers the potentiality for narrativity, especially in its practical dimensions: our everyday practices are made in a way that present, future and past are articulated together in a way that induces narrativity. The temporal structures of action account for the possibility to narrate them, and even for a necessity to narrate them; while they are not narrative in themselves. Emplotment then is not extrinsic or arbitrary, it takes root in the temporal structures which are constitutive of action.

By doing so, Ricoeur refuses the implicit notion at work in much of the debate on narrative and experience – that order is to be found exclusively on the narrative side, while experience is completely unhinged and devoid of form, what he calls «the post-modern seduction». Neither experience nor narrative are pure order nor disorder – in fact, the accidental and the unforeseeable are both part of narratives, while experience itself can exhibit order and configuration. It is, after all, this presence of concordance and discordance that occasions the plot. Ricoeur's concession that the narrative structure comes 'after' experience, then, is but a small one – as he doesn't end up denying that the world has a

pre-narrative structure. The final image is that of a non vicious circularity, or spiral, of experience and narrativity, taken into a circle that both affirms and modifies them (1984, 179); so that, as the three stadia of mimesis exact on each other continuously and dynamically, no chronological or logical priority can be found.

3. David Carr: Human Experience and Narrative Structure

David Carr's works (1986a; 1986b; 2008) on the narrative connection develop a broadly phenomenological approach to the experience of time and narration on the basis of Husserl's and Heidegger's concept of temporality, and a notion of narrative as a primary way of configuring experience in time (1986a, 4-5). Much like Ricoeur's, Carr's reasoning starts with a fundamental distinction – that he will be focussing his analysis on human experience and human reality, rather than take as the starting point a naturalistic, physical notion of reality, what is sometimes by anti-narrativists as 'reality', 'the world'. And, like Ricoeur, Carr argues that human experience does not appear either indifferent to human affairs nor devoid of structure: human time is structured in wholes which unite present, past and future. A sequential, mechanical order necessarily underlies experience and action, but experience and action themselves are not to be found in such a sequential order; they take place in a *configured* sequence, and the configuration is that of past, present, and future. Experiencing an event always includes both an expectation of the future and a retention of the past: at any point, as the experience unfolds, it is experienced as a configuration thanks to a protentional and retentional attitude that allows the present to be experienced at all.

Carr takes Husserl's famous example of the experience of listening to a melody (1986a, 21). When listening to a melody each sound is experienced within a structure: the present note is experience as following past notes and anticipating the follow-up, not as a single drop of music. The protentional and retentional component is constitutive of present experience as it is, where the past and the present are experience «as a function of what will be», so that future, present, and past «mutually determine one another as parts of a whole» (1986a, 29). Melodies have an objective structural temporal duration, but the point Carr is making concerns the dimension of subjective experience, that takes this form even when they object is not temporal at all: «I can explore with my eyes or hands an object [...]. But my visual or tactile observation of it is itself an event with its own duration, its own beginning, middle, and end» (1986a, 48). The quality of present experience, then, is affected by both what has passed and what is expected to come to pass, and the note is understood as part of a sequence. Of course, protention can be disappointed, as things can go in surprising directions; but this doesn't erase the fact that in any case the next experience is had in a temporal configuration, and the unexpected, which requires a revision of our understanding of the experience, is still a function of this expectation.

This fundamental temporal structure can be found throughout passive experiences, active experiences, and self-reflective experiences. Passive experiences «such as the seeing of things in space or the hearing of tones and simple melodic lines», «a throbbing tooth-ache or a wave of sadness» (1986, 26) exhibit this temporal structure because we are not hit by them in a punctual way, but we live *through* them, detecting a beginning and an end, duration and changes: «Even the most unarticulated or instantaneous of occurrences, like a loud bang or a sudden extinguishing of all the lights, is experienced as an event with a certain temporal thickness which assures it the status it deserves [...]». An experience, even as simple as this, then amounts to more than the mere difference between two states: precisely because it is experienced, it must be experienced along with the two states it separates. Even in such a short-lived event, unfolding, distinguishable phases allow the event to be experienced as a beginning, a developing intervening phases, and an ending. Its temporal configuration is one of which I have a protentional-retentional awareness: it allows the unity and articulation to be distinguished, and also the experience to be distinguished from other surroundings. When considering active experiences, albeit they share the temporally configured mode of organization of passive experiences, the temporal structure acquires a particular teleological character in virtue of the action it involves. This is due to the fact that practical time, as in contrast with the experienced time, is forward-directed. When one is undertaking an action, Carr argues, protention is not expected, but *effected* (1986b, 34*)*: future states of things are brought into existence through action. Action involves then an «ontological commitment» that organizes all its phases: Carr takes the serving of a tennis ball as an example of the kind of structure exhibited by actions:

> I serve the tennis ball by drawing back my right arm, tossing the ball into the air with my left, etc., each of which is a distinct action describable in its own right. Such is the interrelation of the elements of a tennis serve, however, that an accurate description would have to sound like this: the sort of arm movement required to hit the ball at a certain height, the kind of toss designed to place the ball in the path of the racquet, etc. In short, each of the phases must be described precisely as a phase of this action and cannot be described independently in terms applicable to other contexts.

Such effecting is the action I'm doing, the bending of the arm, the squinting of the eyes, etcetera: «the action is the same as it unfolds through its temporal span and at the same time constitutes a unit, there is a unity of all the actions involved» (1986, 38). Retention as well shows a different character in action experience, as it takes the form of preparatory and anticipatory stages to action: the preparatory movements to the throwing of the ball are not just successive states of the body one remembers and observes, but leading events to the successive action; they are preparatory towards the present and the future. Past, present and future, as parts of the same action or phases of the same temporal whole, are grasped and engaged with as of a piece, in a «intimate and complementary interrelation» (1986,

34). The elements of the serve exhibit a conceptual inseparability, while the elements of the action exhibit a practical, psychological and even physiological inseparability (cfr. 1986, 33): they are not performed in an additional or cumulative manner, but as interdependent phases such that wherever the agent is in the course of actions, they grasp the successive and precedent phases of actions in one go.

Carr then brings together the teleological character of action and its temporal character. He argues that the purposive structure of action is first and foremost a temporal structure: actions unfold in temporal phases; and the end of the action, its goal, is also the temporal end of the action. So in practical experience, it is the goal, the end of the action, that organizes the different parts of action, as well as the body and the environment, both temporally and spatially, and both towards the goal. It is the future which is salient, while past and present constitute, or better are organized as, the background over which the future is brought about.

The closure of action, its goal, organizes 'retroactively' the different phases of actions: Carr emphasizes that this ordering happens in a quasi-retrospective way, precisely from the point of the goal attained. This vantage point – of the practical agent – is continually changing, just as the present continuously shifts. Protention allows for «more retroactive control, so to speak, on the present, since it governs not just my view of things but what I am doing» (1986, 40). At the same time, the closure of the action is not a mental representation, but is effectuated through the doing of the action itself: the agent is not contemplating the organization of action from above, from outside the flow of the events, but grasps the whole from within it, as it is weaving it, as they are trying to attain it. The action in short is not represented, but lived through. While experience and experiential time is configured into «events», action and practical time organize their temporal span through and into actions. It is this « the adoption of an anticipated future-retrospective point of view on the present» that makes it so that the agent can be likened to a narrator: because in undertaking action one is already positioning themselves into the future: «[...] we are constantly striving, with more or less success, to occupy the story-tellers' position with respect to our own lives » (1986a, 61).

Carr's next step is then to show the kinship between these temporal structures of experience and narrative configuration; and the kinship is given precisely by the shared temporal closure, that can only be «expressed by speaking of a beginning, a middle, and an end» (1986a, 47). Such structures inhere to the phenomena, rather than being over imposed by it, from their inception, and they are fundamentally temporal. Action is inherently structured in temporal configurations, and these are the same temporal configurations that make up narrative structures by arranging events into integrated wholes (such as «closure or beginning, middle, and end… departure and arrival, departure and return, means and end, suspension and resolution, problem and solution»). Carr argues that the 'means-end'

structure of action that we experience in everyday life is akin to the beginning-middle-end plot structure of narrative and thus, «the structure of action … is common to art and life».

> But is there not a kinship between the means-end structure of action and the beginning-middle-end structure of narrative? In action we are always in the midst of some- thing, caught in the suspense of contingency which is supposed to find its resolu- tion in the completion of our project. To be sure, a narrative unites many actions to form a plot. The resulting whole is often still designated, however, to be an action of larger scale: coming of age, conducting a love affair, or solving a murder. The structure of action, small-scale and large, is common to art and to life. (Carr 1986b, 122)

It is the peculiar partonomic structure – the temporal one – they share that makes narrative and action so kindred: «As we have seen, the part-whole relation here is a specifically temporal one, and distinguishable as such from other instances of this relation: spatial, for example, or conceptual».

The temporal unfolding to the structure of experience underlies the logical structure; in fact, the logical character of the narrative connection emerges primarily as a *practical* notion, and such structures «constitute the meaningfulness or direction of the experience or action; it is in virtue of them that these things "make sense" prior to and independently of our reflecting on them and explicitly recounting them to ourselves or to others» (1986a, 61). The logical quality that these structure have, they have as they are in the first place experiential and temporal structures. Logical structures and relations then do not transcend time, are not employed timelessly, but emerge within temporal experience, and are «temporally embodied».

Such elements, and thus the narrative form, emerge more properly when what is considered are basic experiences and actions that enter into larger combinations, and where they will acquire some different characteristics. Smaller actions combine structurally in larger, more complex and extended actions. Such larger actions have their temporal ending coinciding with the teleological end, and it is the end that organizes retrospectively all elements, including smaller and more basic actions. But as complex actions bring with themselves more interconnected temporal structures, they also require a more complex protentional and retentional attitude, one where reflection and recollection will play an important role (1986a, 54ff). Thus, the extension of the configurational model onto more complex actions and experiences requires a reflective stance: larger actions and events in which we are engaged cannot be configured narratively only on the basis of the retentional-protentional span, because this is too local in its operations and subject to interruptions to be able to structure larger events. The subjective position of the agent must be modified, as the attention must be paid not just to the object of one's experience, but to the experience itself:

> Following a ballet performance in progress is protentional-retentional as it goes along, but if it is interrupted by an intermission, during which I converse, buy a drink, and visit the washroom, I need to "pick up the thread" of the story and re-establish myself in the retentive-protentive frame of mind. To do this, I may need to consult my memory, reawaken certain scenes from the first act, etc. [...] The sense of "where I stand" in the project, which was so clear to me while I was immersed in it, now needs to be restored by an act of recollection and reflection. (1986a, 55)

In such cases, the usually unreflective structure of protention and retention becomes reflective and deliberative, as the larger-scale action is thematised in reflection. While in the pre-reflective immersion in the temporal object the elements of action are tied together immediately, here they are thematised as connected: it is precisely the interaction that gets thematised, in order to satisfy « the practical function of holding the action together, organizing its parts, and doing so, if need be, in the face of changed circumstances» (1986a, 71). This reflection effects the «'melodic' character of life, the way different episodes relate together and hang together (*Zusammenhang des Lebens*)» (1986a, 57). Carr brings the point home by appealing to the practice of literally telling what we are doing to ourselves and others and its place in the reflective process: it is expected of us that we can «come up with a story, complete with beginning, middle, and end, an accounting or recounting which is description and justification all at once» (1986a, 61). This highlights the practical function of narrative activity, Carr argues: narration is often constitutive of actions rather than a supplement of it. It is a refinement of this quasi-retrospective stance of the agent inherent in action itself that later evolves into the retrospective view of the narrative. The narrative structure then refers for Carr both to having of a perspective of the kind described, and to the organizational features of events. Carr's inquiry into the pre-thematic experience of time and the past resolves then into saying that historical models of narrative and literary narratives are extensions, and configurations, of their primary characteristics to be found irreducibly in action. Narrative dynamics then are already practically functioning in the pre-reflective sphere of action, before literary forms appear:

> The actions and sufferings of life can be viewed as a process of telling ourselves stories, listening to those stories and acting them out or living through them. Hence: It is not the case that we first live and act and then afterward, seated around the fire as it were, tell about what we have done … The retrospective view of the narrator, with its capacity for seeing the whole in all its irony, is not an irreconcilable opposition to the agent's view but is an extension and refinement of a viewpoint inherent in action itself … narration, intertwined as it is with action, (creates meaning) in the course of life itself, not merely after the fact, at the hands of authors, in the pages of books. (1986, 61)

4. Carr and Ricoeur: an assessment

These schematic introductions to the work of Carr and Ricoeur allow to familiarize ourselves with some of the most conceptually poignant elements of the relation of narrative and action. Both Carr and Ricoeur develop on these theoretical bases sophisticated notions of narrative selves; but here I rather prefer to stop short of a deeper analysis of their positions and focus instead on the material we have now, in order to bring out the theme of their treatment of action in relation to narrative.

Both Carr and Ricoeur construct their works on the practical import of narrative, emphasizing the continuity between action and narrative: narrative structure allows to hold together the different elements of actions and organize them teleologically or thematically; it allows action to be understood, to be told meaningfully, and to communicate and be communicated. Narrative's practical role is one of mediation between different phases of practical experience: between structures of experience, structure of action, and structures of reflection (Ricoeur 1984, 1991; Carr 1986). The clear affinities of their approaches render their divergences all the more interesting, as Ricoeur and Carr can be taken to exemplify two distinct directions within the continuity thesis.

The source of their disagreement is to be found in the first place in the different phenomenological data from which their respective theses start (Cattaneo 2008, 132). Carr characterizes experience as being always already configured, while Ricoeur insists precisely on the compresence of dissonance and concordance in experience, that needs to be configured through a narrative effort. He concedes that experience is pre-figured, that it allows and even promotes narration; but only through configuration this configuration gets spelled out and ultimately reaches its proper narrative form; and eventually, it is from literary sources that narrative gets its shape.

This divergence has far-reaching consequences, in particular on whether the narrative characters of events is taken to be immanent to actions and events themselves, or obtained through a further articulation. For Carr it is temporal and practical structures that organize narration, and thus a direct and linear connection can be traced from the structure of action and experience, to the structure of narrative. Experience has a proto-narrative character of its own, independent of further elaboration and logically as well as genetically primary. In Ricoeurian terms, the kind of structural kinship that Carr recognizes between action and narration is an adherence of mimesis I and mimesis II (Cattaneo 2008, 185). Carr dotes the action itself with a narrative character, that is given by the overlapping of teleological and temporal tension; this also allows him to position the agent as the author, thanks to the quasi-retrospective ordering of action effected through the end in view.

Ricoeur on the other hand describes a more ambiguous exchange between mimesis I, experience, and mimesis II, narrative configuration. He pictures a dynamic interplay where continuity takes different forms, and where it is difficult to establish logical or genealogical primacy between experience and narrative. Narrative organization obtains in the intersubjectively rich level of *mimesis II*, and not

before; but Ricoeur insists also on the way elements of experience lend themselves to narration, and does not give up a strong connection between experience and narrative form. There is a continuous back-and-forth going on between the three levels of mimesis, a looping reciprocity that does not resolve in identity. Mimesis III, the narrative fully elaborated, does come back to influence mimesis I; but this does not mean that mimesis I's pre-narrative character is fully determined by it (Ricoeur 1984, p. 74).

A different way to point out this difference is to say that Carr's account is roughly unidirectional the narrative dynamics stems from experience and action, and can evolve in more sophisticated forms; and such literary narratives do exert influence and practical import on experience, but they do not create that structure. As a consequence, since the meaning of the action is already found in the action itself, there is less space for its elaboration and re-interpretation at further levels.

Ricoeur's model, on the other hand, has a loop-like form where direction of influence cannot be easily determined; the narrative form proper is not to be found in lived experience, but does come back to influence it. Ricoeur's position certainly seem to preserve better the notion of the discursive enrichment that happens through emplotment and the use of linguistic resources; and his account stresses the elaborative, transforming capacity of language and its cultural and intersubjective dimensions (Ricoeur 1984, p. 52). It is open to discussion whether, as Carr argues, this causes an «insufficient anchoring in the pre-semantic configuration of experience» and draws Ricoeur's position too close to the discontinuist ones developed by exponents of the linguistic turn (cfr. Carr 1986b).

The issues that appear in their works – the way experience is structured, the primacy of the intrasubjective or intersubjective character of narration, the extension to which the narrative can be extended or reduced to its minimal terms – are still present in the most recent debate on narrative personal identity, albeit the conceptual terminology might have changed, as we will see. The next paragraph will take some time to look into objections to narrative approaches to personal identity and experience in general.

2.4. Objections to narrative approaches

1. Narrative and reality

Objections to narrative theories are as varied and sprawling as they narrative paradigm itself. In what follows, I will offer a panoramic view of the most fundamental kind of objections that are moved to narrative theses. The main goal is not to furnish a complete comment on anti-narrativist positions, but rather to showcase the different concerns at work both in narrativist and anti-narrativist positions, and where such concerns clash. This will allow to further move into focus some of the elements of the conceptual landscape in which we are moving, and to further work out the boundaries within which narrative theses can plausibly intervene in personal identity.

One of the most common objection to narrative theses concerns the relationship between narrative and reality, making the straightforward point that narratives are factually and descriptively deceptive, and distort and falsify reality and/or our experience of it. According to these objections, narrative thinking does not offer a good description of our psychology, our lives, or our (relation with) world. To the contrary, narratives operate a fundamental betrayal of reality, for any reality argued to be structured narratively: for example, it can be argued that our experience of self-reflection does not take a narrative form; that reporting something narratively effectuates a distortion of the facts; more widely, that life is not akin a literary fiction and that there are not true beginnings and ends either in experience or in the world at large. All such objections, while having different polemical targets in different debates, share a fundamental distrust of the narrative structure as a structure of experience, and move to it an accuse of antirealism.

One strand of this kind of objection takes off from the study of narrative, and the notion of narrative proper, in order to confront its structures and elements with that of life. The argument is easy to grasp: once we get a notion of narrative structure, plot, characters, and all such narrative complements, it will be readily understood that the distance between narrative and life is in fact too large to be bridged; and it is not even desirable that it should be bridged. Real persons are not characters, and do not think of themselves *as* characters; real lives do not have the structure or form of narratives. Narrative theses then operate an illegitimate extrapolation from literature to life (cfr. Vice 2003; Lamarque 2004; Christman 2004).

A strictly related objection on the plausibility of narrative theses focuses on the excessive cognitive effort they require, which is deemed unlikely to actually happen in significant ways; narrative theses of personal identity, for example, seem to demand a kind of self-consciousness and capacity to self-articulate that is perhaps too excessive. The objection argues then that people just don't think or act in such a way as described by narrative theories: we seldom ponder our fates; we rarely stitch together a story of our life that goes beyond the immediate need; we are bad narrators, and we hardly care to

construe longitudinal, coherent explanations of our lives, having at best vague, stereotypical ideas of its direction or theme. It is not just that narrative coherency is unattainable, but we really don't make efforts towards it. Our self-construction through stories is way more spastically built and fragmentary that it is told: they are «mundane, fragmented, inconsequential and for the most part blandly true rather than grandly inventive» (Lamarque 2004, 403). When we are in the mood, we make use of these self-reflecting stories, that are spontaneous enough but actually the product of self-conscious reflection, rather than the form of it.[24]

A further articulation of this kind of objection is what Lamarque the distortion thesis, which is, narratives by their very nature distort the events they should describe or report. This kind of objection relies on the one just seen, on the lack of narrative structures in experience and life: neither the casual, thematic and teleological sequences of narratives can be found in the life and experience of any given person, so that the employment of such sequences will perforce offer a misleading, unreliable imagine of the evens.[25]

The distortion thesis has also some consequences on the notion of narrative in ethics, as if it seems that if narrative theses are factually wrong, they could be also pernicious (Bourdieu, 1986; Sartre, 2013; Strawson 2004; Thomä 2007). The ethical dangers narrative theses pose are again individuated in their excessively reflective flavour at the expense of spontaneity. Thinking of ourselves as characters might result in determinism or 'fate compulsion'; or, reversely, thinking of ourselves as authors with a wrong sense of our own powers and abilities, and choices (cfr. Vice 2003). 'Self-mythologizing', 'fictionalisation', 'aeshteticiziation' are all names that have been given to the ethical worry that one's self might remain stuck into a self-told, unrealistic, deceptive image.[26]

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[24] Perhaps the best well known form of this objection is argued by Galen Strawson's (2004) through his division between Episodic and Diachronic persons. Strawson's argument hinges on a distinction between the kind of self-experiences persons have, depending on whether they are 'Episodic' or 'Diachronic'. These two categories denote different styles of temporal beings and of self-experience. Diachronic persons naturally consider themselves as something that was in a past and will persist in the future, for a considerable stretch of time; whereas Episodic persons think of themselves in a sparser way. Strawson brings himself as an example of an episodic person: «when I am experiencing or apprehending myself as a self, that the remoter past or future in question is not my past or future, although it is certainly the past or future of GS the human being» (2004, 433). Strawson argues that being episodic or being diachronic is an anthropological difference, a tendency that can be more or less accentuated or varying. The point is, *ex hypothesis*, that Diachronics are more prone to being narrative in their life; indeed, being diachronic is at least necessary, Strawson argues, to be narrative. Strawson suggests that the popularity of the narrativity thesis is but a generalization from diachronic experiences to universal; it is a particular thinking style, but not a good basis for a theory of personal identity.

[25] A similar objection is what Lamarque calls the invention thesis, that argues that «it *creates* those events at least in the sense that there are no plot-like structures of events independent of narrative». Lamarque notes that this thesis contradicts partially the first one, weaker distortion thesis, as an event can be distorted by a narrative only if it exists *independent* of that narrative, only because it exists in some not distorted form, having its own structure (whatever it may be).

[26] And, of course, the possibility that such narratives might also be imposed on others: such objections also have wider consequences in adjacent normative fields, such as that of political and social theory, feminist theory and colonial studies. The employment of narratives, especially shared ones, can lead to scripts through which individuals and groups are categorized and oppressed, and used to enforce «submission to a published mode of appearance» (cfr. Vice 2003).

The risk of self-indulgent revision, in truth, goes beyond the ethical dimension to touch the very core of narrative theses of the self:

> If my life narrative constitutes myself, then it might seem that the narrative couldn't be false about that self, any more than *Bleak House* could give a false picture of Lady Dedlock. But that seems plainly wrong.

If my self is constituted narratively, then we don't have any truth to betray. In such cases paradoxically narrative would be twisted out of its place: from a place of ordering and structure to a place of spontaneity where an easy-ready justification for just about anything can be spun into the story at a moment's notice.

Both the descriptive and normative objections are concerned with the dangers that narrative structure poses in regard to accuracy and truth-telling. The main point of contention underlying these objections is that narrative approaches encourage the thought that situations have 'meaning', or are 'designed', as they might if they were in a novel, while in fact they are largely a matter of chance. The falsifying effect comes the notion of narrative itself, as they must of necessity select and order facts trough causal relations and teleological progression; and the selection requires an interpretation, for example, of what is most significant or relevant. But this interpretation is, exactly, an interpretation; it does not belong to the order of facts that happened, but to the order of hermeneutics. The notion that experience has narrative structure implies that such structures are also found genuinely in the world, and suggests a view of the world that is scattered with true beginnings, developments and endings. The objection precisely counters that there is nothing in the nature of the event itself that determines its nature as a beginning, an end, or an intermediate developmental phase, and to see the world like this is to see it as orderly, as invented (Vice); it is, in short, a deviation towards mysticism. At least part of what gives these objection strength is a metaphysical view which Ricoeur rightly calls post-modern, and that is often taken for granted rather than argued for.

The continuity thesis we have just seen is meant precisely to counter this kind of objections on the anti-realism and over-intellectualist character of narrative theses, by binding strictly together the notion of narrative and the notion of experience. If it can be shown that there is a continuity between the way experience is organized and narrative structures operating at high levels of cognition, then objections pertaining the excessively cognitive nature of narrative activity and its fictionalist risks will be greatly tempered. The underlying intuition is that experience *is* structured, that the lives of persons are not random sequences of disconnected acts and events.

But for this move to be available, the notion of narrative has to be somehow manhandled. That is, it is obviously a futile feat to try and find the precise, exact characters of literary narratives in experience. If one is to argue that narratives may be found in different places than in minds and books,

and precisely in the pre-cognitive structure of experience, then notion of narrative in the literal sense is abandoned; the concept of narrative that is looked for must not be cognitively loaded. Both Carr and Ricoeur, as we have seen, maintain a somehow basic (if traditional and linear) structure of narrative through which to articulate their claims. This position softens the cognitive effort required in narrative theses by arguing that not all self-narratives are cognitively constructed and that narratives in a looser senses can be found. But here we come to the problem we had found when we briefly looked at narrative definitions: to define narrative meaningfully, and especially when one is also claiming that such narratives pertain to experience in an «implicit» way.

2. Narrative and experience: unhappy marriage?

This strategy opens up a different can of worms altogether, and a different dimension that interest us. The first problem is that the notion of an implicit narrative might deprive the concept of narrativity of some of its core features, ultimately deflating it into insignificance (Menary 2008, 71). Zahavi argues that once the link between narrative and language is severed, the concept is trivialized: «[...] by severing the link between language and narrative, it stretches the latter notion beyond breaking point. The term threatens to become all-inclusive and consequently vacuous – in the end everything meaningful involves narratives – and this is surely a sign of bankruptcy» (2007, 201). While one could counter-argue that plenty of narratives are not linguistic, taking different representational media, the underlying point is still valid: surely a notion of narrative that remains unexpressed and unproduced, and perhaps even inaccessible to expression is weak. Indeed, the notion of narrative becomes less informative the more general it is, and the more one tries to minimize it, the more it might end up saying nothing substantial about the organisation of experience apart from the fact that it is temporal. Strawson (2004) further bears down on this same point, by arguing that while surely there is a commonsense, matter-of-fact dimension of bodily history that might be described as an implicit narrative with a kind of temporal structure, it is hardly enough for a satisfying notion of narrative:

> But the Narrative attitude must [...] amount to something more than a disposition to grasp one's life as a unity simply in so far as it is the life of a biologically single human being. Nor can it consist just in the ability to give a sequential record of the actual course of one's life –, the actual history of one's life – even if one's life does in fact exemplify a classical pattern of narrative development independently of any construction or interpretation. (2004, 441)

Strawson doesn't specify further what the boundary is for the non-trivial application of the concept of narrative, but he gives a clear enough image: «What do I mean by non-trivial? Well, if someone says, as some do, that making coffee is a narrative that involves Narrativity, because you have to

think ahead, do things in the right order, and so on, and that everyday life involves many such narratives, then I take it the claim is trivial» (2004, 439).

This objection is complementary, if on the other end of the spectrum, with the objection that accused narrative theses of being too demanding and improbably reflective. It appears clear that the notion of narrative structure has to be carefully weighted not to be either too poor – and thus, trivial – or too rich – and thus, implausible.

The second problem is that the first reaction to the introduction of narrative structures at the level of experience is to argue that they «impose a very mentalistic understanding on embodied experiences» (cfr. Meyer 2014, Menary 2008). Here the objections on the implausibility and excessive cognitivism of narrative thesis ties together with phenomenological concerns regarding the autonomy and priority of embodied experiences. In fact, this kind of objection is mostly moved by a phenomenological and neuro-phenomenological concerns in regard to the notion of the minimal self (Zahavi 2007). The concept of minimal self, as we have seen, refers to a pre-reflective, pre-linguistic, primitive form of experiential self-consciousness: it is the first-person perspective in its most minimal form, that is, of simply having a point of view on the world:

> [...] (minimal or core) self is claimed to possess experiential reality, it is taken to be closely linked to the first-person perspective, and is in fact identified with the first-personal *givenness* of the experiential phenomena. This first-personal givenness of experiential phenomena is not something quite incidental to their being, a mere varnish that the experiences could lack without ceasing to be experiences. On the contrary, this first-personal givenness makes the experiences *subjective*. (Zahavi 2007, 184)

This form of selfhood need not any attention paid to it; it will remain as a background presence, informing the phenomenal experience implicitly. I experience my states as my states before any form of attention or reflection: as part of my stream of consciousness, as being intimately and pre-reflective mine. Under this aspect, it is invariant: it never changes, as it is a kind of pure subjectivity that is the same in all. The unproblematic access to one's first person perspective is a form of unmediated simple giveness, a pre-reflective, non-conceptual form of «ownership» of cognitive, bodily and emotional states and operative through all forms of experience. This first-personal giveness implies always a primitive form of self-reference. Experiences, then, are always in reference to the self that is having them: they are always for someone.

The point of concern is quite clear: the minimal self is taken to play a foundational role conceptually, as it underlies conceptually mediated forms of self-consciousness. In narrative accounts, on the other hand, the central role of the first-person perspective (Atkins 2004, 341) is through self-reflective constructions, rather than on the first-person giveness as such. Phenomenologist such as Dan Zahavi are then worried that narrative theories of selfhood, with their accent on narratives as the primary

access to the self or constituent of the self, might bury the delicate notion of the minimal self, which should be regarded as exceeding narrative identity, and a pre-requisite for the evolution of the narrative self. It must now have become quite clear why Zahavi should stress limits and potentially distorting effects of the narrative view of the self. Narrative selfhood, he argues,

> fail to recognize appropriately the existence of a core consciousness of the sort that is primitive and pre-reflective; one is bound up with non-discursive ways of being in the world—i.e. the kinds of consciousness that are associated with the having of a first person perspective, experiences of embodied ownership and the like. (2007)

He is particularly set against those claim that experience is appropriated narratively: he argues, rather, that experience is not appropriated the moment it is narrated, storied, or inserted through a story: it is *already* mine. Since such experiences are phenomenologically salient, Zahavi concludes then that «it doesn't make sense to speak of a first-person perspective without speaking of a self then it seems we have little option but to acknowledge the existence of non-narrative selves».

Zahavi's objection brings to the light a related problem that can be found through a number of authors; Bertram (2013) calls this the *self-identification problem:*

> [narrative theory] cannot explain why the discrete experiences that are integrated into a narrative unity should be attributed as belonging to me in the first place without presupposing a more fundamental level of selfhood as the subject of these experiences, so it cannot account for the emergence of selfhood as such, but must presume a subject whose experiences can achieve narrative organization in the first place. (Køster 2017, 167)

The point is that the organizing and structuring of the narrative is done through something that is already there, as having any self-conception requires that one already has a self of some kind – someone or something is selecting, deciding what belongs or not to the narrative, before the narrative is produced. Easily enough then the next point is that narrative does not produce or forms the form of self-consciousness, nor defines the unity of personal identity, but rather the narrative *presupposes* this unity. Menary also moves this objection, arguing that «it is close to incoherent to claim that the subject of the experiences that the story is about is the story itself» (Menary 2008, 72; Meyers, 2014). There must be an experiential unity *prior* to any narration, if these narratives are to be attributed to a self. There must be a subject before narrative; who, otherwise, is doing such a narrative construction?

There is a further problem: the notion of implicit, internal, unconscious narratives further endangers narrative's relationship with truth: it seems to suggest that there are 'real', authentic, if implicit and mysterious subterranean narratives underlying one's self-reflective narrative; and they can overrule one's conscious explanation of their own actions. This position flies right in the face of the main thrust of self-constitution theories: that narrative is an achievement, not something to be found in the

existing structures. If such narratives are not just implicit but also unconscious, we are compelled to ask what should we make of the notion that narrative theories have of self-constitution as an achievement. What kind of self-constitution can be afforded narratively if it is granted that some narratives are implicit, and some unconscious? The narrative position under this issue seems to inch closer to an essentialist view of personal identity, where one's identity is something to be true to – and in particular a structuralist position, assuming that there is a true story that one possess, that is true, and that has to be dug up (Køster 2017).

The issues at hand were already in fact present in the continuity theses. Ricoeur and Carr defend the narrative stance against accuses of anti-realism by emphasizing that the focus of their inquiry is *human* experience; and that, rather than an exercise in cognitivism, the search for narrativity highlights the way human experience is particularly configured. They also share an important turn from the cognitive to the practical import (Cattaneo 2008, 185) of narrative: they characterize the narrative connection as one rooted in practical and experienced time, rather than as a logical, atemporal connection; such practical organization is not fictional or invented, but ontologically rooted in the structure of experience.

Now, Ricoeur's dynamic model comes still at the risk of losing the immanent narrativity of action, or to expose itself to fictionalization accuses; in fact, Carr looks at the priority of the socio-cultural origin of narrative organization accorded by Ricoeur as an illegitimate intrusion on the world of action, and sees it as a discontinuity that eventually leads Ricoeur nearer to a linguistic position, such as Mink's (Carr 1986a, 111). On the other hand, Carr's strictly isomorphic vision of action and narration means there is very little available space for the independence of the configurative act, and thus very little space for elaboration and refiguration of the narrative structure inherent to action. Furthermore, Carr's defence of the immanent narrative structure of experience seems to map precisely onto Ricoeur's comments regarding the tendency to find an equivalence between order and narrativity; rather than admitting that bodily configuration may take place in a non narrative order. In fact, Carr's position has insidious, counterintuitive consequences, as it doesn't seem to allow that experience, especially in its most embodied forms, might escape the narrative order. On the other hand, Ricoeur's position allows the existence and persistence of something outside any text and perhaps of any connection; the sheer vivacity of life that escapes all over the place and cannot be reined in by any word, sign or structure. He is interested in preserving a dimension of experience that remains linguistically mute and murky, beyond reach. Carr's narrative reach seems an infraction upon this bodily dimension of experience.

Schechtman's position seems closer to Carr's position – it is experience that has a holistic, narrative form. In fact, she argues that, apart from local articulation, narrative organization is always ongoing

implicitly. Such implicit narration is described as «*the psychological organization from which experience and actions are actually flowing*» (1996, 115): Schechtman argues that «experiences are more or less *automatically* organised according to a story logic». A sort of story-logic is already present before reflective work, and the reflective structure of consciousness in narrative form can be understood as evolutions or refinements of a more silent and pervasive mode of organization. But she also argues that in any case, the implicit narrative self-cocneption must be available to being told, whereas the ones that operate below consciousness are not properly part of one's narrative. Schechtman here then defines as belonging properly to one's narrative such elements that one can articulate and express: exactly what the articulation constraint is about then is the tie between articulation and self-integration. So, by definition the subject is in charge, as only those elements that are known properly influence narrative. With this last move, she seems to come closer to a notion of narrative developed by Ricoeur.

Through this overview of the most fundamental objections to narrative theses, emerges precisely the conceptual lines along which the issue of the realism or anti-realism of narrative theses intersects with matters of embodiment and more minimal notions of selfhood. This particular set of problems will emerge again later in the discussion. For now, I want to turn to the next instalment of Schechtman's theory, her 2014 *Staying alive*, where she develops her concept of practical identity and offer a reply to some of the objections just seen.

2.5. Staying alive

1. Reconsidering the practical

Schechtman's *Staying alive* (2014) takes off from where her *The constitution of selves* (1994) had ended. Schechtman is still interested in the question of, first, identifying the proper conceptual object of the analysis of persons; and second, to work out an appropriated understanding of their identity and persistence conditions. The analysis starts precisely from where she has left off: the proper focus of the question of personhood had been brought into focus by distinguishing and clarifying questions pertaining metaphysical identity and practical identity; and relying on everyday practical relation to establish which one is *the* relation of personal identity.

While in her previous work Schechtman had argued for distinguishing several meanings of identity, here instead she takes a different position. Yes, different practical demands each exact different considerations for our judgments; and as there is a multiplicity of practical relations one can look for, it seems difficult that there is only one, single relation of identity underlying all practical judgments about the identity of a person. But: this multiplicity seems to coexist with the fact that we also treat persons in one piece, as it were: persons may have different aspects, but we never separate them fully. Whenever we interact with persons, we may be interacting with them under several of such meanings, but we are always also interacting with *one* person. I had introduced this problem in the last chapter; and this is the conceptual scenario, then, in which Schechtman picks up the thread, and in which we had left our inquiry: a multiplicity of practical relations involved in judgments of practical identity; the impossibility to give a unitary account of the 'practical' person as individuated by such practical relations that seem to have different relata; and there being just one such object, the person.

In acknowledging that the previous position she held operated a somewhat forceful distinction between meanings of the concept persons and separated strands that stand together, Schechtman also comes to argue against the possibility to define a metaphysical concept of personal identity severed from practical concerns; that is, against the thesis of the independence of the practical. This is due to the fact that without a constitutive linkage, the metaphysical and the practical become only contingently related. If questions concerning practical identity do not matter in relation to questions of metaphysical, literal identity, then there is no obvious reason that these practical questions should be asked about *that* individual. The account of practical identity should be appropriately, constitutively linked to an account of metaphysical identity, less the two come apart (2014, 65ff).

Schechtman's goal is then to give an inherently practical conception of personal identity, where facts of *literal* identity are connected to practical considerations. Schechtman here adopts the usage of "literal identity" to indicate the logical structure of a person's numerical identity, that is, «the conditions under which there remains a unified locus of all such practical concerns». The logical

structure of numerical identity does not allow branching nor does it admit of degrees, but does not yet implicate anything regarding its metaphysical content. That is, she argues: let's for now use the notion of literal identity to see whether we can understand how practical concerns can all inhere to one entity and to its numerical identity. But let's *not yet* give a metaphysical content to this numerical identity. We can use the concept of literal identity to speak about numerical identity without committing ourselves yet to the idea that there is a metaphysical identity yet. The reasons for this move will become clear as we go on.

Schechtman starts her analysis by introducing a distinction in her analysis of the practical relations that concern personal identity: she distinguishes between being literally responsible of something and being truly responsible for it. This fairly basic distinction, she notes, had been obfuscated in reductionist accounts, where the limits of the person coincide with the limits of particular practical judgments: if person A has taken the action x, then A is responsible for x. There is no gap between being the person who did something, and actually being responsible for it in a more than material way. This she calls a *coincidence model* of the relation between personal identity and practical considerations, since on it identity and practical concerns coincide (Schechtman 2014, 41). In such a model, the identity of an individual person is made up of exactly the same relations we look to answer specific practical questions, and there is no separate relation of identity which defines a more basic unity about which practical questions are raised. The result is the such in accounts, it is impossible to distinguish the question "Did you do it?" from the question "Are you responsible?" The problem Schechtman individuates is precisely the incapacity to distinguish in these terms a question of basic attribution, that should individuate the *right* person to inquiry about, and strong practical relations that make that person *responsible* for it. One might very well be the right person to individuate in regard to a certain action and not be responsible at all. The basic question of attribution should be answered before the more nuanced one about full-blown attribution can profitably be raised: in the first place, she argues, we always have to look for the unit that is the suitable target of our practical concerns. Since the practical cocnerns she is considering here are still of the forensic kind, Schechtman calls this a forensic unit, or locus.

Schechtman argues that the existence of such a forensic unit is implied by our forensic practices, and their valuation of identity, to the point that they cannot be understood without such a concept: we are conceptually bound to accept that there is, first, a practical unit to which can be appropriately raised, which provides a unified target of our various practical questions and considerations but within which not all of the particular practical relations need apply simultaneously. The forensic unit then is a required precondition for coherently raising questions about moral responsibility and related concerns, and the question of the identity of the forensic locus is inherently bound to practical

concerns because it is a requirement that the unity of this locus be defined in terms of a relation that makes it an appropriate unit within which to raise particular kinds of questions. Such forensic unit is not tied to *specific* practical judgements, but to practical concerns at large. This model then furnishes a notion of personal identity that is inherently tied to practical concerns *without being automatically coincident with particular practical judgments*.

So, there are then at least two ways in which we can think of personal identity practically: one, that she calls the *forensic unit of practical concerns*, is «a suitable target about which particular forensic questions can be raised and judgments made». The other is the moral self, which is properly is given through the very actions and experiences for which the person is in fact held rightly accountable. The moral self thus concerns the true and fundamental moral nature of an entity. Being a basic locus and a moral self are two separate dimension of the practical: being a basic unit of practical concerns just means being the right kind of entity that can be questioned about an action, while it is the moral self that actually *bears* the moral responsibility for an action.

Once she has developed the structure of the relation between personal identity and practical considerations, Schechtman further explores the question of the practical considerations involved in personal identity. As has already begun to show, such practical considerations expand well beyond the forensic concerns that had informed the psychological stance in the neo-Lockean tradition, which she now considers too limited and too restrictive, yielding a partial image of personal identity. In fact, Schechtman insists that there is now a need to expand the understanding of practical concerns to embrace a wider nexus of practices and considerations, such as the full range of everyday behaviors that make up the lives of human persons. This evolution is suggested by reflection on the kind of practices that are involved in personal interactions, practices that are often not forensic but nonetheless proper of persons. Schechtman argues for an expansion of practical concerns tied to persons beyond the acknowledgement of rights and responsibilities, but includes all the relations of care and interest revolving about persons – so that being a person not only involves what someone is able to do, but also how one is treated and how should be treated, and not just as a moral or rational agent, but also a patient. The practical concerns of persons involve not just recognizing someone has having right and duties, but also non-forensic concerns: clothing, feeding, entertainment and many more activities occur and concur to the lives of persons. The inclusion of much fundamental and ubiquitous practices as these means that on the expanded view of the practical, personhood is extended to individuals that previously, on a more strictly forensic notion, would not have been included, such as infants or those with cognitive impairments. These are numerous and omnipresent in our life, and, if we are interested in providing an account of literal identity we should not limit ourselves to looking for an appropriate target of forensic concerns alone, but look instead for a target

of all of these myriad concerns and practice. Schechtman argues that is such a *basic* practical unit that is the literal identity.

2. Challenges of the Person Life View

Schechtman's analysis of the concept of person then yields a complex internal articulation. Metaphysical and practical identity can be distinguished in virtue of the different questions to which they answer, but cannot be divorced completely; and practical identity is further separated in the notion of a basic unit of practical concerns and that of a moral self. The moral self is individuated by the practical relationship that actually obtain; but there can be no moral self, no correct or incorrect attribution, without first individuating a basic unit to which such attribution can be made in the first place. The basic practical unit is then necessary for articulating the notion of moral self; and it has to be a practical unit to which is appropriate to raise such concerns in the first place. Now, this basic practical unit has to be conceptually tied to metaphysical identity if it has to have any real reference to one entity; is has be a basic unit of concerns that is also a *literal* unit, not a metaphorical one. Now, the definition of the problem so obtained by Schechtman is that persons should be seen as « individual loci of practical interaction to which the whole set of practical interests and concerns associated with personhood are appropriately directed» (2014, 7).

The immediate problem that such a definition of persons arises is this: How to define a single locus that is by its very nature an appropriate locus for the full range of practical concerns, when we have just argued that such concerns are multiple, and presumably all involve different conditions to be an appropriate target for the given concern? How to individuate the broader practical unit that is an appropriate target of *all* of our person-related practices and concerns? This challenge shows several facets, depending on what one is considering.

The first is the challenge of individual unity The challenge here is to explain how an *individual* person, defined as the appropriate target of the range of person-related practices and concerns, can be a *single* entity given that the appropriate loci of the various concerns and practices are defined in terms of different relations. This challenge has both a synchronic and diachronic dimension. On the synchronic dimension, the problem is, if different practical concerns can hold independently in different loci, then, each must have an independent relation that defines its appropriate target. On the diachronic dimension, the question is how an infant and the mature adult she becomes can be the same person, if the adult is an appropriate locus of particular practical concerns, while the infant is not? That is, why isn't a mature adult person actually a concatenation of several different loci, following one another through time, rather than a *single* locus?

In answering both the synchronic and diachronic challenges, Schechtman adopts the same strategy, although declined differently: she employs a kind of holism that allows to attribute characterises to wholes that do not apply to each of their parts. All such questions are of course strictly related; but I will not detail how she resolves the challenge of individual unity on the synchronic dimension, as this would carry us far away from our interests, but rather show how she resolves the tension on the diachronic dimension, that more immediately concerns the narrative theses.

3. The Person Life View

Now, with this evolution of the internal articulation of the practical concept of person, the narrative self-constitutive view that Schechtman had developed in her previous work as a criterion for individuating persons is no longer adequate to fill in the remodelled conceptual requirements.

In the first place, it presented a conflation of the two concepts Schechtman has just disentangled, that of the identity of the moral self and of the basic unit. In the second place, it appears now too limited to address the notion of personal identity born out of the extended considerations of practical concerns, as it was strictly forensic; as such, it did not recognize personhood to infants, and individual with severe cognitive impairments, who are now recognized to partake of practical considerations proper of persons. Schechtman argues that the concept of narrative self-constitution appears too problematic to be held on any longer: it is too exclusive and prone to misunderstanding (2014, 106). This prompts Schechtman to abandon the notion of narrative in defining persons, and to embrace instead the concept of *person life* itself as the adequate criterion through which persons can be individuated. The idea is that life developmental pattern can be used in individuating persons. In doing so Schechtman is holding fast to the intuition that had brought her to select narrative structure as the unity of the person. She recovers the central element of her previous approach, the notion of personal identity and personhood defined in a diachronic and holistic way in terms of the unfolding of their developmental structure. In her previous work, it was narrative that took this role, not just as a connection between different moments of the person, but also as a structural whole that gives unity to the events within it in virtue of the fact that they together instantiate that structure. The unity of a narrative comes from its characteristic, organized developmental structure: this is the insight Schechtman now expands, as she considers that it suits not just the notion of narrative, but to a number of other entities, such sonatas, sonnets – and life itself. What mattered of narratives, she argues, is not the story-like nature of life, but their shared structure: their integrity derives from the characteristic structure of their development, from an overall structure in which individual moments play a role, and take their distinctive meaning in relation to other moments and the underlying unity.

Consider a sonata, that has the same structure: every part is influenced by the others – if it is a difficult piece to play, then it will be so even if some passages, isolated, can be played easily; and the easy parts, interfacing with the difficult ones, acquire quite a different quality than if they were played on their own. The sonata on the whole can be difficult even if it has easier parts, precisely because it is the whole structure that influences the single parts, and there are attributes that apply to it as a whole which do not necessarily apply to each individual portion.

Schechtman applies these structural properties to life as well: if we understand life as one developing structure, we might see how the old person and the infant can be the same person as stages or elements of one single structure, the life-course of the person. The person might be defined by the unfolding of the pattern in which these stages (infancy, adulthood, illness) all play their part. And the person as a whole can be an appropriate target of practical judgments even if the infant and, say, the dementia patient she becomes are not: «The forensic nature of the mature adult is inherently linked to the events of infancy and decline by the structure of a person's life». Under this view, then, the person is defined «by the unfolding of the pattern in which these stages all play their part», and the unity of a person is not a narrative unity but the structural unity of a person's life.

If understood properly this move is perplexing, because it requires to argue that lives have typical forms, just like narratives and sonatas do (and we have seen how difficult it can be to establish what such forms are). But this is the point Schechtman is making, that person-lives have a *typical developmental structure* and persons are entities that live characteristic kinds of lives, person lives. While it is certainly a messier notion that the one we may have for artfactual objects like sonatas, person lives have a particular developmental structure, that of the standard life story; in any moment, one is at a given point of such development. A typical person is, at every moment in her life, something that was (or is) an infant and develop (or is expected to develop) in a certain way:

> persons are defined in terms of the characteristic lives they lead. To be a person is to live a "person life"; persons are individuated by individuating person lives; and the duration of a single person is determined by the duration of a single person life.

Schechtman is well aware that, since the notion of life is tied to that of an organism whose life it is, this definition is quite circular, if not paradoxical: shouldn't we first individuate the person? How can we move from a concept of person life to individuate the person whose life it is?

In fact, Schechtman has several challenges in front of her here. In the first place, to make plausible the idea that persons can be individuated by their lives. In the second place, to give a definition of such person life. Accordingly, Schechtman articulates her strategy in two steps.

4. The biological understanding of life

To understand how the concept of life might help individuate persons, Schechtman starts from biology, and a bit cheekily from the work of Eric Olson, *The Human Animal*. Here Olson conducts a biology-informed argument to argue precisely that «the identities of organisms should be defined in terms of their lives». Biological lives are then the starting point on which Schechtman models her own discussion of a person's life. This is useful because biological lives, as well, are described and individuated through their metabolic activities: the biological life of organisms is described as «a special kind of event, roughly the sum of the metabolic activities the organism's parts are caught up in» (2014, 140): so biological entities present the same problem that individuating persons do. How to defuse this circularity viciousness? The answer is given by Olson through an analogy: consider a storm:

> We can often tell, he says, whether the storm that hit Cuba yesterday and the storm that brought floods to Alabama today are the same storm or different ones; and our ability to know this doesn't involve any judgments about the persistence of material objects. We don't first need to find out whether the material object composed of all and only those particles caught up in the Cuban storm is the same as, or different from, the material object composed of those particles caught up in the Alabaman storm. There may not even be any such material objects. (Olson 1997, 139ff).

The point of importance here is that although a storm does involve material parts, the identity of the storm does not require that one is able to identify which material parts are involved beforehand: «All that is necessary is to be able to follow the series of activities that makes up an event of the appropriate kind» (1997, 140). Now, Schechtman (as well as Olson) thinks it is possible to transfer this argument on storm onto lives:

> Just as we can identify and re-identify a storm without any independent way to identify all and only the matter that is caught up in it, so we should be able to identify and reidentify a biological life without an independent way to identify all and only the material parts which must be caught up in it. (Schechtman 2014, 141)

This strategy then proceeds to individuate an organism by way of the kind of activities it is involved in: just as a storm, which has no independent object as its centre, can be individuated through its activities, we could individuate an organism by ways of its organic activity – its life. And, in the same manner, we should be able to individuate a person as well. Not, clearly, by individuating a substance: but by individuating a «salient locus of interactions» through its own activities, which may be internal but also external, of exchange with the environment. the idea is that «No organism can be defined only in relation to its internal processes, but their activities are within an environment [...]. Each kind

of living thing does have a set of characteristic behaviors and a characteristic role in the ecosystem as a whole, taking up some kinds of resources and providing others». (2014, 193)

The concept of life and personal life Schechtman argues for is a cluster concept: life is as a homeostatic property clusters. That is, there is not one criterion to determine whenever biological life has continued or stopped. Schechtman argues that the very structure of life indicates that there is no one given activity stopped which, life ends. Rather, if we look at the way biological life operates, we can see that there are more dimensions active: «the property of being alive [...] involves a cluster of characteristics – none of which is in itself necessary and sufficient for an organism to be alive, but all of which contribute to an organism's being alive and tend to reinforce one another in paradigm cases» (2014, 145). If this is so, then life continues under several different conditions, as long as the functioning of the organism is kept: death is «the irreversible cessation of functioning of the organism as a whole», but there are many ways in which an organism can continue to function, engaging in the activities: we all know just how flexible and adaptable organisms are, through compensation of sorts, artificial enhancements, and plenty of in-betweens. There is no *single* function that keeps something alive.

5. The life of a person

Schechtman thus has obtained a way to think a life can reasonably be taken to provide a means for individuating and re-identifying integrated loci of activities. At this point, it befalls on her to give some substance to the concept of a person life, and try to gather herself out of the circularity of defining the unity of a person in the terms of the unity of a person life. Schechtman thinks she can squeeze out of this circularity and show how innocuous it really is.

Her analysis starts with an account of what she means by person life, and how it is different from other kinds of lives. In order to offer a definition of what is a characteristic person-life, Schechtman takes into consideration paradigmatic, unproblematic cases and see how much deviation is possible before personhood and personal identity are undermined. Such paradigmatic cases of persons and personal life are given by enculturated humans in good health. A typical life, she argues, starts in social dependency, with the gradual development of cognitive capacities and enrichment of social interactions. This leads to a typical mature person being sentient, self-aware, having a self-narrative, and being a moral and rational agent; a person as was characterized already in the narrative self-constitution view. The standard trajectory of life also can include the dimming of agential and cognitive capacities, as well as physical ones, as life proceeds.

In defining personal life and its characteristic development, Schechtman shapes an understanding of personhood strongly determined by social concern and practices. She emphasizes that a proper social

environment is required, as the life of persons standardly also includes rich social relationships and a deep involvement in cultural and moral norms. The development of interpersonal relationship and dealing with the complex social world in all its aspect runs parallel to the development of the individual's cognitive and agentive development.

In fact, Schechtman individuates these elements as the components of that make up a person-life: first, there are the attributes of the individual, the physical and psychological capacities and internal structures. Second, there are the kinds of social activities and interactions that make up the individual's daily life. And third, the right social and cultural infrastructure of personhood is needed, as the «set of practices and Institutions that provides the backdrop within which the kinds of activities that make up the form of life of personhood become possible» (2014, 113). To truly understand a person life we need to look not only at interactions and practices, but at the stable background structures that host them and sets the parameter of interactions and supports personhood. Such infrastructure defines a person-space, and being brought into personhood is being accorded a place in a such a person-space:[27] «In the case of human persons, for instance, other humans play a particular prescribed role that is set by social and cultural institutions and not accorded on an individual basis*;* for example*,* human infants are automatically accorded a place in person-space, and so are caught up immediately (often even before birth) in the kinds of interactions and activities typical to persons at the beginning of their existence» (2014, 118).

The relation between the institutional space and individual capacities is of mutual constitution: the infrastructure is produced by individuals with that have the capacity to understand normative and practical concerns, but this very capacity can only be developed in in a within a social infrastructure, engaging in characteristic activities. There is a standard expectation that they will grow into full human persons, and so they are treated this way; such expectation is not arbitrary, nor based on simple similarity – but rather, «we do so because they are embodied like us and this has all kinds of implications for the sorts of interactions we can have with them» (2014, 124).

Indeed, these three dimensions are precisely the dimensions involved in an ongoing person-life. The cluster model that was shown for the life of organism, and that saw a deep interaction of internal biological activity and interaction with the external environment, is now translated into the typical form of life of persons. As the concept of life that Schechtman individuates is a «dynamic interaction

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[27] This cultural infrastructure is continuous with that of non-human animals, but, being mediated and transformed by cultural institutions, it is also sensibly different: «The kinds of things that constitute social/cultural infrastructure might include religious traditions, institutions of punishment, codified systems of governance, economies, educational institutions, technologies, systems of symbolic representation through which information and knowledge are transmitted, means of transportation, and developed practices concerning arts, entertainment, and leisure». In what follows, 'culture', 'social infrastrucure' and 'person-space' will be used more or less interchangeably.

between biological, psychological, and social functions and attributes», the identity of the person is given by the interactions of such dimensions:

> On the property cluster model the integrated functioning *is* the true nature of the relation that constitutes the conditions of our continuation to consider how these different types of continuity support one another and work together to sustain the integrated functioning of the person as a person.

Such capacities and systems are deeply intertwined in forming one kind of activity, personal activity. Schechtman offers here an in-depth discussion of how such intertwining works: how biological mechanism and activities «play in producing psychological capacities, but involves many different levels of interrelation» (2014, 148ff); the way our embodiment is inscribed and taken into account in in the institutions and practices that make up the person-space within which our lives are lived; and how our organic nature, from illness to sexuality, to mating rituals, our organic nature is deeply present: «Our psychological and social lives are thus infused everywhere with our biology». The influence is bi-directional, as well: our biological functioning has been shaped and is impacted by our social and cultural environments.

The thought experiments where these strands get artificially separated, as well as the real cases where they get accidentally separated, are all cases in which the other dimensions involved keep in some way working, compensating for the loss in ways that are perplexing, because anomalous. Such cases do not 'unmask' the one, pure criterion of personal identity – rather they highlight how they all function together, and enter in a crisis otherwise. There is not one single relation necessary and sufficient for person life to continue, but different combinations can sustain the integrated unit of interaction, its continued functioning. On this view, a person exists in the convergence of subjective and objective features: that is, infrastructure and interpersonal relationships can sustain the integrity of the person, even if, say, the psychological and physiological capacities and attitudes are missing. This also means that lives can continue in more or less robust manners, as it is a «critical mass» of the relation involved in personal identity that will determine that.

This cluster-functioning is particularly important in understanding how and why individuals that are not moral selves – infants, the particularly ill, and all such cases – are considered persons. Even if they have an «atypical developmental trajectory» (2014, 119ff), or have suffered the loss of psychological capacities, and do not exhibit the paradigmatic characteristics, they are afforded space in person-space, they are included into person lives and treated as such.[28] Here the interpersonal and

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[28] Schechtman invites us to think of the role that household pets in contrast to those humans with radically atypical developmental trajectory: only the latter can be viewed as "appropriate loci" of forensic concern as they are the kind of

background elements of the theory come back into play, in the outsourcing of narrative construction in regard of non-standard people live: Schechtman argues that in some cases there can be social and external narration, starting from «how the way is prepared to the infant, to how the elderly and ill are taken care of and their narration brought on by others».

The concept of socially supported or constituted narration, inspired by Lindemann Nelson work, allows to include into personal life individuals unable to shape their own identity narratively. Children offer a good example of this: we start weaving stories about them before they are born; and once they are, they are treated as persons that will possess forensic capacities precisely in order for them to possess this capacity. Usually one's own first-personal narrative is intersected with narratives by others, and this is what happens with children, that an individual comes to be a self-narrator in the ways the original version of the Narrative Self-Constitution View describes, and the first-personal experience this self-narration generates becomes a constitutive part of her life. Identity-constituting narration carried on by others, Schechtman argues, is not an exception: we all have pasts that go back to a time before we can remember and that what happened in that past is partially responsible for how things are for us now: «The life narrative with which someone operates does not begin with self-consciousness and end with its dissolution».

Such narratives interplay with first-personal ones; so first-personal narrative is not the only element of personal life, and personal life neither starts nor ends with it necessarily. Despite abandoning the notion of narrative to define personal identity, narratives still play an important role in this model. The development of the person as a moral and rational agent still takes place narratively, just as it was described in her previous work; the point is simply that this narrative self-constitution is not all there is to personal life. The other two dimensions, too, employ narrative notions of the person, and the three dimensions are mediate narratively.

Such considerations bring Schechtman's approach closer to a conventionalist result, and the ever-hanging threat of a too promiscuous concept of person. If an individual becomes a person just on the basis of being accorded a place in person-space, and if relevant identity-constituting narratives can be brought about and kept on by interpersonal effort, it seems as if we could make (or unmake) anyone or anything a person by adjusting our social institutions and/or our social efforts. She considers the streak of conventionalism adequately tempered by the fact that our social and cultural infrastructure is not simply something we choose or make up, but rather something that evolves with us and is responsive to and constrained by facts about us and about the world (in line with the kind of answers, then, we had seen in Chapter One concerning the risks of conventionalism). Whether or not someone

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entities whom it is typically appropriate to make these judgments; the basic expectations depending on them are different than those on a pet, and they take a very different place in the institutional infrastructure.

is accorded a place in person-space is not quite a matter of choice, but rather of responding to how things in the world are experienced. In the case of humans, the attitude to treat them as persons is not a choice, but rather an automatic consequence of cultural norms that are both automatic and acquired.

6. The literal identity of persons

It seems that Schechtman has obtained what she set out to do: The person-life view developed fulfils the requirements of a *dependence model* of the relation between personal identity and *all* relevant practical concerns, since it sees a relation of mutual dependence between the two (rather than an independence model as was before). To be a person on this view is to lead a person life and to occupy a place in person-space. A person life just is a life made up of the kinds of practical interactions peculiar to persons, and occupying a place in person-space just is to be a locus of the practical interests and concerns that apply to beings like us. An account of personal identity is conceptually dependent upon practical considerations because the relation which constitutes identity must by necessity be one which makes a person an intrinsically appropriate unit about which to raise particular practical questions. Practical concerns are dependent on facts about personal identity in the sense that identity must be in place before particular practical judgments can be appropriately made - identity is a *necessary* but not sufficient condition for these judgments.

There is only one step missing. What is left to argue is that PLV truly furnishes an answer to a question of *literal* identity. Schechtman had refrained from defining what she meant by literal identity, rather than metaphysical identity; this is because she sees that she is in something of a conundrum.

Now, if she frames the question of literal identity as a question of numerical identity, it seems to Schechtman that her person-life account will incur in the coincidence problem, the problem of too many thinkers: that is, if a literal account of personal identity must provide the conditions for the numerical identity of a *substance*, and human animals are substances; then persons are human animals, as there is no other way of making sense of two substances being materially coincident and yet not identical.

Why wouldn't Schechtman then argue for persons as kind of complex organisms, and a person-life just the organic life of a human? It seems the easiest way out. It is clear that personhood and human life are strictly intertwined: persons are generally associated with one body in their history; biological functions are not just casually connected in the production of psychological and social capacities and the form of our social and cultural infrastructure is deeply entwined with our embodiment.

Schechtman concedes that this is a viable path, but this would overshadow the encultured, socialized complexity of human behavior, that differentiates it radically, on her view, from that of other biological beings. She concedes also that the biological life that constitute an organism is a part of

what constitutes the person, and so there is in fact a «material overlap», but this cannot mean that being a person is an attribute of a more basic entity. This would mean that the person is an entity to which are attached a set of characteristics or capacities, while it has been presented here as locus of interaction, and as a locus it is not constrained within the life of a single organism. Like all living things, human persons are unified loci constituted by the activities that make up their characteristic lives; but the forensic capacities, and social interactions, that enter into personal identity, are part of one single, integrated whole that goes to modify importantly the nature of this locus.

Schechtman could, at this point, adopt a socio-ontological approach to the problem, such as Lynn Baker's constitution view: Baker's take on persons is that they have different relational properties from human animals; and thanks to them, persons are primary kinds of their own, having their own persistence conditions. The relation between persons and animals could then be described as one of constitution, making persons as constituted, but not identical to, by human animals.

This option is briefly examined, and indeed it seems there is at least some space for Schechtman's account to be fit into a constitutional account. But this socio-ontological approach does not convince Schechtman. On the one hand, she doesn't have the resources to bring it about, as she notes that her own account does not «offer a decisive change of state through which a person is brought into the world» (as, in Baker's view, happens with the strong first-person perspective). The way personhood is defined here does not offer an easy way out:

> The PLV version of the constitution model would say that a human animal is a substance that comes to constitute a different substance, a person, in virtue of the fact that it exists in the social and cultural infrastructure of person-space. This makes finding a separation between persons and human animals even more difficult on this view than on Bakers. (2014, 175)

The second problem that renders a constitution-like solution unavailable is that while Schechtman maintains the *interaction itself* as the focal point of her account of the persistence conditions of persons, Baker's chosen criterion, in the form of the strong first-person perspective, is in Schechtman's eyes as much essentialist as the animalist one: «this obscures the possibility of taking genuine unified loci to be conceived of as homeostatic property clusters» (2014, 197).

Schechtman prefers to articulate a different approach, and comes out of the coincidence problem by denying one of its premises, that is, that questions of literal identity are questions about numerical identity. She wants by this to drop the metaphysical load attached to numerical identity. The question of literal identity, instead, «should be interpreted as a question about the integrity of a unified locus which we can track and interact with as a single unit», and this does not have to end in substance metaphysics. The argument she develops hinges on the fact that, even if persons are not substances, there is still an ordinary sense in which statements about persons are either true or false, to which

answers must be given as matters of fact, not conventions. There is, in short, a very real sense in which persons exist, in an ordinary and practical way, and in the way just described, even if they are not metaphysical substances.

Schechtman then adopts an ontological framework that she thinks particularly friendly to animalists in order to show how even there can be room for questions of identity that are legitimately considered questions about the literal continuation of entities even though they are not about metaphysical substances as these theorists understand them. This is van Inwagen's metaphysical nihilism, which holds that there are no substances at all: objects are arrangement of particles. Under this view most objects are not substances, and neither are persons: «The ontological status of persons, in other words, can be seen to be the same as that of apples, wedding albums, shoes, chairs» (2014, 179). We need not stop using this ordinary way of speaking and understanding each other, but ordinary discourse is to be taken as paraphrasing claims about the arrangement of particles, rather than about substances. In short, a question on the literal identity can be asked of objects and things that are part of the world of world of everyday objects, even if such objects have no material coincidence with any other kind of substances. The meaning of the term is context-dependent: we can talk of apples even though, strictly speaking, apples do not exist, but there are arrangements of particles. Salience, interests and practice determine the way we carve up the world, so that we can ask questions that are truly about things in the world despite these things having nothing metaphysical behind them, so to speak.

Schechtman thus argues that persons exist literally, but they are neither identical to animals nor distinct substances: «they belong to a different mode of discourse» (2014, 180). Questions about the identities of everyday objects, including ourselves, are legitimate questions of *literal* identity:

> The idea this is meant to convey is that persons have integrity as unified entities that comes from their ability to play a particular role in the transactions of ordinary life, and that this does not depend upon any further or deeper principles of composition (although it does depend upon facts about the world). An apple is an object of everyday life because I can put it in my pocket to eat later, count it as one of the seven I need for a pie, trade it for your potato chips, and so on. Persons are objects of everyday life because they can interact with each other and with the environment in particular ways as a single unit. The unity of both the apple and the person are directly connected to facts about both the matter of which they are composed and the structure of their environments. If these facts were different in relevant ways they would no longer function as units. (2014, 195)

The coincidence problem is not completely avoided, as, of course, human animals (or organisms) seem to be part of everyday life just as much as any other ordinary object, and thus to once again coincide with persons. Even taking in account the context dependence of the meaning, still we talk of persons and human animals as if they both inhabited the everyday world – as they do. Schechtman ultimately has to deny that human animals figure literally in everyday life along persons. She argues

we primarily experience and engage with persons as persons, and only in a secondary, abstract manner, as 'animals', when we focus on a section of person, the purely biological functions. Since persons are practically prior, we should see the human animal as a particular perspective we take on ourselves and our lives, one that attends only to our purely biological functions. Human animals are a particular dimensions of persons, but not something in their own right; as all the dimensions of personhood, it cannot act as stand-alone entity or loci, and is better theorized as a «strategically limited» way to think about persons, which are the primary entity resulting from the interaction of all the systems in concert.

7. Discussion

Schechtman's approach presents several points of interest, starting from the analysis of the internal articulation of practical identity. By distinguishing the moral self and the person as the unit of basic concerns, Schechtman offers a further refinement of the notion of practical identity that allows to identify the basic unit as the notion of interest for practical concerns; and to draw a constitutive link between literal questions and practical questions of identity. This allows her to construct a dependence model of personal identity. Further, her account presents a notion of personal identity that, rather than simplifying it into a single criterion, embraces its complexity; and in order to offer a model of identity faithful to these dynamics, refuses to translate into a metaphysics of substance and structures it instead as a locus of activity. There is an inherent incompatibility in positioning the person as a locus of interaction within either an animalist or a socio-ontological solution of the kind proposed: there is no sensible way out to give ontological standing to the literal unit without deforming it, leading Schechtman to prefer the literal unit to a metaphysical and numerical one. But this solution has some consequences that are left unresolved. This can be seen by the way she relates her account to an animalist, biological criterion, and to a socio-ontological criterion in the style of Baker.

As she is very well aware of the narrow distance that separates her notion of person-life from the animalist notion of human life, Schechtman takes care not to resolves personal identity into the identity of the human animal. Her attempt to give an account of her own approach in nihilistic, animalist-friendly framework is meant to show precisely that her notion of personhood and personal identity does not capture the same notion as that of biological life. But it's not clear how successful she is in making an animalist position work with her theory, and whether she is not actually untying the knots she worked so hard to establish between an account of literal identity and practical concerns. The choice is justified insofar as she takes a merely biological continuity as a reductionist choice that ends in a metaphysics of substances, one that does not honour the specifically social element on the constitution of personal identity and personal life. The human animal is but a dimension of personal

identity, one that we have to make an effort to see, to abstract from the person. This leads to Schechtman excluding the notion of human animal from the world of everyday objects in which persons exist: where it would occupy the same space of the person. This leaves the concept of human organism or animal in an awkward position, expelled from the world of everyday metaphysics. This seems at least counterintuitive, as it seems true that we do have a concept of human animal in everyday metaphysics, as well. It is a risk Schechtman is willing to accept, as she takes that the interactions making up the person life are sufficient to distinguish it from other kinds of life, and ban the possibility to equate the human organism, in all its complexity, with the different qualitative complexity of person life.

Schechtman also avoids a socio-ontological solution in the style of Baker: it develops around the first-person perspective as *the* condition of personhood and personal identity, rather than highlighting the multidimensional, interactionist constitution of the person. But Baker's account does nonetheless manage to establish a continuity between her socio-ontological notion of person and the ontological status of the body, and give appropriate space between the notion of the embodied human animal and that of the person. On the other hand, Schechtman leaves a certain ambiguity to the role the social dimension play in her account of literal identity. It is stressed several time that the social dimension is important enough to distinguish person-life from the simply biological form of life. But it is not strong enough, it seems, to carry over the notion of person into a different ontological quality. This can be seen in the way Schechtman tries to fit her account within van Inwagen's metaphysics: she seems to downplay the result of complex social interactions, as she puts persons and apples together in an everyday metaphysics, without granting that the social interaction she has spent a great time describing might result in a different ontological quality. Persons and apples appear on the same plane, but it's not clear in what sense an apple, whose existence conditions do not depend on further levels of social interaction, has the same existence as a person, whose complicated existence conditions we have spent a lot of time unravelling. Yes, they are both unit of interactions; but what is the quality that allows Schechtman to further distinguish them? She doesn't have one, as she admits, since her notion of what brings about this change is given just in these terms, of the unit of interaction. The role the particular social quality that inheres personal interactions is left undetermined.

This can be seen also in the concept of literal identity Schechtman adopts. Despite the serious effort to give a *literal* identity of the practical unit, it seems that the literal unit is a literal unit only within a practical field, that of everyday reality and the way we speak and interact usually. But ultimately it is not reconnected organically or intrinsically to a metaphysical notion of numerical unit. In fact, as we have just seen, persons now exist in an order of discourse that is completely separated from the strictly metaphysical one. There is, at the end, a break in the way we perceive and organize the world, through

holistic structures, and the way the world is made. Schechtman's metaphysical card-shuffling thus does not fully succeed in giving a dependence model of personal identity – but rather, it seems, an independence model of it, in Koorsgard's style: the metaphysical issues are ultimately separated from the practical ones, and the metaphysical unity is irrelevant to the practical unit (cfr. Behlorad 2014).

2.6. Embodiment, narrative, and agency

1. The problem of the locus of interactions

I argue that these issues are caused by an under-specification of the way the unit of interactions that is the person is constituted, which in turn depends from the partial overriding of the concept of the moral self as a practical agent and its development within the new architecture of practical personal identity. The phenomenological focus of Schechtman, coupled with the programmatic loosening of the definition of the concept of person, obscures the relevance of the practical relation of the moral self to the other dimensions of personhood.

My point goes like this. In her account, Schechtman shifts the focus from the moral self, and questions on how to best attribute practical concerns, to the practical unit. The person-life view provides not the identity of the moral self, but the identity of the entity that is eligible to be a moral self. The identity of the moral self is subordinated to this more basic identity, and it is not clear in fact if it is even 'identity' anymore – rather, it is a dimension of what it means to be a person.

This conceptual moves takes place within the expansion of the range and quality of practical concerns to embrace not just forensic ones, but all personal concerns. In doing this, it becomes more clear that a concept of person based on practical relations should also include those that are not able to self-constitute through narrative means. In wanting to include these persons and enlarge the understanding of the practical concerns of persons, Schechtman is naturally moved to loosen the requirements concerning self-constitution carried on, in particular those that relied on active self-constitution through narration; it cannot play the pivotal role it did, because such persons are not moral agents, but moral *patients*. Of course, moral agents are moral patients as well; but these persons are moral patients only. Here in particular it emerges that persons are constituted partially also by extrinsic features, such as social interactions and the socio-cultural infrastructure As Schechtman shapes an understanding of personhood and personal identity strongly influenced by social concern and practices, and by cultural processes, both in their developmental phases, and as conditions of their persistence, the person's self-narrative is one of the dimensions of personal identity, but not the only one. So the conceptual role that narrative structures play is the formation of the moral self is passed on, in the formation of the person, to the structure of person-life, for which the term 'narrative' is now dropped, its analogical function exhausted. It is no longer the (implicit) narrative organization of experience that holds together the person through its various phases; rather, the notion of person-life now takes this function, structuring the person through its development. In fact narrative and agency take a step back together – the concept of narrative is demoted along with the centrality of the notion of person as narrative agent.

One consequence of this effort to widen the concept of person beyond the limitations of the narrative approach is that the notion of characteristic unity of a life might encounter issues of triviality: the notion might now be wide enough to encompass anything that befall human beings in the course of their lives. Narrative self-constitution might have been too exclusive, but it did furnish a criterion of constitution and of properly personal life, and so offered a criterion, faulty or not, in determining practical matters. It was a criterion that emphasized the agential dimensions of practical concerns, but the notion of person-life is programmatically made so that it might include practical concerns that might attain to a person that is not a moral self, such as children and individuals with cognitive impairments. As a consequence, the notion of personal identity and personhood that emerges is not very informative in regard to practical matters of personal identity. For example, as Schechtman argues, it cannot determine whether a foetus is or is not a person, since there are both social practices and socio-cultural infrastructures that concern the foetus and treat it as an integrated unit, and confer personal identity *in absentia* (Schechtman 2014, 106, n. 21). It is indeed a consequence to be expected from the re-evaluation of the role of the practical agent, the moral self, in the concept of person. The same consequences show up on the other end of life, as well: in fact, even dead persons occupy such a person-space, as persons do not exit from their person-space and from social narration the very moment they die, but keep being treated as persons, being involved in complex nets of social interactions and keeping the place in a social infrastructure that would make them persons. In the everyday metaphysics in which persons exist, dead persons are undistinguishable from live ones; if this is correct, then it seems that the person-life view does not give a satisfying metaphysics of ordinary life, as it cannot seem to distinguish between dead persons, and live ones (Bělohrad 2014, 11).

These issues arise from the fact that the person as a locus of interactions can continue existing as long as it keeps functioning as a single unit; and so there are cases where two dimensions of personal identity, the social interactions and the infrastructure of personal identity, can maintain a person into personal identity where *no* moral self is present, as in the case of abortion or the problematic cases at the end of life. Schechtman's argument is precisely that a cluster notion of person life allows to have a person when one of the strands is missing. But it is certainly curios to think of a locus of interactions where the *interactee* is absent: as the person is a locus of interactions, the lack of the moral self – the one doing the interaction with the other dimensions – might cripple the possibility of the whole interaction. This is precisely the reason why abortion and end of life cases are so controversial, because there is no one serving as the moral self (or rather, the point is exactly: is there a moral self?). Consider that the argument on the way we could identity an entity through the concept of its life pointed towards following the activities to individuate the entity. The idea was that a storm could be

identified and re-identified not through its material parts, that may not even be present, but through its storm-activities:

> Thinking that we need somehow to be able to identify the material object (the organism) independent of its life is a mistake. This can be seen by the relevantly similar case of the storm, in which there is no presumption that there *is* any independent object, and so identity conditions are clearly set by the activities themselves.

Ideally then we could also identify organisms on the basis of their activities, and persons as well. But such activities have to be present. We would not argue there is a storm going on if we didn't hear the wind, see the branches bending, hear the rumble, etc. The same should also be true for persons – that we cannot argue there is a person when there is no personal activity going on, as in the case of a foetus. Of course Schechtman is arguing that *there is* personal activity going on, and this is precisely the personal activity with which the foetus is treated: the preparing of the baby's room, the excitement growing, the selection of a name, etc. But is there actually anything like a *locus* of activity here, resulting from the interaction of physical, psychological, and social dimensions? The activity seems one-sided.

A different way this issue surfaces is in relation to the bodily dimensions of personal identity, where it also reveals a somewhat weak and unconvinced notion of embodiment. Throughout her work Schechtman insists on the embodied dimension of psychological structures and social interactions, and in fact, the «being embodied like us» plays an important role in mutual recognition and the interactions that take place in the person-space. Her account details how the embodied dimensions of the person are relevant to being recognized as a person, and how physiological as well as psychological capacities are engaged in the kind of activities that are proper of persons. She employs also remarks on how embodied attitudes towards other persons are «cultural and automatic». But this notion of socially constituted embodied attitudes is not cashed out ontologically. That is: despite the insistence on the embodied dimensions of the activities that constitute the locus of interactions, the bodily dimension of personal identity is still left in an ambiguous position.

The difficulty that Schechtman encounters in arguing for the concept of person-life is substantially different from that of the life of the human animal. The point can be made this way: if we take seriously the embodiment of personal attitudes, both individual and social, then we must concede that there is a human body behaving like a person and having embodied attitudes, that moral agency is not just a psychological attitude but one that is translated into embodied structures and relies on them. Then, there is a human organism that exists in the metaphysically sparse world of van Inwagen's, a human organism that behaves like a person and interacts with other human organisms that likewise behave like persons. This is clearly yet another variation of the duplication problem, and is due to the

fact that we have not a clear picture what kind of difference is effected in the constitution of a person rather than in the constitution of a human being.[29]

If we look back at Kim Atkins' work, presented in Chapter One, we can see the difference. Atkins' theoretical starting point is very much in the spirit of Schechtman, as she is arguing for a narrative conception of persons; she takes more or less the same reasoning of Schechtman concerning the way practical relations of identity define personal identity, and insists equally that such practical relations have a strong embodied dimension.

But her commitment on embodiment brings them to argue that the concept of a person resulting from practical consideration has to have a bodily dimension, because the body of the person is not just the medium of social attitudes, the carrier of psychological and social properties: it is thoroughly imbued with them and takes a constitutive role in bringing them about. In wanting to preserve the embodied dimension of practical identity, she argues that the best way to satisfy these commitments is think of persons as social entities, the numerical identity of which is partially determined by the practices that constitute them. As the body *is* part of this social concept of the person, bodily identity is required for a concept of practical identity. Through this approach, practical identity and metaphysical identity finally come to coincide in that of the person as a socially constituted and embodied entity. Now, Atkin's proposal is unsatisfactory to Schechtman insofar as she takes the first personal perspective as pivotal in the constitution of the person, and Schechtman's goal was that of defining the identity of the person as the ongoing locus of interactions of these dimensions. Nonetheless, as she takes the question of the embodiment of the moral self to be ontologically relevant, she also makes space for a notion of embodiment that is constitutive of personal activities in a way that the notion of being a person and that of having a (personal, cultural) body cannot be separated.

Schechtman is interested enough in the social dimensions of personhood and personal identity to recognize that it cannot be flattened over biological life; but still does not take Baker's way out, as she thinks the explicitly social-ontological solution implies an essentialism that would badly fit with her interactionist view of the person. The same essentialism is yet another reason to steer free of animalism. So the ontological status of the person ends up being neither here nor there, despite having good reasons to be more explicit on the socio-ontological constitution of the person or to fold and rely on an ontologically sound concept of human-animal-life. Schechtman's valuable formal progress on the notion of practical identity then seems to struggle to find an appropriate ontological framework within which to function, one that both preserves the embodied dimensions of personal identity as

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[29] For example, Schechtman prioritizes social functioning over bodily aspects, implying that they are not mutually constitutive: «The development of culture and of social infrastructure changes the character of a life so that social functioning takes on a special kind of significance and is more salient in many ways than the inner biochemical processes typically associated with organic life».

well as the socially constituted ones while outmanoeuvring essentialist animalist or socio-ontological essentialist positions. This appears a narrow passage to navigate.

Part of the difficulty is given, so I argue, in the somehow hazy manner in which the workings of the locus of interactions are left. As we have seen, Schechtman prefers not to characterize the way such a locus of interaction comes about. In a different passage, she argues that the interactions and entanglement between the different dimensions of personal identity, that produce the locus of interactions, are «mediate narratively», with the notion of narrative coming back to bear the load of structuring the inner workings of the unit of interaction.

With the decentralization of the notion of narrative, many of the objections that applied specifically to that element no longer hold. For example, Schechtman does not have to worry about an excessively reflective notion of personal identity, as the role that narrative self-reflection plays in the psychological constitution of the person is now less pivotal in the constitution of the person: it is not a subjective attitude that constitutes persons, but an interaction of both subjective and objective features. The exclusion of several individuals from the sphere of personhood that was tied to the excessively high and cognitive features of narrative self-constitution is also overcome through the concept of person-life, structurally analogous but far looser. But the shift of focus then from narrative concepts to the concept of person life has not taken us very far away from the concept of narrative: despite being dropped in its analogy, the concept of narrative is still shouldering a notable part of the concept of persons individuated by Schechtman. Schechtman disposes of the concept of narrative, but the operation is only half-successful. It is not just that now the account has lost some of its intuitive value, as had happened to psychologist theses when refined under conceptual pressure; and not just that it seems we are somehow exasperating a problem we had already had - wasn't difficult enough to say that sonatas (like narratives) have a typical, artfully-produced form and structure, without arguing that lives, as well, have typical structure?

But there is a further problem. In losing the word 'narrative' Schechtman also loses the conceptual tie that held together the practical concerns structure of the moral self, that of action and perception, and the larger concept of life-narrative in a single sweep. She does keep capitalizing on the practical import of narrative as structuring the psychological and phenomenological life of persons, where the notion of narrative keeps playing the role it had, but it is unfettered to the larger notion of the life of a person life. But what made narrative such a fitting concept to adopt was not just the way its structure is isomorphic to that of experience; it also implied the presence of an author, or someone at any rate conducting the narrative, steering their way through the events, articulating their actions, preferences and concerns. This is the reason why Carr did not limit his account to passive experiences that can be understood with the concept of melody, but adopted the concept of narrative for the agential quality

it carried over. Now the semantic network that united narrative identity to action and thus to practical identity is lost, and person-life and its narratively constituted dimensions hang loose. While the moral self is vindicated in its passive dimensions, this move also shadows the moral self as a narrative agent. The loss of focus on the agential continuity can be seen in the way we do not have a model of how the locus of interactions happens, and the narrative architecture connecting the various dimensions is not further articulated. Consequently, we lack an account how of the narratively mediated dimensions of the person cohere practically, and the basic unit of interactions seems in truth quite disbanded. If the structure of this transition are narrative, that is, becoming a moral self and acquainting with social structures that equally is narratively structured, how does this happen?

What seems to be missing is a model of how the person as a locus of interaction comes about in a way that differentiate it from biological life as locus of interactions. I argue that the resolution of these issues, and in particular of the status that the unit of interaction has, requires a better understanding of the way the interaction is brought about. Schechtman's phenomenological orientation, and the progressive shift from the notion of practical agent to that of a moral patient, pushes into the background the role that the structures of agency play in structuring the locus of interaction. What is missing is an account of how such activities reach the «added complexity» that would mark them as personal rather than just organic; that is, an account of how the social character of personal activities seeps into organic activity, and how deep, and how it alters them, so as to put an end to the metaphysical fence-sitting in which the account is stuck.

I suggest first we look back at the problems we had left unresolved when debating the relations of narratives and embodiment. This is the place where to look to understand in the first place what space there is for an embodiment of narratives, in a way that shapes the action and the phenomenology of action. This is an issue that if left unresolved is liable to hinder attempts to develop a notion of how the activities that have a personal, social quality come to be.

2. Narrative and embodiment

We had presented this problem as an issue of the position and relation of the minimal self to the person as narratively constituted. Now, this issue is usually resolved by way to distinguish between a basic form of consciousness, and a more complex kind (Gallagher, 2011; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012). Zahavi argues that exclusively narrative accounts of selfhood suffer from oversimplification, and proposes to use 'self' to refer to primitive self-referential consciousness, and 'person' for the narratively constructed self that is also engaged in a social, interactional dimension; roughly the same distinction that I made in Chapter One.

This move has, indeed, been taken up by some narrative theorists; what they failed to do, according to Zahavi, is acknowledge that this «primitive and foundational structure» can already be called a self, and that selfhood cannot be reduced to narration. An experiential self is a pre-linguistic presupposition of narrative practices, as having a first-person perspective precedes the capacity to articulate it; while it cannot be seen how narrative theories should be able to result into this, remarkably unstructured, first-personal giveness (Menary 2008; Zahavi 2014; Atkins 2008). The question of primacy can be resolved in favour of the minimal self, which can be recognized as the first, genetically and developmentally; the narrative self (the moral self, in Schechtman's new structuration) emerges out of it.

But once the question of the relationship between embodied and narrative dimensions arises, it cannot be quelled back by simply surrendering the genetic primacy over to minimal selfhood. In fact, the matter of their relationship is quick to come back once one gets interested in the way embodied and narrative selfhood interact, even if now emerges no longer as a matter of primacy but of dependency and interaction (Dings 2019). The point of interest does not concern only the way one's discursive self-conception affects one's body and thus, indirectly, contributes to its regulation and change (Mackenzie 2009, 117; Brandon 2016). Rather the point here is how and to what extent such an influence takes place. The question is whether the core, minimal self with which one starts out, endures as a dimension of selfhood that is purely experiential, non-discursive, etc.; or if does become permeated with narrativity:

> whether this first-personal character remains invariant through development, or whether it is necessarily changed and altered through language acquisition and socialization. [...] Is narrative selfhood a layer on top of a pre-existing structure, or does the former radically transform the latter, just as dye mixed with water leaves no water uncoloured? (Zahavi 2014, 5)

The issue concerns the kind of changes that can occur to the minimal self and to the bodily dimension, In particular, the interest is on whether the minimal self is affected by the acquisition of language and the process of socialization. It is not just the problem of priority and dependency that brings us here, but also the issue of the range and penetration of narrative selfhood, if any; the matter of the kind of narrative status such embodied experiences enjoy, if any; and the kind of transmission link that must in any case subsist between these two dimensions.

Here we can find two main positions. On the one hand, one might take the most straightforward way out, by translating the question of primacy directly into that of dependency: Zahavi argues (2014), that while the embodied self is independent, the narrative self is dependent – on it. So the minimal self can exist without the narrative self; but not the other way around, as the narrative self is then

dependent both for its development and maintenance on the embodied self. Even considering the profound influence culture and language have on bodily structures, and admitting that acquisition of linguistic and conceptual capacities fully and pervasively shapes our experience, Zahavi opts for distinguishing the content of narrative – the basic first-personal character of experience – from the mode or manner of presentation of experience. Dyed water, to remain with his analogy, is still water. Language acquisition cannot transform the structure of pre-reflective self-consciousness that is constitutive feature of phenomenal experience: the formality of the minimal notion of selfhood preserves it from being contaminated.

An evolutionary argument can be made in favour of the primacy, inalterability, and independency of the notion of minimal self: it is shared between persons with language, persons without language, and animals. If we were to abandon this common feature of existence that is the minimal awareness of consciousness, Zahavi argues, we would be left with an evolutionary gap between the animal, the child, and the adult person; there would no shared ground between proto-subjectivity and full-fledged subjectivity and then the connection between sentiency and animality would be severed, and with it any hope of developmental continuity. It would render impossible to connect these forms of subjectivity back together.

The consequence of this argument then is that bodily experiences possess both genetic primacy and autonomy over narrative elaborations. Experiential selfhood is not evolved nor touched by cognitive development and socialization: it is and remains a basic, requisite feature of experience, and interaction remains one-way only.

The claims that the continuist positions makes on the narrative-like quality of experience are translated into the notion, much less threatening, that embodied experiences constitute «*the pre-narrative fodder* for narratives» (Menary 2008, 70) or «ripe for narrative» (Hutto 2008, 66).

But this position seems to make too quick a job of several issues (Brandon 2016; Heersmink 2018; Køster, 2017). The first issue to consider is Anthony Rudd's objection that the minimal self conjured by phenomenologists is neither interesting nor relevant to the notion of personal identity. The minimal self that seems to him «an abstraction» (2012, 195): it actually lacks any *personal* features, much like the «monad pellets» that populate thought experiments. Due to the first-personal giveness of experience, our experiential life might be inherently individuated, but remains, however, a purely formal kind of individuation. As experiential selves are no further qualified, they are not enough to individuate persons or develop personhood. So, Rudd allows the conceptual necessity and developmental priority of the minimal self, as theorizing a more basic form of self does not really interfere with the work that narratives do in regard to selfhood; but he goes on to say call this notion «a purely abstract precondition for narrative selfhood», subordinate to narrative and relevant only for

infantile consciousness. It is a developmental phase, which develops into narrative selfhood and does not subsist alongside the narrative self (2012, 195). As the child grows, the character of experience takes on a narrative quality. The argument goes that the long process of socialization, the years soaking in symbolically and linguistically saturated environment, ultimately produce a kind of self-consciousness that is not that of the minimal self. There are not atomistically divided levels of consciousness, one more basic than the other, more primitive and ineradicable. This is how Mackenzie, who stands by these points, puts Zahavi's position:

> This [Zahavi's] position sharply distinguishes between two senses of self, one as an embodied experiencer of and actor in the world and the other as a narrator of those experiences and actions, as well as relevant motives, from a first-person point of view. (2014, 159)

And, she adds, it is precisely because embodied and narrative self are separated that primacy and dependency become issues at all. They wouldn't be present if one accepted that «Our lived bodily experiences are '*always already mediated via narrative self-interpretation», so that their relation is actually bi-directional:* narrative shapes embodied experience, experience shapes narrative» (Mackenzie 2014, 162; Brandon 2014). Under this approach, the issues would disappear: this is because on this position embodied and narrative self ultimately come to overlap, as the narrative self develops and progressively 'takes over', colonizes the experiential self; there is no possible reversal to this more primitive, basic form of consciousness unspoiled by narrative and language.

It is not difficult to see that such a position inches dangerously close to falling once again down the drain of over-cognitivism: insisting on the fact that no minimal, experiential self remains untouched by narrative tendrils is precisely what gives way to accuses of excessive cognitivism against narrative positions. Meyers clearly states that Mackenzie has «succumbed to the siren song of mentalization» and «illicitly assimilates elements of corporeal experience to the mental» (Meyers, 2014, 144), as once again, pre-conceptual, pre-linguistic bodily self-experiences are shrunk into the minded. Mackenzie seems to acknowledge this risk, as when Meyers questions whether «the mind's ratiocinative capabilities can translate lived bodily experience into a self-narrative», and the extent to which they should overlap», Mackenzie gives an ambivalent answer:

> 'yes', because qua agents we make sense of our embodiment through processes of narrative self-interpretation, but 'no', because there are dimensions of our embodiment that necessarily elude integration into the embodied first-person perspective (2014, 164)

What seems to emerge from this discussion is the notion of the unnarratibility of certain embodied dimensions, and the futility of the attempts that try and put it into a narrative form. Zahavi makes this point by speaking on the persistence and core primitiveness of the experiential self and the element

of unsayable depth that belongs to the non-discursive body: «Who I am isn't exclusively a question of how I understand myself and how this is expressed in the story I tell about myself. It is also a question of who I am quite independently of what I decide».

Such unnarratibility, it should be noted, goes beyond and even deeper that the notion of the minimal self: for all its primitiveness, the minimal self is a function of consciousness of some kind; but here there seems also to be reference to an unnarratable that is also the mere facticity of the individual existence. While such facticity can be conceptualized, it is not clear that it can ever assume narrative structure and be integrated in the narrative structure of the moral self. And, given that the narrative practical approach is, indeed, all about creation and self-constitution, perhaps we should not be surprised that narrative selfhood, with its self-interpretation and reflection, seems to lack the space for passivity, facticity, and bodily dimensions.

Schechtman's position in regard to this debate might be made out through her works: she argues that we *do* have a different character or quality of first-personal experience qua narrators than as non narrators (Schechtman 2011, 410), which would seem to put her closer to a position according to which the narrative self colonizes experiences completely. On the other hand, she also argues that the form of interaction between persons is not categorically different from that of non-human animals, but that a continuity can be traced between them. This at least hints a commitment to a form of continuity that seems better preserved by arguing that the minimal self does remain intact, as per Zahavi's evolutionary argument. It seems to me that we find here the same uncertainty that plagued the problem of how to position the basic unit of interaction. Atkins' position would seem to line better up with the complete overtake of the narrative self, that constitutes an embodied person which has ontological qualities different from that of the animal. On the other hand, the argument for the unalterability of the minimal self seems better adapt to an animalist position, where the personal qualities are taken to be just that, qualities, attaching to an animal body and a deeper unalterable form of consciousness. It seems then that we might have just better specified what are the conceptual stakes, but not made substantial progress.

3. A scalar concept of narrativity

But there is one thing that emerges from this debate, and it is the need for a more defined notion of embodiment and bodily dimensions. As things stand, the two options cannot even be mediated – even if one accepts or states that the minimal self is a conceptual necessary and necessary precursor to the narrative dimension, and if one accepts that it is unchangeable and primitive, then we have not made any progress, as precisely this primitiveness and unalterability isolate it. There is no touching it narratively. It is not perhaps even clear that such dimensions do pertain to the issue of personal

identity, narrative or otherwise; but nonetheless the underlying problem remains that of making space in narrative theories of self-constitution for a notion of embodiment that is neither downplayed into irrelevance nor cognitively overburdened. The notion of minima self and of the unnarratable dimensions of the body do define the lower-bound limits of narrative, but they do not help understand how narrative selfhood interacts with other embodied structures; and it also does not explain the various claims that narrative self-conceptions are prompted by embodied structures and experiences, which furnish the «pre-narrative fodder».

The need for a better transitional structure between minimal form of selfhood and more structured and narrative ones has been taken up by Allan Køster (2016). While the notion of selfhood he works with is quite different from the narrative one, his work focuses precisely on the extent and modality to which embodied selfhood can reach narrative organization. He recognizes that the notion of minimal self is hardly sufficient to work out a sense of concrete selfhood; but all the same he criticizes the rapidity and shallowness with which narrative theorists dismiss the level of minimal self as a theoretical or abstract prerequisite playing only a theoretical role, and move on to full-fledged narrative selfhood.

Køster articulates his approach to narrativity by using the position in narratology studies that we had seen initially: rather than seeing narrative as a binary, «narrative as something x (the self/a text, etc.) either is or is not», he takes a scalar approach, which allows a softer, more flexible approach to narrativity as a quality that a phenomenon may exhibit in different degrees and intensities». So narrative experience would be one where «the quality of narrativity is dominant in our experience of the phenomenon» (2016); the more relations between elements there are that we would quality as narrative, the more the experience is narrative. Under this position narrativity admits of degrees as a scalar predicate; an attribute of experience rather than constitutive element. Certainly Køster's account no longer allows a strong understanding of selfhood as constituted through narrative, as the narration is a secondary process, resting on selfhood rather than constituting it. Still, its approach usefully details an alternative solution to the relation of narrative and embodiment that furnish useful resources.

Køster argues that narrativity can found at different levels, intensity and degrees in embodied experiences. The first level is the unnarratable, that that cannot be captured, understood or communicated through narrative order: this is the case for emergent phenomena, as argued by Porter Abbott (2008, 228), since the causal transition that brings about the emergence of such phenomena is of the kind that cannot be understood narratively, as a meaningful process (2016, 233): «the functioning of the immune system, the movements of flocks of birds, certain neurological processes» are not narratable.

The second level is the narratable, within which enter embodied experiences that have no narrative order, but can be brought to narrative order through narration. These are then those experiences 'ripe' for narrativity, even though they are not yet narratively integrated. He thus adopts the narratable as the level of mediation between discursive norms and their embodiment. The narratable then takes on the «an ambiguous mediating position as that which does not yet exhibit narrative order, but may be eligible for being narrativised». They can be brought under narrative order because they can be contextualized in a way that is meaningful. In his example, a man who is overwhelmed by negative feelings after a break-up may come to understand his own reactions thanks a contextualization of his current experiences within his past history: his negative feelings attain a degree of meaningful integration as he recognizes, for example, that this reaction springs from a neglected childhood and ties with his insecurities.

Finally, there is the narrative, which he uses for embodied experiences where «narrativity is dominant and there is no longer any substantial disagreement as to whether it is appropriate to understand them as possessing a strong narrative order». The example here is taken from Mackenzie, that argues that a young woman's childhood experiences of being shunned and made fun of because of her weight «[infuse] her bodily style and her lived experience» in a way such that her own self-conception is that of a awkward person. Brandon (2014) similarly argues that a woman with poor self-esteem will behave in a shy manner, in the way her shoulders are lurched, her eyes downcast (2014, 77). Køster allows that these experiences possess a strong degree of narrativity, but not that they are themselves constituted by narrative form, as this would once again impose a too mentalistic understanding: bodily attitudes, habits, postures are forms of embodied experiences that can be «moulded or or *enact* specific discursive norms», such aesthetic ideals, but are not narrative per se.

This discussion started as a way to understand how the narrative structure (both of the moral self and the interpersonal interactivities) can be embodied. The concept of minimal self is neither narratively structured not available to narration; and it is not clear whether the kind of changes that narrative structures of self-reflection and interaction effect are of the kind that would permanently transform the minimal structures of consciousness and the embodied dimensions of the self. Once again, here we do not have a clear notion of what kind of changes narrative structuration should effect and how. Still, this discussion has helped work out several possible dimensions and interactions of body and narrative, by unearthing different strata of embodiment that are differently susceptible to narrative organization. The level of the narratable seem the one where to focus the efforts, but we have not a more precise notion of what makes something narratable. We are left with asking what is it that makes such actions and experiences «ripe for narrative».

This seems almost the same problem we looked at for the start of this discussion, only upside down: if at the start the question was, How can the narrative structure of self-constitution and interactions be embodied?, now we ask what is that makes embodied experiences the right kind to be told, to be narratable; they are not the same problem, but just a hair apart.

There is another thing we can take from Køster, and that was anticipated throughout the discussion: that the level we should look at is it in any case not that of passive experiences, but of experiences of action. Køster writes: «narrative is first and foremost the language of *actio*, whereas the dimension of *passio* always leaves a penetrating surplus of meaning that evades narrative configuration» (2016). That narrative and action share a meaningful connection is clear; both Carr and Ricoeur, as we have seen, characterized the dimension of action as the one that presents the narrative or proto-narrative quality. I have also argued that it is Schechtman's focus on passive experiences rather than agential ones that leaves into the darkness the modality with which the locus of interaction works. I suggest then that we bring now the analysis in the direction of action and in particular embodied action.

4. The framework for narrative action

The same issues that characterize the relation of minimal and narrative self are to be found reproduced in agency, as two senses of agency, a minimal sense and a narrative sense, can be distinguished (Gallagher 2012). The minimal sense of agency corresponds to the kind of agency that is proper of the minimal self – it is the phenomenological pre-reflective sense that one is the source of one's action, given through immediate experience. On the other hand, the narrative sense of agency captures the way goals, motivations, projects that correspond to one's narrative self-conceptions are phenomenologically felt as mine. It is a longer-term agency that is implied, one that has been attained through reflection and deliberation. Here the issues found when exploring the interaction of minimal and narrative self come up like this: how it is that narrative structures – which we use to formulate goals, define our social identities, and the like – can affect the minimal sense of agency? That is, how narrative structures our more immediate, embodied processes, how the narrative affects and shapes agency?

Here the lack of details on the notion of agency implied in narrative self-constitution emerges: it is not clear how narrative structures affect agential powers, how narrative shapes actions and the kind of activity that persons are involved in.

Now, a way out of this issue could be had by placing the underdeveloped notion of narrative agency within a well-understood framework of agency, such as the standard theory of action. By standard theory of action, I will indicate the paradigm, developed in analytic philosophy by philosophers such as), that describes an action as a movement which is intentional under some description (Davidson

1963). More precisely, a movement is an intentional action if it has a causal relation to a psychological event or state (a belief, an intention, a desire, a reason, etc.) with pertinent content. Fitting narrative agency into this framework would mean translating narrative self-conceptions and narrative goals as reasons for action; and detailing just how such reasons structure intentions and cause actions (Pacherie 2007, Bratman 1984, Gallagher 2012). This model seems good enough for at least part of narrative agency: the part where we do deliberate, reflect, evaluate or explain our actions in the context of our belief systems, intentions, plans, etcetera, as result of conscious decision-making processes.

But the standard theory of action seems to me particularly unfit to articulate better the notion and requirements of narrative agency, as they are in fact constructed on very different premises, and employing the intentionalist reading of action might in effect reproduce some of the problems that the very concept of narrative identity was trying to avoid.

To see this, consider some of the premises. In the first place, narrative agency is committed to the notion that actions belong to one person by belonging in their self-narrative: actions are linked to beliefs, desires, and mental states in general, but only insofar as these mental states belong to, and play a role in, the agent's self-narrative. That is, their role is mediated by the self-narrative. It is not the possession of a belief, a desire, etcetera, per se, that authenticates the action as belonging to one person; it is the way this belief, desire, figures in their narrative self-conception. Authoriality is described diachronically: this dimension of narrative agency conceptualizes actions as continuous with one's past and one's future, in a holistic way. As we have seen, the narrative answer to the problem of characterization is that actions might be properly attributed to an agent, be meaningful and truly belong to them as they are incorporated in the broader meaning of their life-projects or experiences; such an integration affects the phenomenological experience of the agent, who feels the actions as properly theirs. That is markedly absent in the standard theory of action (Mackenzie & Atkins 2008), where it is the aetiology of the action that distinguish it from involuntary or accidental movements: actions are 'internally sourced'. But this would not serve in making it belong to a story.

In the second place, when narrative agency is read through intentional framework, the intellectualist accuse deepens and worsens, as it would tie engaging in activities that match one's self conceptions to an excessive cognitive load. Certainly, the employment of such a model of agency is compatible with a notion of self-narratives as internal, propositional and skull-bound mental activities, that are translated into action as they have been characterized by some authors. This runs counter to the kind of description of narrative agency that can be taken from Schechtman's work, as one that is pervasive, employed automatically and spontaneously: indeed, the point is exactly that such agential personal attitudes are deployed automatically, without requiring some kind of implausible, time-exacting,

decision making. On the same line, the individualist ontology underlying intentionalist readings of action seems to run counter to the emphasis on the social dimensions of narrative agency. That is, it is difficult to see how starting from this concept of action we could structure the person as a locus of interaction. If anything, the concept of narrative agency that seems involved seems to be one strongly interpersonal and embedded within the environment, more in line with approaches to narrative theories that see them not as a discursive achievement, but as embedded in our social reality and present in and through objects and persons who co-authors them (Hyvärinen, Hatavara & Hydén 2013). Thus, the elements of the standard theory do not match the structure of action as understood in narrative agency, which in fact cannot be translated into such categories without infringing its inherent holism (Velleman 2009).

2.7. Conclusions

The path traced it here is not very straightforward. I started out by giving an account of Schechtman's The constitution of selves as a way to introduce the narrative position in the debate of personal identity. Then I placed her account within the continuity thesis, and took advantage of Carr and Ricoeur's works as a way to show how the continuity of action and narrative has been configured. I then presented some of the objections to narrative theories, in particular objections that concern the realism of narrative and the closely related objections that concern the supposed infringement of narrative thesis on embodied dimension. I further followed Schechtman's work in *Staying alive* as a way to present a narrative account that is plausibly tempered by claims on the social constitution of persons and a notion of narrative less cognitively demanding.

Still, I argued that Schechtman reaches unsatisfying conclusions on the metaphysical side of her account, and that the problem is that there is no clear notion of what and how do narrative takes over; how it happens; what sort of interactions they bring about that should be distinguished from biological life pure and simple. With the thought that the best way to enter this problem was to clear the ground on the relation of embodiment and narrative, that had already been problematized with the notion of unconscious, implicit, and micro-narratives, I presented the debate. This last debate, much like already the confront between Carr and Ricoeur, centres on the goes on whether there is a dimension of experience that is inherently narrative; or whether narratives are imposed forms. Finally, I introduced Koster's scalar account of narrativity as a way to think of narrative in a scalar way and thus, to visualize at least the kind of field we are looking for: the narratable.

I then argued that experiences of action, rather than passive experiences, should be on the focus of the narratable; and that, to this end, the notion of intentional action does not seem fit. In the next chapter, I will propose an alternative paradigm of action that may suit better the characteristics of the narrative approach, and offer a notion of action both embodied and narratable.

Chapter Three. Telling habits.

0. Introduction

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to revise the work done so far. In the first chapter, it was established that theories of personal identity underestimate the role that embodiment plays, especially in practical concerns. The practical understanding of personal identity, nonetheless, seems better suited to individuate the conditions and the workings of the concept of person. In this second chapter, we pursued the narrative approach to practical personal identity following the work of Marya Schechtman, posing it broadly as a form of the continuity thesis exemplified by David Carr and Paul Ricoeur. Schechtman furnishes a concept of person as a locus of practical interactions, the identity of which is constituted by the interactivities of each strand: it is the way the moral self enters into interpersonal interactions and is accorded a place in a person-space that makes a person out of a human animal. Schechtman ultimately declines to posit this interactionist concept of person either into an animalist ontology or into a socio-ontological account as neither seem able to accommodate its interactionist quality. The concept of person is left ontologically orphaned, but this need not be. I argue that by looking deeper into the way the locus of interactions works, its ontological standing can be cleared up; in particular by focussing on the way action and narrative interrelates. That is, the structures of agency are supposed to be narrative in this scheme and supposed to be carrying out the interactions through which persons come into being. But what is meant by structures of agency shaped narratively? Or that the interactions are carried out narratively? Since the locus of interactions in Schechtman's work is mediated narratively, I argued that in first place it was necessary to understand how in general embodiment and narrativity interact. The following discussion reveals that the unclear relation of embodiment and narrativity diverges into two positions: whether narrative selves are superimposed on minimal selves, all the down to the bodily dimension; or whether they cannot seep so deep, and the minimal forms of selfhood remain unaltered. I have showed afterwards the way this problem washes up in the notion of narrative agency, as well; and just in which ways is an intentionalist account of narrative actions unpromising.

Koster's scalar approach to narrativity has been introduced to ease somehow the binarism of the notion of narrativity so far employed and accommodate different kinds of narrativity, by which at least some of the difficulties can be untangled. It sits well with the account we have now of how different levels of embodiment may work in relation to narrative, and permits to articulate like this the question to the narrative agency: what is that makes an action narratable?

What is needed is then a notion of action that can fit within an interactionist notion of person, that might give suitable structure to what it means to act narratively or that interactions are narratively

mediated; it should be a notion of action that does not centre on the subject as an isolated individual, but as open to being moulded and shaped by interactions, in a way that has to be defined; it should be an ecological notion of action, as the person is precisely that locus that can be identified in relation to the particular interactions that keep with the social environment; it should give a notion of how the social environment can be shaped narratively, how concretely narratives are deployed or how they can be found in the social space; that emphasizes the diachronic dimension of action rather, and its correlation to an environment that is equally narratable in quality.

A notion of action of this kind can be found in the work of classic and contemporary pragmatism, and in particular in the notion of habitual action. I will argue this point on the basis of two elements.

First, the pragmatist framework is generally favourable to work not just with the concept of practical identity, but with the concept of practical identity developed by Schechtman. Pragmatist approaches give interactionist, and processualist, readings of philosophical matters, ontological and metaphysical in the first place. As pragmatism is an action-oriented framework, it is not surprising that it should give descriptions of life and individual entity in terms similar to those reached by Schechtman, as environmentally-distributed and relational constructs. In fact, Schechtman's definition of the person as the integrated locus of interactions is remarkably pragmatist in the way it abandons a substance concept and instead insists on the interactivities through which the person is constituted.[30]

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of pragmatism in helping here though is the way its exploration of human nature and social conduct never falters in keeping together both the natural dimension of humans, and the social quality that attains to their activities. Dewey calls this fundamental aspect of pragmatism, and indeed his whole philosophy, cultural naturalism (Dewey 1981). It is the concept that there is a continuity to be established between non-human and human forms of lives, and in this aspect it is naturalistic and evolutionary; but, also, that this continuity presents itself in emergent forms and emergent qualities. This is, for example, the social quality of interactions. These emergent qualities cannot be reduced to the lower mechanism that gives instance to them, but cannot either be thought of separately from it. The pragmatist image of the human being is that of an entity whose culture is so fundamentally inscribed in every form that it becomes second nature. The concept of second nature is precisely that of the human being naturalistic and historied together. The concept of habit, in particular, effects this mediation of what is natural and what is social, historical, cultural: habit is the result of natural impulses, physiological capacity, with history and natural environment. The concept of narrative so far has always been on an edge between a spontaneous form of self-

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[30] It is not surprising also considering the phenomenological tradition that underlies the continuity thesis, and its compatibility with the pragmatist notions of experience; see for example Rosenthal & Bourgeois 1983; Hills 2013; and the recent monograph number of the European Journal of *Pragmatism* and. American Philosophy (*XIV-2).*

organization and a notion that is imposed on the form of experience by social and cultural dimensions. Habit is both spontaneous and acquired, perfectly natural and heavily cultural, and this is the central tenet that makes a pragmatist framework an available resource to fill out the gaps left in this notion of person. Because habits are the hinge through which nature and culture condense.

This brings on the second point, that is, that very often the attempts that have been made to understand how narrative agency is displayed do point towards the notion of habit, dispositions, etcetera. They do so in the intentionalist framework and insomuch as they do they do not go to the length to which I will go here, but this indicates only that the connection I am about to make has been noted in different forms and manners before, and this is somehow encouraging. Recently for example Dings (2019) argues that we may understand the way in which narrative decisions come to affect embodiment by adopting the notion of «narrative self-programming»: drawing on the notion of self-programming developed by Marc Slors (2015), he argues that « narrative self-programming [...] consists of a conscious effort to establish an embodied responsiveness (or to alter an existing one). So our conscious, narrative deliberation is the structuring cause for many of our everyday interactions with the (social) environment». This proposal is explicitly intentionalist insofar as it is developed on a concept of self-programming that appeals to intentions (more precisely, distal intentions: cfr. Slors 2015, 96). But the intentional vocabulary, with its unwanted load of individualism and reasons, can be disposed of; clearly the concept that is at play here is that of developing a habit to do something, here rendered in «establish embodied responsiveness».

A different example is Wagner (2019) that as we will see adopts a pragmatist concept of habits in order to argue in the same manner that habits can be used to understand how narrative self-conceptions, as well as social narratives through which meanings and social dispositions are acquired, affect the embodiment of the person. So far I have sketched some reasons that lend plausibility to the pragmatism concept of habit. In the following sections, I will expound on these points in more concrete ways – in order to show how the habitual concept of action may fulfil many of the desiderata of narrative agency.

The first section of the chapter introduces the pragmatist, and especially Deweyan, concept of habits. It details how habits shape the interaction of organism and environment, and in particular it focusses on the transactional, social and embodied character of habits. This preliminary overview of habits is then completed in the second section, where the notion of habitual agency is examined and defended as a form of agency that is both responsible and responsive to reasons, even though it does not require a conceptually heavy machinery of intentions, beliefs and reasons. In particular, it is the diachronic, historical dimension of habitual agency that is underlined. The third section then shows how the characters of habitual agency fit within the narrative notion of agency. In particular, it is argued that

habits and narrative share a conceptual kinship that promotes their integration; and that habitual agency can concur in stabilizing and concretizing narrative self-conceptions, as well as in breeding new narratives. Finally, the fourth section employs this model of narrative and habitual agency to integrate Schechthman's account of the person.

3.1. Pragmatist habits

1. The concept of habit in pragmatist tradition

The concept of habit has a long, vivacious story in philosophical tradition (Barandiaran & DiPaolo 2014; Sparrow 2013, Ramírez-Vizcaya and Froese, 2019). Two general tendencies can be individuated in regard to habits. On the one hand, a «deflationary» concept of habit as a phenomenon of blind routine, automatic repetition and stimulus-response associations, such as can be found in the works of Kant, Nietzsche, Spinoza, Ryle and behaviourist psychology, for example. Here habits are disparaged as an obstacle to freedom, will, and reflection: they are something like acquired reflexes that mechanically click into action when the cue is given. They are seen as forms of automatic behavior that bring little intelligence to the table.

On the other hand, a concept of habits as forms of flexible, adaptive and intelligent behavior can be found in an organicist tradition, into which pragmatism's concept of habits plays a relevant role. Pragmatism's concept of habit develops an ecological approach to both cognitive and non-cognitive behavior, by prioritizing the notion of the living body as practically engaged with its natural and social environment. Habits are stable patterns of coordinated actions that structure the relation of organism and environment, covering the realm of context-sensitive, socially informed, intelligent and spontaneous activity that comprises most of our daily life, in action, perception and thought.

I will sketch out the concept following mostly the work of John Dewey and its more recent interpretations. In *Human nature and conduct* Dewey offers a comprehensive description of habits:

> Habits may be profitably compared to physiological functions, like breathing, digesting. The latter are, to be sure, involuntary, while habits are acquired. But [...] habits are like functions in many respects, and especially in requiring the cooperation of organism and environment. [...] We may borrow words from a context less technical than that of biology, and convey the same idea by saying that habits are arts. They involve skill of sensory and motor organs, cunning or craft, and objective materials. They assimilate objective energies, and eventuate in command of environment. [...] all habits are affections, that all have projectile power, and that a predisposition formed by a number of specific acts is an immensely more intimate and fundamental part of ourselves than are vague, general, conscious choices. All habits are demands for certain kinds of activity; and they constitute the self. In any intelligible sense of the word will, they are will. [...] The word habit may seem twisted somewhat from its customary use when employed as we have been using it. But we need a word to express that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity. (Dewey [1922] 1983, 17)

Dewey presents habits in relation to both physiological functions and to arts. Habits are like physiological functions in that they structure a relation to the environment using resources from the environment as well as from the organism: just like breathing is done between lungs and air, habits take place between the organism and the environment and organize their relation. The natural environment prompts and shapes the production of habits, insofar as the organism has to heed to its own needs within that environment; but the environment is not exclusively involved in the habituation process as a negative limit. Rather, the environment both constrains and structures habits, as habits exploit precisely the features of the environment in their creation and maintenance. Importantly, they also shape the environment: a certain degree of stability of the environment is then needed in order for a habit to develop, and such stability is brought by and through habits. A trivial example – if every day in order to go to my favourite cafè in the laziest way possible I cut across the park off the path, in a short time there will be a trail of trumped-on grass where I walk. This rudimentary path is as much part of my habit of shortcut my way to the coffee shop as it is my making sure I have enough money to buy coffee. The environment was already quite stable on its own, but in order for this particular coffee-needing organism to have its coffee, a new organization is reached between the organism and the environment. The permanence of the desire path is a function of my keeping going that way. The working of the habit keeps the environment stable, and in turn the stability of the environment fuels the habit. The same stability is both effected *by* me and reproduced *in* me. (If I'm attacked by geese while on my way to the cafè, the path will decay as I recover in the hospital). The environment is both used and incorporated in my habit, but also structures it: habits «are not adjustments *to* the environment, but adjustments *of* the environment" (Dewey 1983a, 38).

Unlike physiological functions, and like arts, habits are not involuntary, and are not innate: they are acquired. The manner of their acquisition is quite telling in regard to their nature. Habits are in the first place acquired through exposure to a social environment that is always shaped by individual and social habits, socially shared ways of conduct that developed out of the necessity to deal efficiently with the environment in relation to human needs. Such habits Dewey calls customs or traditions if they are sufficiently shared within a community and have reached some kind of stability; and institutions when they are explicitly formulated and have reached a greater degree of stability through time and space (1983*). These 'objective' habits are not, for the most part, explicitly taught: children pick them up from their caretakers and from their environment practically more than discursively. When one is born, one is exposed to such habitual ways of dealing with practical necessities from the start: from being named to being bathed, fed and handled in certain ways. The process of socialization is the process of acquisition of such social habits through exposure and involvement with the social group; it happens not (or not mainly) through explicit education, but through practical immersion,

continuous reinforcement and emendation, observation and correction that take place daily in a variety of way. Only a small part of the habits we have are born out of conscious acquisition: it is enough, and it is often the case, that one is initiated into certain habitual practices without having formed explicit intentions to join said practices or without having adopted policies or intentions to continue pursuing them. Most of the most fundamental habits we inherit from our social groups are not cognitively known, even when cognitive capacities have been developed, often because there is no need for them to be known like that. One does not question why things are done the way they are done (philosophers constitute an obnoxious exception). Through habituation, the child is introduced to a world that is immensely and minutely stratified; from potty-training and the use of cutlery to the correct choice of greeting, and much more complex things as language, moral values and virtues, symbol systems, cognitive biases, gender roles, crafts and arts, etcetera (Dewey 1984a: 334).[31]

From this brief introduction we can isolate some of the principal characters of Deweyan habits. In the first place, it is evident that Dewey's characterization of habits is programmatically broad, throughout all kinds and levels of activity: not just practical, but also perceptual and cognitive, overt and not. The kinds of habit one has will influence their openness or closeness to certain classes of perceptions, influence their sensitiveness and shape the organ of perceptions, selecting what kind of stimuli will get perceived and how (Dewey 1983, 123ff). Cognitive activities, as well, are structured through habits: they determine the way thought will go smoothly, what kind of cognitive processes will be available and more easily followed or will first pop up, the standards of reasonability and adequacy. Indeed, cognitive activity is built upon and made possible by habits, as habitual modes of thinking shape and offer the ground over which thinking and intelligence can be deployed: «Thinking is secreted in the interstices of habits» (LW 2, 335). This «inflationary» view of habits reflects Dewey's intent is to capture a class of behaviours and tendencies that, even when not overt, condition behavior actively. That is, these kinds of activity are all headed under the concept of habit because they all share the projective, propulsive power (Levine 2012, 266) – they are active in any moment of conduct, rather than needing to be stimulated into action. Their propulsive power is perhaps best evident in the way they shape embodiment and thus influence future conduct.[32]

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[31] Language as well is described as habitual by Dewey, as it is from practical, habitual meanings that linguistic ones are derived but not reduced to (Dewey 1981, chap. 5; Cuffari 2020; Steiner 2020; Di Paolo, Cuffari & De Jaegher 2018). Albeit this is an aspect that is obviously important to the problems at hand, I have chosen not to handle it as it would require building a stronger pragmatist framework to be decently arguable. I chose instead to focus more directly on habits of actions, that offer a clearer picture of a level of embodiment that is both practical and narratable.

[32] This also justifies Dewey's choice to avoid, instead, the use of the neighbouring concepts of attitude and disposition, for they suggest rather that habit is latent and potential, needing an external stimulus to be activated; which is not the case (Dewey 1983, 31–2).

2. Repetition and embodiment

Habits so defined are not mental entities, and are not required to be connected, preceded or contemporaneous with psychological states, planning, or some kind of explicit belief to go on. The acquisition of a habit requires not a deliberative process but a habituation process, that takes place concretely and temporally (Pollard 2006, 63; Douskos 2017, 1133).[33] They can, on the contrary, never been thought about. They work by altering the original bodily endowment of human beings by creating selective and preferential channels of action, perception, and thought. Repetition plays a key role here: «[h]abit is impossible without setting up a mechanism of action, physiologically engrained, which operates "spontaneously," automatically, whenever its cue is given» (Dewey 1983, 50). Both time and reiteration are needed in order to acquire a habit: each repetition leaves its trace in the physiology of the organism, bringing about the alteration of bodily structures. This can happen through the development of specific sensori-motor capacities and sensibilities, structuring perception, action and cognition (cfr. Menary 2014, 2018; Graybiel 2008; Roepstorff, Niewöhner & Beck 2010; Caruana & Testa 2020 for some of the vast literature on the topic). It is the physical body that contains the trace of the previous action that will render the successive action smoother and more natural; habits thus are culturally shaped tendencies to action that occur in the body and as such work actively on the historicality of the body: «The physical body, in both its material and its functional aspects, bears traces of previous actions: it *contains* its past in its movements and positions, so that its material structure represents a kind of cross-section of an historical existence» (Carlisle 2006, 28).

Repetition is not the *essence* of habits: habits are *general* ways to act, rather than specific acts. Habits are not routine sequences that take places every time at the same time; they are general modes of response, that will show up in more than one way. On the other hand, though, habits require repetition as a matter of conceptual necessity (Pollard 2006b; Douskos 2017; Carlisle 2014). This is due to the temporal character of habits. The structure of habits is intrinsically diachronic: habits are acquired through synchronic implementations that take place through time: so they take place synchronically, but are developed diachronically (Wagner & Northoff 2014). That is, there needs be more than one instance of an action for something like a habit to develop – in fact, the characteristics of habit we have seen are strictly tied to their temporal consistency:

> When an agent has repeated a behaviour in circumstances f in circumstance of type C, often enough for it to be automatic for her to f when she encounters C, we can say that she has the habit of f-ing in C. A habit, then, is this temporally extended pattern of an agent's responses to C. (Pollard 2003, 417)

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[33] Of course, habits are also developed intentionally, and initiating a habit may require an intentional effort. But the usefulness of habit hinges precisely on the dispensation of cognitive mediation they afford once they are developed.

> If S is in the habit of a-ing in c, S is likely to undertake a when circumstances c obtain. And we ascribe a habit only if the agent has already done the thing in question in a sufficient number of occasions in the past. Just as ascribing a habit of a-ing in c entails a claim about the agent's past record of a-ing, a habit of a-ing in c is only ascribed if one has been regularly a-ing in these circumstances. (Douskos 2017a, 1133)

Habitual behavior then is temporally thick, as the present slice of behavior is intrinsically a prosecution of what had gone in before, and also projects into further behavior in a continuous way. The single instant blends within the temporal horizon. This is why Dewey argues that behavior is serial or longitudinal: «Any observable piece of behavior is longitudinal because it has a history, notably in the forms of habits that embody past transactions and their values» (Dewey 1984b, 32ff). Individual actions take place in the wake of previous conduct, and «no act can be understood apart from the series to which it belongs» (Dewey 1984c, 221). The same may be expressed by referring to the cumulative force of habits, as the ordering of individual elements of action expresses a tendency and a direction:

> By prioritizing the principle of habit, and emphasizing accordingly the affectivity and plasticity of the individual, we regard actions not as discreet, and not merely as effects of the will, but as elements of a kind of continual training, so that each action is a reaction that stretches beyond itself to condition subsequent actions. (Carlisle 2006, 28)

Being habituated then allows for seriality of behavior, and thus the continuity of experience. The action I undertook yesterday as for the first time I walked across the grass to reach the coffee shop will not stand alone as a solitary rock in the middle of the desert. If I do the same thing tomorrow, both I and the park will be more ready for it. Past actions are shaping the way I will behave tomorrow, and the environment into which I will act. As habits are not action-specific, but general modes of response, it will influence my behavior in more than one occasion. It's not like the habit of disregarding rules acts as a mysterious internal or psychic force that motivates some other habits: the disregard for rules is shown *and* fostered exactly in this particular shortcutting. Vincent Colapietro expresses this concept by saying that:

> Agents transform themselves in the very process of acting. While not all action is directly transitive (i.e., an exertion which transforms some aspect of the world other than the agent), all action is immanent (an exertion which affects the dispositions of the agent). Thus, in the formation of habits, we discern one of the most important ways in which agents *transform* themselves. (1988, 158)

Interestingly, this transformation that agents effect on themselves through acting, relies importantly on the development of passive dimensions for the continuity of conduct. The change of states that habituation brings onto the organism has inseparable active and passive aspects (Ravaisson 2008, 37;

Pollard 2010; Testa 2017, 2023; Levine 2012) as «habituated agent is passive both in the sense that the habit is only exercised if the world is a certain way; and also in the sense that the way she responds is determined by actions over which she no longer has any control, namely actions in the past» (Pollard 2010, 78). That is, the more one develops habits, the more habits govern conduct and the less cognitive effort is required for their exercise in the right circumstances.

The development of the passive dimension of agency is correlated to their temporal character: the historical depth of the habit is an embodied depth; roughly then, the more the habit is embodied (and, as I will remark shortly, environmentally embedded), the smoother the course of action, the stronger the tendency and the less the awareness and the resistance. It becomes easier to act out of habit than not; the passive dimension has to be understood as the result of offloading the burden of deliberation, rather than as a form of ungovernability (the next section will explore this theme further).

3. The transactional and conservative character of habits

The bodily dimension of habit should not pass them up for bodily states, though. The environment is always required in the instantiation of a habit; and while habits mould the environment, they are also moulded by it. When the right circumstances within which my habit thrive are altered, the habit might fail. Habit then take place between organism and environment, or better yet, as a cooperation of organism and environment (Dewey 1983a, 15), both natural and social. Dewey prefers to adopt the notion of transaction, rather than interaction, to illustrate how both the social and natural environment participate in the constitution and maintenance of habits. An interaction takes place between two individual poles; but habits constitutes the very poles that they mediate. The individual organism has the structure it has because it is in a practical commerce with the natural and social environment; it is not the case that the individual exists independently from them, and then enters in an exchange with them. The individual organism just exists through the habits that allow it to navigate such environments. Equally the environment does not just constraint and prompt habit, but is also constituted by them. The embodiment of habits then should not conceal their transactionality: they are as much 'in' the body of the agent as they are in the (natural and social) environment, comprised of social actors and material objects. Habits are embodied, then, but also extended and embedded in the environment: they are distributed on both poles of the interaction constituting them, and irreducible to either of them (cfr. Testa 2017).

Habits produce and reproduce the environment through cultural and material artefacts, as well as social organization in the form of material infrastructure, objects, commodities. Objects or situations can become stimuli for the organism because of the historical dimension of its behavior (Dewey 1984b: 34). They furnish «landmarks» for action when the context is uncertain: the same stability that

allows to take things for granted comes into play in the definition of new, uncertain or unknown situations, where habits allow to define and decipher and interact. A new situation might thwart the effort of some habits, but other habits will anyway be in action – a totally new situation, one where we would not be able to rely on any of our habits, is a situation that is too disorienting to be navigated. It is thanks to their conservative character that habits then can be means to knowledge and convey meanings (although they are not meanings themselves: Määttäanen 2010): they allow retention of certain kinds of practical knowledge, so that it is possible to rely on their automatic processes and turn our attention to other, more sophisticated tasks. The objects with which we interact are objects we know habitually: they appear to us in their practical functions, and in their relations with the rest of the material and social environment; such objects are meaningful to us insofar as they are taken and employed precisely in such habitual conduct: do not appear to us isolated or abstractedly, as purely physical entities, but as connected with other objects, activities, and uses.

An object to which I have been exposed will elicit a given attitude and a given anticipation: in looking at a roll of toilet paper, I know it will get soggy if exposed to water, that I can use it to blow my nose, and that my roommate finally remembered to buy toilet paper; but I do not expect it to explode at all. My habitual dealings with toilet paper have not prepared me at all for this possibility, and toilet paper does not appear to me as a risky object to handle. There is no reflection involved in my judgement that this roll of toilet paper can be thrown about without exploding. Linguistic meanings and words represent a further objectification of the practical meaning that inheres to the object in my experience as a result of my past transactions I entered with it. The qualities that I attach to the object are qualities it exhibits in the practical transaction: they belong to the transaction, not to the object nor to the subject. And insofar as the practical, habitual meaning of the object is not something I made up for myself, but something I inherited in a social world, the meaning is shared and public (Dewey 1983). This cognitive economy that habits afford is what Dewey calls their «liberatory power»: they free energies from more basic activities and shoulder the most of what would otherwise require cognitive effort; and in doing so, they allow more sophisticated, complex activities to be brought about. This liberatory power of habits must not be confined to repetition of previous actions: habits are propulsive, active agencies and tendencies that shape our perception, thought and action thoroughly. As they transform and allow creative solutions based on the agent's history and their evolving circumstances, they manifest a creative flexibility. To the contrary, habits no longer growing or responding to the environment are «dead», «reified» (Dewey 1983, 51): they are reduced to mere repetition of past, and engage unsuccessful interactions with the environment. Such habits have decayed into routine: they have hardened into mechanical stimulus-response pairs so that the mechanism underlying habits overcomes their function of practical mediation of the environment.

The double character of habits in terms of conservation of previous tendencies and openness to new ones has then to be carefully handled. Habits are the «enormous flywheel of society», to use William James' expression, as they stabilize social interactions; but the hardening of habits to excess might smother the rising of new situations altogether, keep the individual and the society into their old tracks, preventing innovation.

4. The normativity of habits

Through the notion of bad and good habits we reach the topic of the normativity that can be ascribed to them. It should be clear from what said so far that habits are not wholly informed by reasoned purpose and deliberate choice; they function precisely rather on their absence, even though they are more or less amenable to them (more on this in the next paragraph). The intelligence and appropriateness of habits consists in their sensitivity «to assessments of what is appropriate and not appropriate given the situation» (Levine 2012, 263): that is, it is to be found within the very same logic that pervades and guides habit. An evaluation of habits is possible on the basis of the same need that generates them, that of accomplishing a successful transaction; the criterion is to be found not externally, but from within the situation that employs them, in the logic of the practice in which they are engaged. The normativity of habits is not then that of following a rule, as habits are not rule governed; they are rather governed by «a mastery of the logic or of the immanent necessity of the situation» (Levine 2012, 267), «a feel for the game» (Bourdieu 1990, 1). They respond to the situation, and can be judged on the basis of the practical handling and mastery they afford of the situation, rather than by internal norms or explicit rules. This mastery lays outside the conscious control of the agent – if anything, it lays even before it, structuring what the agent will perceive as right and wrong, and over which conscious control can intervene if needed to correct the appropriate response.

This is particularly relevant for social practices, as it shows as habits may correspond to social norms without requiring some cognitive machinery, but just referring to the logic of the practice they are following, which allows to meet the demands it makes on the person and respond accordingly, without need for an explicit rule or even an explicit education. They are organized following the practical constraints inherent to the social practice, as well as the organization of sensori-motor activities. Habits effect a synthesis of the embodied dimension with the social one: it is in habitual activity that one can see embodied social action. The point is then not that actions are social because they are result of cognitively acquired reasons social in nature that are then translated into bodily movements; but the bodily action itself is social, not as an ex post characteristic inherited by intentions, but because it carries its reasonableness within itself, in its own articulating the situation. Habitual action «is not

a response to an antecedent exercise of reason but a manifestation of it» (Levine 2012, 249). Habits cover a curious ground between reflexes, sub-personal bodily processes, and higher cognitive functions; they also offer a transition point between an embodied, unreflective dimension of action and one that is culturally informed, socially shaped. In other words, in habits nature and history meld: the biological dimension of activity gets transformed, but not elided, under the socio-historical influence of one's upbringing and conditions. Here we find the space for a notion of action that is thoroughly social:

> Action is social not only because our reasons for acting are social, or that our bodily movements are taken to be actions by other agents in deontic scorekeeping, but also because our bodily actions are informed by socially inculcated habits and skills. (Levine 2012, 266)

What is developed through practical exposure to rule-governed behavior is pre-reflective know-how that allows the action to adjust to and engage successfully with the varying circumstances.

This allows us to see the teleological character of habits: habits are goal-oriented, be such goals expressed or not (Brett 1981, 367), as habits are developed practically to engage successfully with the situation at hand. In this sense habits functions as means-ends structure; but the teleology implied is not a fixed teleology, that would imply that a given habit is coupled with one fixed end. Means and ends, for Dewey, form a continuum: the means one employs to reach a given goal actively shape the goal to reach; and the end that one attains constitutes not a static, final point, but a preparatory phase, indeed leading up to, a successive phase of action. Means and ends are functional distinctions that can be drawn practically, but «habits are not means to various ends that could be framed and defined independently of them» (Dewey 1983). The sense in which habits are means to action is not then to be understood in the sense that habits serve mechanistically to bring a result about; the very result one can envision depends on the habits available. The goals are established practically on the basis of the means at hand; and habits that are deployed and developed within a given practical situation, to a certain end, will themselves becomes goals of actions, done for their own sake. For example, Testa writes: « In this sense the recursive structure of practice and repetition makes it possible for a habit to be both cause and effect of its own enactment in the individual body and in its environment» (2020, 406), and Carlisle notes that habits are «curiously, at once a source and a result of action. [...] the phenomenon of habit testifies to the power of action not merely to produce an effect, but to generate and to form subsequent actions from the same source» (2006, 21). In acting, the short-end result of the action is not as important as the fact that the action can generate or strengthen certain habits, or destroy others: «Thus, by our actions we decide not only what we are going to do but also who we are going to be [...] our actions not only lead up to other actions which follow as their effects

but they also leave an enduring impress on the one who performs them, strengthening and weakening permanent tendencies to act» (Colapietro 1988, 13).

This self-reinforcing tendency applies not just to a single habit, but to the larger body of habits within which it is encapsulated. That is to say that habits do not take place singularly, but tend to come in clusters. Habits are more like longitudinal waves than fragmented, succeeding sections: they merge within one another. This happens not just on the temporal perspective, as one habit may be part of a whole sequence, and thus they merge continuously and smoothly into one another: I put my right sock on and then my left sock on and then I put my pants on, for example, and this is the way I usually get dressed in the morning, in this order. If nothing interrupts me, I can proceed onto the next item of clothing. In this sense habits merge comfortably into one another consequently. But they also merge synchronically, as when my habit of smoking allies with my habit of wandering around, and they reinforce one another. They cohere, for practical questions: I only have so much time and so much energy. This alone attains a coherence, a consistence of the body, albeit it is continuously varying as habits decay, blossom, fade away, and correspondingly circumstances vary.

5. Phenomenology and epistemology of habits

The phenomenology of habits that can be reconstructed on these bases is particular. There seems to be no precise sense of exercising or having a habit – which seems coherent with the passivity associated with habits and the liberatory power they exert. Less and less deliberation is needed until the habit takes control and no deliberation is needed at all; in cases where the habit was acquired unconsciously, there is no deliberation at any point. The agent becomes *less* aware of what they are doing the more they engaged in the habit: a «dulling effect» so that we stop noticing what we are most familiar with, and indeed, we tend to forget we have done things we have done out of habit (Carlisle 2006). Since habits come into being in order to ease activity and allow a use of cognitive powers for different tasks, it seems right that in acting habitually one takes little notice of being acting at all, as their minds are plausibly somewhere else entirely.

But this dulling is also accompanied by a renewed sensibility for what is out of the ordinary and interferes with the unthinking proceeding of the habit; it is associated to a new kind of heightened sensibility: «we become more sensitive to subtle differences in what we are engaging with and adjust to these differences, as the guitarist adjusts his hands to the shape of a new guitar» (Pollard 2010, 79). Habits' phenomenology then shows such characteristics: Habitual behavior effects the quality of the performance of conduct, insofar as it becomes more fluid or natural, eased and, usually but not necessarily, more efficient. Further, one acquires an awareness of some micro-qualities that would

not be accessible to our sensibility if our attention was focussed on the usual and the common. But at the same time the dominating feeling seems to be no feeling at all.

Habits also produce and afford a sense of familiarity and attachment on part of the agent in regard to the environments, objects and persons in which their habits are exercised. Through habits, after all, we «in-habit the world» (Dewey 1987, 109), so that the «The exercise of habits therefore becomes a source of comfort and brings with it a sense of belonging and a feeling of being 'at home'» (Pollard 2010, 79; cfr. Carlisle 2006, 24). This does not seem at odds with the notion of 'dullness': indeed the familiar is what is taken for granted to such an extent that we do not notice it, just as I don't take any notice of my feet or of the fact that I'm wearing a shirt.

And indeed at least in some cases it seems that if I did notice a sense of habit, it could ruin the performance:

> This change in the *way* the actions are performed does not seem adequately captured by saying merely that the intellect is not required. Rather we should say that the intellect is necessarily absent. This is illustrated when one starts to think about the movements involved in walking as one walks. Walking becomes difficult, hesitant and stilted. (Pollard 2010, 78)

On the other hand, it could be argued that familiarity and easeness present a more positive sense. The phenomenology habits exhibit is probably all the more difficult to pin down insofar as, as shown, habits cover a huge classes of activities and behaviors.[34] A more precise taxonomy of habits, that could individuate them on a continuum depending on the kind of elements involved, the timescales covered, the small or large level of description, could help solve this issue.

The weak phenomenological sense attached to habits seems to be reflected in their epistemology. It would seem sometimes we do not know the habits we have precisely because there seems to be no striking feeling of having a habit; which, coupled with the deep naturalness that our habits have for us, and how much they are taken for granted in the ordinary workings of life, accounts for the fact that the epistemology of habits is not one given primarily through the first-person perspective. Rather, interestingly, Pollard argues that habits have a «second-person authority» (2006b, 66): very often they are pointed out by other people, rather than being explicitly known by the subject. Obviously, it is possible to bring their habits to light and examine them. In principle, no habit is closed to the agent's own analysis. They can be acknowledged, and they are susceptible to normative judgment. At the same time, one can relate to one's habits engrained character not just, as with bad habits, by refusing

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[34] See for example Miyahara, Ransom & Gallagher (2020), who distinguish between two modes of habitual performance: flow, or mindless coping; and heedful performance, each of which presents different phenomenological forms; also Douskos (2018).

them: a habit can also be considered as a source of self-knowledge and be examined in self-reflection as showing a previously hidden side of one's character or history.

The weak phenomenological sense attached to habits matches their function: habits allow to dispense with attention. But while they may not produce a distinct phenomenological sense, they are importantly connected to emotions. This connection becomes particularly relevant to our inquiry when habits fail to work properly. Habits fail when the course of action is interrupted, and the agent is compelled to pay attention to the task that is usually dispatched by habitual means. The circumstances that provoke the breakdown of a habit may be varied: it can be due to a change in the environing conditions, or to changes in the individual organism. It is, in any case, a change that renders the habit inadequate to respond to the situation, which becomes «indeterminate» or «tensional» (Dewey, LW 12: 108) whether the situation be an old one or a new one. Such failures can be more or less far-reaching and extended in how much they bring into question the habit, depending on the habit they bring into question. Such crisis can be relatively contained and case-specific or more general and transversal.

Two elements of the crisis of habits interest us. The first is that the break-down of a habit is signalled by the emergence of an emotion: as I try to open the door and find resistance to my pulling, I may experience surprise, irritation, confusion or even amusement, depending on the circumstances. such crises are accompanied by emotional outbreaks, provoked precisely by the habits failing to function. The emotions correlated with habit failures both «manifests the habit crisis, and on the other elicits a revision of the habit itself» so that it plays a «plays a double role: revelatory, and introspective» (Canditto & Dreon 2021).

The introspection constitutes the second element of interest: the agent is forced to stop and reconsider how to best proceed. Such deliberation requires to individuate where the source of the failure, whether in the environment, in the habit itself, in the goals set, etc.; and to elaborate a different route. The re-orientation of action will in any case proceed thanks to habitual resources, as the choosing, reflecting, and decision are made on the basis of habits of thought as well of as habits of feelings; and, of course, one has to rely on habits of action actually available to them when pondering. The reflective phase that is required may compel more or less drastic or important changes, that can affect the environment, the goal of the action, or the beliefs of the agent. Desires, needs and interests are brought into play in both re-orienting the action and in testing out possible courses of actions, in a process that Dewey calls of «dramatic rehearsal».

6. Habits are the will

We are now in the position to see why Dewey argues that habits are the will: they provide the very materials through which agency can be deployed, that is, «the very make up of desire, intent, choice, disposition which gives an act its voluntary quality» (Dewey 1983a, 20). They allow the constitution of activities through which our everyday life is carried out in accordance to our commitments, interests, and constraints, in a way that is both automatic and informed. Will is characterized by Dewey, as noted above, not as a faculty that is exercised punctually through deliberate and conscious actions, but as a result or quality that characterizes action as habitual. Habits are the will because they enable action, predispose to control of self and environment, provide the operational capabilities to problems of coordination; they form a background of practical knowledge, an economy of forces and distributions. In this way, they allow people to divert their attention from how to do certain activities, and to focus on more sophisticated, higher-level or more creative activities. In some cases, they constitute real stepping stones to be taken for the acquisition of more complex skills. Habits thus provide two important axes of agency: «Habit's power as will is dual: as an enabling condition and as a source of agency» (Cuffari 2011, 537).

More than the single act that is effected consciously, more than the spoken words of what one would like to be or to do, better than the sometimes aspirational or delusional things we tell ourselves and each other, habits speak of one's stronger tendencies, one's effective dispositions – in short, one's character, as emerging from the interaction of one's habits. Were it not for the continuity and inter-connection of habits, Dewey suggests, the lives humans lead would be reduced to a loosely gathered bundle of activities. It is their habits that help agents achieve a degree of consistency and stability: «A sense of self comes from the unity and continuity of habits developed over time».

At the same time, habits capture the sense of emerging self that is both natural and social: the habituated body is not just the organic body. Shannon Sullivan writes: « A body is not so much a thing, as it is an act—an act made possible, to be sure, by the physicality of the organism performing it, but not identical or reducible to the organism's physicality» (2001, 29). The habituated body is the one shaped by social and cultural meanings, in transaction with the world. It cannot be cut off from its environment, material and cultural alike, because it is in a co-constitutive relationship with it, through physical objects as well as by cultural meanings.

Already from this introduction to the pragmatist concept of habits it can be gleaned the characters they show that can be usefully employed in narrative approaches to identity.

First, habits articulate a field where social and cultural meanings attain embodiment, and where, conversely, embodiment is socially and culturally constituted. Habits are not mere means of execution of one's discursively articulated and socially informed reasons; they themselves share in this rationality, manifest it and bring it forth in their execution. Habits effect an integration of bodily,

individual and social activity. Thus, as embodied forms of social action and cognition, habits locate precisely at the level which was missing in between narrative self-conceptions and embodiment.

Second, habits are ontologically interactive. Habits as an ontological phenomenon are stabilized patterns of activity; and they allow to individuate entities precisely starting from these interactions. It is interaction that plays a constitutive role in the constitution of individual and social entities (Testa 2020, 400) not the other way around. This kind of interactionist ontology, which proceeds with anti-individualist and anti-essentialist claims, seems well positioned to integrate Schechtman's account of the person, which had as one of its main problems the lack of an appropriate ontological vocabulary in which to insert the person as a locus of interactivities.

This brings us to the third point, that is, habits and narratives seem to cover much of the same ground: much of the claims that can be made with regard to narratives – that they allow social cognition, that they shape social interactions, that they form the cultural background from which personal identities are shaped – can equally found, of course in a quite different vocabulary, in habit theory.

These three points can be synthetized by remarking that the way habits constitute the person's *character* matches broadly the concept of characterization that structures the notion of practical identity. I argue that is not just a happy coincidence that the notion of moral self through the characterization question fills more or less the role Dewey gives to the habituated self; these affinities are hints to a more comprehensive, structural affinity that can be traced to the structure of habits and narrative.

There are certainly also dissimilarities to be found between narrative and habits; but this for later. I want now to continue arguing that the notion of habit has the conceptual capacity to fill in some of the gaps left by narrative self-conception and strengthen its ontological standing. In the last chapter, the problem of the missing ontology and uncertainty in Schechtman's model was identified in the lack of a concept of action capable to sustain it and develop it further. I suggest now that habitual action is a good fit to resolve some of the issues found. But before moving on, I will have to give a defence of the concept of habitual action itself. I will first complete the exposition of the concept of habit by way of defining them as a radial category. Once this is done, we will be in the position to analyse habitual agency.

7. Habit as a radial concept

One can begin to clarify in what sense habits are actions by distinguishing habitual behavior from other classes of behavior, such as reflexes, compulsions, nervous reactions, etc. with which they share some characters – especially, the character of automaticity. Some authors argue for a categorical distinction between such behaviours. I prefer to follow Lizardo's (2021) approach to habit as a radial

category (Tuggy, 2006), or a fuzzy concept: there will be instances or exemplars that will exhibit and share the most of the features of habits, and exemplars or members of the category that share only some of the characteristics, and are thus less exemplar or indicative. The general idea is that classes of behaviours can be more or less orbitally close or far from the central habit that exhibits the most paradigmatic characteristics. Understood like this, habits are not categorically different from the other classes of behavior mentioned, but rather such behaviours can share more or less strongly the core features of habit.

This seems more in line with the Deweyan approach to habits. Dewey's understanding of habit is programmatically ambiguous; and his distinction between good and bad habits is meant to precisely keep such behaviours under the same heading, despite showing different characteristics; for they exhibit different qualities, as adaptable or not, in relation to environment and situation rather than being good or bad on their own. In trying to isolate the characteristic of the agency afforded through habits, then, we will not meet perfect homogeneity but rather habitual behaviours that are more or less present given the notion one is considering.

Reflexes, for examples, seem to share the embodied and automatic character of habits and also take place through bodily structures. On the other hand, though, they are not acquired, as habits are. They are not sensitive to context, either, in the way habits are: sneezing may be a reflexive reaction I have to dust, and I will have it every time I come across dust no matter how untimely it might be (for example, while I'm trying to give a talk). We have no control over such reflexes, while we do have control over habits (what kind will be explored later on).[35]

Dispositions, just like reflexes, are not acquired, but are part of the endowment of the entity considered: physical dispositions, such as the disposition of glass to shatter or of a coiled spring to elasticity, rely on intrinsic properties of the entity, the glass or the spring, and they do not need any previous instance to come into being in order to be attributed to the object. The cause of the glass breaking is its dispositional property, but a habit is not the cause of the habitual behavior in the same cause-effect way (Carlisle 2004, Douskos 2017). Further, a habit needs to be exercised in order to be had, and so one can attribute a habit to an entity insofar as that entity has already exhibited the habit behavior, whereas «standard dispositions need not have been manifested by the sample in question, for those properties to be correctly attributed to that sample». This is exactly the contrary of habits as

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[35] Do they change in relation to their exercise, do they undergo modifications, increments and decrements with experience? Reflexes certainly can slow down both in punctual occasions and in a long lasting manner: ageing, accidents, substance abuse all are accompanied by a modification of reflexes. And it seems true that reflexes can be sharpened with training: a Olympic skeet shooter will be much more reactive than me in noticing the target. Is this a reflex, or part of a larger skill? Some other reflexes do not seem to change, as when the doctor brings a small hammer down the right place in your knee, your leg will shoot out. It seems in any case that we have no punctual control over such reflexes: I will grab the knife falling from the counter no matter how stupid doing so is.

we have seen that they do require a certain history in order to be attributed to the individual. The quasi-dispositional character of habits, while useful in understanding the naturalness of the way habits act, should not conceal the fact that it is the habit that causes the right disposition, not the other way around. They certainly do rely on causal processes at the embodied level, but such processes are the *result* of habit development, not the cause thereof.

Habits share similarities with other classes of behaviours we are familiar with – addictions and compulsions. Indeed, we often call addictions and compulsions bad habits, with which they share characteristics such as that of being repeated and automatic, and acquired. On the other hand, addictions and compulsions are not in the agent's control, and thus defy the agency of the agent, if anything: when one is addicted, one is not exactly at freedom to choose whether to indulge in their addiction or not. Rather, one is struggling for control, if anything. The fact that it's the agent's own choice that have led them to addiction is of little importance when the addiction kicks in; there is a physiological dependency that will not be altered: «Addictions, compulsions and phobias are all "conditions" that the agent "suffers", and their manifestations are accordingly not actions in any full sense» (Pollard). Compulsion as well are prompted by psychological elements that are not within the reach of the agent to change. Still, under a Deweyan understanding of habits, addictions and compulsions seem to better fit within the notion of reified habits.

Skills also share a lot with habits, and indeed they are sometimes run together in philosophy of action (Dalton, 2004). However, there are good conceptual and empirical reasons to keep them distinct (Douskos, 2017c). Notably, the ascription of skill and habits entail different things about action. Skills are a capacity one has; but having a skill does not entail that, in the right circumstances, the skill will be enacted unreflectively: «skill ascriptions, in contrast to dispositional habit ascriptions, usually speak of potential and not occurrent actions. When we ascribe a skill to an actor, we are simply saying that they can perform it, not that they regularly do so in response to the solicitations of a given context» (Douskos 2017a, 1136). Possessing a skill does not entail a habitual usage of this skill, nor does it entail a context and repetition. The conceptual tie between repetition and habit, story and habit, is not present (Douskos, 2017a). Obviously a skill can become a habit, and a habit can involve a skill, but it is not necessary. In fact, one can exercise a habit badly, in an unskilled manner: for example, I might never bother to learn how to properly latch the door and simply slam it close; I do it ungracefully but I have a habit of doing it.

3.2. Habitual agency

1. Habits and standard theory of action

So far, a Deweyan-inspired characterization of habits has been time and again connected to the notion of will, and to the kind of agency that they allow. But it cannot be denied that this characterization of habits as agentially relevant runs counter to much of the standard philosophical understanding of agency. Taking habits as a radial category that includes behaviours such as compulsions and addictions does us no favour in this respect, as these are behaviours that we do not associate with agency at all, but rather with failures of agency. Of course, such behaviours, as we have said, inhabit the periphery of the habit category; but the un-agential characters they present can be found, more or less intensely, in habits. Habitual conduct in general does not sit well with the standard concept of action, and in some cases seem to outright clash with some of the elements it requires; in particular, the cognitive elements that structure intentional action cover in habitual action a much less pivotal role. So the question is, is there anything like a habitual action, or is this a contradiction in terms?

If we make an initial characterization of habitual actions relying on the habit concept sketched before, a habitual action would be an action that has been and is repeated, so that the agent has a history of similar behaviours in similar contexts. It is automatic, it doesn't require deliberation to take place, and requires less effort and focus (Pollard 2003, Ferretti 2019). It is context-dependent, or passive, in the sense that the right circumstances have to obtain for the habit to kick in; these circumstances will often involve certain regularities of the environment or certain material artefacts, so that habitual action is often coupled to external circumstances. Habitual actions, further, can be done while executing more complex, difficult tasks. And, of course, habitual action has to be responsible: that is, something that the agent does, rather than something they suffer. This last feature is what would allow habits to be actions, something that the agent authors rather than something the agent suffers. It is precisely here that the problem lies, in establishing what kind of relationship exist between habits and the agent in terms of responsibility, control, in a way compatible with all the elements mentioned previously.

Now, why would habits be out of place in standard action theory? Well, the standard theory of action takes that intentional mental states precede and cause actions. A rational action is one where there is a suitable connection between intentions and reasons, so that the rationality of action is deeply intertwined with its intentionality. For example, both Elizabeth Anscombe's (1957) and Davidson's (1963) influential approaches to action theory characterize an intentional action as one that is done for reasons; and other accounts, such as Michael Bratman (1987), describe an intentional action as one that is preceded by an intention, and if the intention is rational, suitably related to reasons, the

action will be rational. Both approaches tie the rationality of actions to intentions, either directly or indirectly (cfr. Pollard 2003).

Habits on the other hand are not originated through mental states, nor do they seem to have a necessary connection to some kind of psychological states (a belief, intention, reason, desire, etc.) that precede them, nor are they mental entities. Nor is planning or some kind of belief necessary to their persistence; they may, indeed, never become the object of the consciousness of those who develop them. So they do not seem to be understandable as rational actions – if by that we mean an action that is done for reasons or caused by reasons. What is required is a certain process of habituation, not a deliberative process (Pollard 2006b, 67). It is true that habits may be originated or acquired voluntarily, but even habits that can be genetically traced back to deliberation still do not make reference to intentions in their deployment, once they have been developed – quite the opposite, as we have characterized them as automatic, indeed, precisely devoid of a deliberative moment. There are certain forms of habits, such as reflective or thinking habits, that would fall uncontroversially within the paradigm of action insofar as they involve intentions and other mental states on their own. But the problems easily represent themselves when we consider how habits behave in relation to such intentional actions of which they are part: for example, when the habit interferes with the larger intentional project of which they are part. Most habits at any rate are not acquired intentionally; some are acquired in the period of dependence that characterizes our infancy, and most others are picked up on the way to do other things. So habits lack the necessary ground for making them rational or intentional under the standard theory, and do not qualify as actions.[36]

But, factually speaking, it seems just wrong to say that what is done out of habit is done not intentionally, or that habits are irrational. To the contrary, from the account just given habits appear to play an important role in everyday life, and constitute an important part of what allows persons to live and thrive in complex environments. It is therefore important to try to understand in what sense habits are actions, and what kind of agency they allow, since they raise questions regarding control, attention, intentionality, and responsibility as they are usually defined under the standard theory of action (Ferretti 2019).

Now, habits seem to be connected to action in a double manner: *ex hypothesis*, habits are both a kind of action, and a kind of explanation of action (Lizardo 2021, 393). The two things seem strictly related: it is the characteristics that make a habit an action the same characteristics that make habits useful for explaining action. Curiously, this double role is present in the notion of intention, as well:

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[36] On a strictly pragmatist reading, intentions are structured by habits: it is habituation that endows the individual with the capacity for choice, selection, desire and means and ends that are the object and content of intentional actions; so habits result in intentions, rather than the other way around (cfr. Steiner 2020). As in the case of the habitual character of language, defending the position to this point would require too much space here and take away from the practical focus of the problem.

an intentional action is a kind of action, but intentions also appear in the explanation of action, usually in causal roles (Lizardo 2021, 394; Douskos 2017b). I will start by examining the relationship of habits and intentions in order to clear the ground.

2. Habits and intentions

One possible way to understanding habitual actions as actions is to hold fast to the standard theory of action and make space within its conceptual apparatus for habitual actions. The general idea is to save the given understanding of action as intentional and rational, and fit habitual actions within it; this can be done for example by tweaking the understanding of intentions, or loosening the requirements of doing something for a reason, just enough so that it may suit the kind of characteristics presented by habitual actions.

John Searle, for example, develops a distinction between a prior intention, the standard form of intention preceding action, and intention in action, a form of intentionality immanent to action (1983, 83ff; see also Bratman 1984 on present-directed intentions). Searle uses this notion to account for the intentionality of sudden actions (setting out to walk across a room while thinking) or subsidiary actions that are necessary to execute a prior intention (driving from home to work, e.g., requires a series of actions such as steering, changing gears, etc., that are sub-actions generated by the larger intentional action of going to work). Prior intention is directed to the future and has as its object action in the future; intention-in-action is contemporaneous with action, is generated by prior intention, and is a component of it. In this case, intentionality does not precede the action, but is contemporaneous: it subsists and develops along the development of the action itself, from which it is inseparable. Intention in action is caused by the prior intention, so that «by transitivity of intentional causation we can say that the prior intention causes both the intention in action and the movement, and, since this combination is simply the action, we can say that the prior intention causes the action» (Searle 1980, 61). As such, habitual action «inherits» the intentionality of the larger activity (cfr. Pollard 2006b).

Now, habitual behaviours performed as part of some larger intentional activity are compatible with the standard notion of action, but it doesn't seem that we have advanced our understanding of habitual action, as we already acknowledged that habitual actions done in service of intentional actions are less problematic. Here we have identified instances where habitual actions share enough elements with intentional actions to be subsumed under them, or to "follow fashion". Furthermore, Searlian intention in action still refers to a causal link between an intention as a mental state and an action, and distinguishes actions from non-actions in accordance to their aetiology. In fact, Searle's proposal on intention in action is limited to apply only to sudden or subordinate actions, which can certainly

be habitual, but might also not be; and conversely, not all habits are subordinated or sudden actions, as they might be carried out slowly, carefully, etc.

An alternative solution, much in the same vein, is to argue that habitual actions are intentional, but such intentions, or the reasons for the intention, are unconscious: they have become unconscious through habituation. The idea is the intention that originally guided my habitual action has simply become unconscious as result of habituation, and so it can no longer be detected: the unconscious intention is modelled on the conscious process of deliberation that took place at some time. This strategy is shaky, though, as strategies involving unconscious elements often are. It requires to postulate unconscious intentions, introducing further conceptual apparatus to the notion of habit that seem to fly in the face of the fact that habits are acquired without prior planning or without even acknowledging them. It also denies that habitual actions have any particular character: it describes them as «little more than actions which the agent happens to have done before» (Pollard 2010, 75), thus obscuring their particularity.[37]

3. Habits and reasons

Now, the failure of these two solution should not be too surprising: the standard theory of action is a rational, deliberative-centred model, and insofar as intentionality is modelled on deliberative processes, and intentions are taken to precede action, habits have little chance to make it off the ground as intentional actions: they simply do not have the right characteristics. The result of such considerations is that many theorists have attempted to get to an understanding of intentions and intentional action that does not privilege explicit deliberation or does not require that reasons be conceptually prior before the action. This has been done by theorizing a kind of intentionality that is not, in the first place, a property of mental states, but rather of «bodily, behavioural or organismic states» (Steiner 2020, 229), as targeting or being directed at something.[38] The kind of intentionality that fits habitual action should not restrict agency to mental states and be closely knit within the rooted in and embedded in bodily habits, rather than seeing these habits as expressions of prior intentionality. This approach doesn't just 'adjust' the notion of intention or reason the bare minimum necessary to make sense of habits, but recognizes that the current notion of intention and reason is too intellectualist altogether; as is what Pollard (2006a) calls the consciousness restriction, the notion that «the agent must have a conception of what is good about an action at the time of acting».

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[37] The postulation of unconscious intentions also causes problems for the standard theory of action in other cases, for example in the resolution of the classical problem of deviant causal chains (cfr. Ometto 2016): there is no way to understand an accident from an intentional actions, since we could always suggest that the accident was caused by unconscious intentions.

[38] There are other kinds of intentionality that go beyond the standard conceptual paradigm: cfr. Steiner 2020 for an overview.

Pollard follows this way by conceiving of the way reasons and actions are connected not as identifying the elements that prompted the action and judging their rationality – but as «a process of creatively *constructing* an account of how the agent's action in its immediate worldly context coheres with her overall world-view, motivations, projects and so on» (2006, 424): habits can be connected to reasons *ex post facto*:

> we can distinguish between two senses of rationalization: (a) a process of *reconstructing* prior workings, which were present, though perhaps only subconsciously, to the agent at the time of acting; and (b) as a process of creatively *constructing* an account of how the agent's action in its immediate worldly context coheres with her overall world-view, motivations, projects and so on. In other words, rationalization is the process of coming to see the action as part of what it is to be *that* rational agent. (Pollard 2006, 424)

The action is rationalized, in the latter sense, by adducing reasons that do not need to be in place beforehand: the rationality here is not to be understood as the content of (possibly unconscious) deliberation, but as what the agent would have chosen had she deliberated, and this is shown in the agent' s capacity to give reasons for her action, were she required to (Pollard 2003, 424). There is no need, either, to refer to psychological items or unconscious content. Clearly not all habitual actions would qualify as rational in this sense: some habits do not have reasons at all, such as nail-biting. As Pollard in this particular instance is interested in making sure virtuous actions can be both rational and habitual, his goal is far stricter than that of making sense of all habits.

Ometto and Kalis (2018) also offer a variation of this strategy. As they begin from an Anscombean understanding of action, where the action is intentional if the agent knows what they are doing and why, they work on the relation of reasons to habitual action rather than on intentionality, but the insight is the same: they propose a different understanding of what is meant by acting for reasons so as to give a different understanding of the intentionality involved in habitual actions. Drawing on the work of Elizabeth Anscombe (1957), they argue that acting for reasons does not perforce commit one to have reasons already in place before the action took place. The idea is that agents acting habitually have their reasons «before their minds», and this can be tested out through the why-question, or the «Anscombean question» (Railton 2009): *why are you doing X*? The mark of intentionality is the agent's ability or possibility to give their reasons for doing something as they are doing it. When this question is posed, it shows that agent has an answer - they know why they are doing something - but the answer to this question is not a preceding internal process. The answer reveals *the practical knowledge* that the agent has of their current action. This practical knowledge is the expression of the goal-directed, means-ends structure of the action undertaken: the agent manages to position herself and her action within a chain of reasons, means and ends. This practical knowledge needs not be punctually present in the agent's mind, but to be present throughout the agent's performance of her

action. Practical reasoning is the other face of the coin of practical knowledge: it is knowledge of the means-ends relation of the ongoing actin that allow one to be doing something in order to do something else. So, intentional action is a behavior that that makes sense to the agent as her action.

As only the agent can give such reasons, what an agent can truly be said to be doing intentionally will depend on what the agent understand herself to be doing: the point of view of the agent, under this perspective, is constitutive of the intentionality of the action. It is necessary then that the agent knows what she is doing, in the very minimum sense that they are not *surprised* in finding themselves doing that particular thing; and that she is able to give a first-personal account of what she is doing. In so far as agents have practical knowledge of the goal-directed structure of their habitual behaviour, such behaviour can be both seen as intentional and as 'done for reasons'.

This proposal goes much in the direction of Pollard's solution insofar as Ometto and Kalis, too, loosen the requirements of reasons in order to accommodate habitual actions within intentional actions, that is, actions done for reasons. Ometto and Kalis' proposal captures more habits than Pollard's insofar as explaining the means-end structure of one's habit need not appeal to reasons in the sense specified by Pollard, but otherwise their approaches are kindred in spirit: «Specifically, it is to say that such behaviours have a certain teleological structure – they have a point, purpose or goal. In the above examples, these would be that one's nail are bitten [...]» (Pollard 2006b, 67).

4. Responsibility through control

These accounts can be completed with a matching notion of how one is responsible for actions for which reasons can be adduced only later. A suitable option is offered in the form of intervention control, as argued briefly by Pollard (2003) and more extensively by Di Nucci (2011)[39] by drawing on the concept of guidance developed by Frankfurt (1978) to understand how automatic structures can be monitored and become an object of intervention:

> A driver whose automobile is coasting downhill in virtue of gravitational forces alone might be satisfied with its speed and direction, and so he might never intervene to adjust its movement in any way. This would not show that the movement of the automobile did not occur under his guidance. What counts is that he was prepared to intervene if necessary, and that he was in a position to do so more or less effectively. (1978, 160)

Using guidance as discriminatory, Frankfurt describes an action as a movement that is under the agent's guidance[40]: the agent could, as a counterfactual possibility, correct it if they wanted. The

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[39] They are not alone in taking interest in this notion of control; for a review of the so-called Guidance Theory of Action see Asma (2021).

[40] Frankfurt makes a distinction between intentional movements and intentional actions. An action is an intentional movement, that is, a movement under the guidance of the subject as it happens. An intentional action is an action (i.e., an

difference between action and non-action is thus found not in the causal-intentional aetiology of the movement, but, rather, in the way the agent is related or in contact with his own movements.

These elements furnish the right conceptual apparatus to see how habits might be actions. A movement is thus an action if it is under the agent's guidance, and it is under the agent's guidance if the agent can, if they deem it necessary, correct it or control it differently from the way they passively control it. The descent of the car is not out of his control, even if it is a passive action. The difference between action and non-action is then not to be found in the causal-intentional origin of the action; the difference lies in how the agent is in contact with the movements during action and non-action, whether they are under the agent's guidance at the very moment they happen. Compensatory, adjusting movements do not have to be actualized; it is enough that there is the possibility for the agent to make them. It is the possibility of making these movements, not the origin of the action, that determines whether the movement is an action. Rather than having a deliberative moment from which the rationality and the responsibility of the action follow, the kind of control and thus responsibility at play here would be one tied to the capacity to intervene; it is an indirect, passive kind of control that is exercised punctually. Intervention control still requires deliberation, as we deliberate to intervene, and thus is not habitual per se.

Now, there are classes of habitual behaviours that do not make it as actions even under this de-intellectualized notion of agency. They cannot be connected to reason in the way shown, and they cannot be controlled counterfactually. These are habits that escape our notice as they are too small, so to speak: the kind of posture one adopts, the way one has to walk, or to play a game, for example; and all such minuscule behaviours that take care of the most basic, and most unnoticed, copings. For such habits, the proposal to offer reasons ex post facto, or that this is what the agent would have done if they had thought about it, is either inapplicable or false. Think of the man throwing the ball in a baseball game. It's almost certain that if he consciously thinks of throwing the ball, he will throw it very badly. It is the particularity of habits that they allow a kind of action that is not the same one would have done if one had thought about it. By definition I would have done such things much worse if I had done them consciously, and in some cases if I had thought of them, I would never have managed to do these things at all (Dreyfus 2002, 379).[41] Such habits are necessary for dealing with the natural and social environment, but do not seem to have any kind of intentionality, intrinsic or otherwise, and are hardly available to rationalization. Nonetheless, such habits do appear to belong just as much as other habits in composing what one's 'direction of life' is, as they affect and regulate

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intentional movement) that fulfils some prior intention, desire, etc. An action, i.e., an intentional movement, may not be preceded by any intention.

[41] But see Miyahara, Ransom & Gallagher (2020) for a different idea, where it is argued that heedful performance allows for thinking thoughts; albeit these thoughts are not about one's *own* performance in that very moment.

the seemingly trivial behavior that allows one's life to be possible and decent at all, and perhaps even satisfying. If one lacks such small, omnipresent adjustments to the environment, if one has to follow one's hand when reaching out for a glass or has to remember constantly that not making regular eye-contact when talking is unwonted, one will have to spend much of their life taking care of these very trivial, very important issues. And the way such behaviours are carried out does belong to the agent: one can grasp a glass elegantly or bluntly, move gracefully or mechanically, depending on their own past histories; and certainly can affect one's future (for example, my habit of slouching towards the computer will result in a crooked spine; the way I comb my hair with my hands when stressed may compromise my hairline, or strike someone as endearing).

The kind of rationality that such habits exhibit must be understood in an even less intellectual way: Levine, for example, argues that such habitual actions have not intentions at all, but are still rational:

> When we exercise bodily habits or skills we activate patterns of sensori-motor response the configuration of which is *organized by the project of which they are a part*. In other words, the demands of the project one is engaged in determines the sensori-motor responses that one produces in response to them. These responses are therefore *purposive* for completing the project of which they are a part. For example, if a batter (in baseball) has the habit of cocking his leg before swinging, this sensori-motor coordination is not merely a mechanical response to the situation, but a purposive response, its purpose being provided by the goal of the overall project (hitting the ball).

Levine thus argues that the habits do have reasons – here the reason is to hit the ball, and the mark of success is not a deliberative result but the successful, unimpeded course of action. The norm of optimality, as Levine calls it, is given practically in the situation. The situation itself coordinates the action. Here, also, the notion of intrinsic intentionality has become so thinly adherent to the action that it seems to disappear; and indeed it does if one wanted to be even more radical with it (Steiner 2020 dispenses totally with it by arguing that it can simply be resolved to the pragmatic notion of object-directedness, for example; cfr. n. 21). Once again then habits are coupled to goal-directedness, although the degrees to which such purposiveness is exhibited seem to impact on how much they are understood as agentially relevant. So perhaps a scalar readings of habits, in addiction to a radial reading, would help differentiate the different kinds of habits (Kalis & Ometto 2019).

We have thus found the conceptual space in which a notion of habitual action can be plausibly be defended as reasonable and responsible. This description of action allows us to understand habits as actions because they are under the counterfactual control of the agent: they can occur without relevant antecedent causal states, and yet be under the guidance of the agent, where this guidance must be understood as potential guidance. The relation that such actions bear to reason is to be found in their performance, as they play out a kind of practical knowledge. If we understand habit as a radial

category, the fact that some habits do not fit these accounts should not be too problematic: since not all behaviours that fall within the same radial category possess the same characteristics at the same degree, there will be habits that exhibit the kind of responsiveness to reason just delineated, and others that will exhibit less of it or be less amenable to be understood this way. And certainly the applicability of these accounts depends in part at least on the level of description employed in individuating the habit – 'ball-throwing' may not fit, but 'playing baseball' could.

5. Habit and the explanation of action

The last piece needed to conclude this analysis of the relation of habits and agency is the way habits relate to explanations of actions. The kind of explanation that seems most fitting for habitual actions is a constitutive explanation. The concept of constitution at play here is the same employed in Baker's account of personal identity in Chapter One. Now, the idea is that when an action is explained as a habitual action, this is enough per se, as we are positioning the action into a broader pattern of which this instance is a constitutive part (Pollard 2006a). The relation is a partonomic one: «a given action identified as a habit is explained by being part of a larger ensemble of similar actions forming part of a given individual's previous history». More precisely, the action is contextualized – in regard both to the circumstances, and to the agent's history. The explanations references both the temporal context of the agent, that is, their history of past actions, and the current, synchronic environment into which the habit is employed. This «double contextualization» is inherent to the meaning of habit in the use of habit explanation:

> When we say a person did something out of habit, we imply that they (a) have done this activity in the past many times before (historical context), and (b) due to this repetition, they have acquired the tendency or disposition to act in similar circumstances in the present (synchronic context). The conjunction of past repetition and present context-dependence and the acquisition of automaticity and fluidity in acting are sufficient to explain why the person is doing the action in the present. (Lizardo 2021, 395).

Habitual explanation of action is then both causal and historical; they refer to a story of acquisition, to a habituation, within an environment, and thus the habitual action is explained by contextualizing it within the agent's story. Constitutive explanations of this kind do not explain in reference of a future state to be reached, as in intentional explanations, where the goal of the action informs its teleological, forward-looking structure. Instead, in habitual actions, «the main causal driver of the action is not located in an unrealized future, but its locus is instead a (repeatedly) realized series of past occurrences, making the action persevere in the present» (Lizardo 2021, 396). Notice that such

an explanation does not require mental states nor teleology, and does not need any rationalization: it can stand as its own independent explanatory practice:

> In this respect, accounting for someone's action by ascribing a habit is perfectly compatible with providing a 'reason why' a person engages in the action. However, note that placing habits (after the fact) within this space of reasons is *optional and not the de rigueur*. A habit explanation explains even if no reasons are cited. Placing the action within the context of previously per formed actions in the past is sufficient for a habit explanation to account for the action qua habit. (Lizardo 2021, 397; emphasis added)

We are able this way to account for the way habits might defy reasons or intentions because they exploit the conservative, persevering dimension of habits (); as such, habitual explanations cover a larger range of phenomena than intentional ones (Douskos 2017b, 1134; Strand & Lizardo 2017; Hutto & Robertson 2020).

The inertial character of habits that underlies this dimension can be expressed by saying that the relation of habits to an agent is not one of possession – one does not 'have' habits the way one has a belief or a reason; but, more correctly, «habits are related constitutively to the agent», and one is constituted by their habits: «if one acquires a habit of F-ing, one thereby makes F-ing one's own, and F-ing is quite literally, part of who one is» (Pollard 2006b, 245). The different kind of relation between habits and agent than mental items and habits can be seen through the different time-scales they occupy: a belief, a reason, can be left in a matter of seconds; habits, on the other hand, cannot be dropped on a whim.

The way habitual explanations work is useful in understanding habitual agency because it highlights most the difficulty with which an essentially diachronic concept of agency and agential powers is fitted into the categories and concepts of a punctual notion of action as that endorsed by standard action theory. By remarking on the constitutive way habits explains, we bring once again to the fore their diachronic structure and the kind of longer term agency that is proper to them: one relevant in the long run, rather than in the single moment. Certain habits, such as less-conscious ones, cannot be corrected at punctual moments; and in any case, punctual correction must be seen as an emergency, or exceptional, measure with respect to modes of action that usually work without the need for expediency.[42] What is really relevant to agency is thus, above all, the first type of control seen: that which, in the long run, allows one to create and modify one's habits. This kind of control, which can occur precisely because of a good understanding of the kind of mechanism underlying habits, occurs sometimes explicitly, and continuously less explicitly, in countless situations. Given the embedded

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[42] Dewey (1983) argues directly against this understanding of action: while one is perfectly justified in seen the person from which the action proceeds as the one to which it must be attributed, this proximate source of action is not the only source of action: action is embedded in a transactional; the environment produces it as much as the agent does, and « to see the agent as a trans-actor means denying individual agents the exclusive ownership of their particular actions».

character of habits, they cannot be lost or acquired by a mere effort of will; the control of habits (which can be by the agent's own doing but also by the work of other agents) requires an understanding of the mechanism involved, the conditions that enable and foster or prevent it: altering habits requires a flank movement rather than a direct attack. They are hooked into the environment, so to speak, and so the objective conditions of their operating need to be modified if the habit is to modified; and they affect one's own embodiment, which also will offer resistance to change. Effort on just one side of the transaction will not effect the transaction: both poles must be coordinated.

This is why, despite being capable of being controlled, habits can also appear to be deeply engrained and difficult to change. The literature on habitual slips and bad habits details this aspect (Amaya 2013; Douskos 2017): habits can appear to defy control, while still be attributed to the agent. Bad habits clearly show this dialectic, as one can be held responsible for one's bad habit and, at the same time, be trying to get rid of it, and receive sympathy in their attempt. This partial ungovernability is to be correlated with environmental factors, given the material and social extension of habits: the presence of certain objective conditions can, for example, act as a behavioural cue, causing one to drive to work on a Sunday or fall into 'old habits' when the opportunity present itself. They are then both rooted in the past, and also perspective, tensed into the future: habits thus straddle the line between conservation and innovation, between mechanism and freedom. Habituality thus is a «liminal place» (Charmaz 2002, 12) through which the past is actively present and continuously re-engaged in one's activity, now and in the future: «Habits are [...] an intermediate zone that lies between the givenness of our body's materiality and the responsiveness to reasons that governs thought and intention». (Levine 2015, 17). By way of their genesis and very structure, then, habits can be more or less mine: the agent can, at the same time, consider a habit to be authentically one's own, as a sediment and a testimony of their history, and by the same token not at full disposal of one's will.

What has been said is, I believe, sufficient to explain the agentive character of habits, and make intelligible sense of the concept of a habit-based agency in its main points of interests for our problem. I come back now to the two weaknesses with respect to narrative agency: the lack of a suitable theory of action, and the lack of a detailed account of the interaction of self-narrative and embodiment. A habit-based agency seems promising in answering both points combined. The idea is that habitual agency underlies, at least partially, narrative agency; and that narratives self-conceptions can be drawn on habitual resources in order to be fleshed out, enacted, in daily conduct. The initial point of contact can be traced to the conceptual kinship that habitual and narrative agency share.

3.3. Habit and narrative

1. The conceptual kinship of habits and narratives

Habit-based agency appears suitable for filling the gaps of narrative agency due to the conceptual kinship that can be traced between the structure of habit-based agency and narrative agency. 'Kinship' is a vague word: it is evocative enough for the current purposes of finding under which aspects may habit and narrative dimensions appear significantly coupled. As the analysis unfolds, I will try to define better what kind of relationship can be established.

Habitual agency is structured through the partonomic relation that is proper of habit in general: any habit-instance is a part of a larger whole, the habit, which is constituted by them but cannot be reduced to them. This part-whole relation can be found in narrative agency, as well: a narrative action is part of a larger whole that it constitutes. Both for habitual and narrative agency, the partonomic relation has a temporal character. Habits develop through time, and the relation between parts and whole is also the relation between the synchronic character of single habit-instances and the diachronic dimension of the habit that they constitute. Narrative agency as well is developed through single synchronic moments that are instantiation of a wider, longer whole. In both cases, the diachronic holism they exhibit is conceptually tied to the story of the agent to which they belong. Habit agency and narrative agency are both developed through synchronic instantiation that brings about the habit, or the narrative, as the coherent result or overall structure. Each instantiation of the habit carries within itself the past that has fostered it as well as being projective, forward-looking. That is, the diachronic holism proper of habits is logically connected to the agent's history, and to have a habit, habituation is logically required: «a person with a particular habit is logically required to have a certain sort of history. If somebody has never Φ-ed before, it is simply false to say that she has the habit of Φ-ing» (Pollard 2006b, 64; see also Alvarez 2010, 187; Brett 1981, 363; Douskos 2017, 9). Narrative agency also presents this double temporal thickness: it carries within itself the load of the past, and moulds it towards the future. Habitual agency comes with a thick temporality that pairs well with the diachronic holism characterizing narrative agency: just as actions belong to me as they emerge from my self-narrative, and can be explained and make sense in relation to it, they can also belong to me as they are expression of my past history, my character, the cumulative outcome of my past decisions and history. Habits belong to and bear testimony of the agent's story biographically, physically and psychologically: they are constituted through this story, but also constitute it.

The proposal is to exploit the structural kindredness of habitual and narrative agency in order to fill out some of the gaps individuated regarding narrative agency; to use habitual agency as a ladder to first, a better structuration of narrative agency, and second, a better definition of its relation to the embodied character of personal identity.

Indeed, habitual agency and narrative agency cover a shared ground in that they both expound on a a longitudinal notion of agency notion, that has its root in past commitments and springs *forward* from one's past experiences. But while the very structure of habits logically requires this relation to one's history, the way narrative agency and the agent's historicity are tied together is precisely the problem of the kind of actualization narrative agency has.

The elements I have highlighted so far certainly mark some kind of parallelism to be found within the temporal logic of both habitual and narrative agency; but not a complete match. Habitual and narrative agency seem to unfold on timescales that are only partially matching. Habits have a recursive character: in the stringiest terms, what was done before is now done again with reduced effort or acquired smoothness. Habitual actions are self-enclosed in the sense that each instantiation of the habit instantiates the habit whole: my habitual action of making coffee unfolds through each and every passage of what coffee making requires. It starts with me grabbing the moka, opening it, cleaning it under the tap, filling it to the mark with water, etc. The sequence can be more or less rigidly fixed (for example, I can skip cleaning it if I use it daily, or so the saying goes) but will in any case take part in its whole and is tied to the intrinsic purposiveness ordering my movements. The elements of the habit are coordinated together and the whole sequence is enacted each time the habit takes place. But narrative actions do not necessarily have such recursive character. Indeed, it would be a strange narrative one where the same actions are repeated over and over. Narrative agency proceeds linearly: a narrative action is not an action that belongs to me because I have done it in the past, *of necessity*; it is an action that belongs to me because it matches my self-conception, and fulfils it. It can fulfil a narrative decision taken in the past; it can, also, set a new course altogether. The conceptual requirements that narrative actions have to the past of the agent are different than those of habitual actions. A different way to make the same point is that narrative agency proceeds unidirectionally: a project is carried on to its conclusions; its past building blocks are necessary for the result to come about, but they do not return time and time again. Conversely, habits do not progress linearly, they do not 'go' somewhere, they do not reach a conclusion. Of course a habit can improve, deepen, smoothen, become more and more familiar, be dropped or be cherished. But it is not the points of habits that they evolve or proceed forward. Further, in their recursivity, habits do not present an internal rhythm in the sense we might find in a narrative – a habit has a beginning, a middle-phase, and an end, but this development is flat; it does not present paroxistic moments or cadence in the sense of starting, peaking, and dying out.

This difference can be seen in the phenomenological sense attached to narrative agency on one hand, and habitual agency on the other. The phenomenological sense of habitual agency is, as shown, elusive; there seems to be no particular phenomenology correlated to habits. This is quite in line with

what one would expect from their description: Habitual actions see a reduced attention and a reduced effort, and potentially one could add a heightened sensibility to differences and exceptions. habits are not meant to be heard or noticeable, or would rather run counter the ease with which they allow things to happen.

Narrative actions on the other hand do have a phenomenological sense attached to them, although it has been described varyingly. On the one hand, narrative actions have also been characterized as being accompanied by a sense of «mineness» due to the fact that they cohere with our narrative goals and self-conceptions; and the fulfilment of a narrative goal, or the execution of an action that consolidates my narrative self-conceptions, are actions accompanied by a phenomenological satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment, or similar. Habits, too, have been associated to a notion of mineness, although this is connected to the historicity of the habitual relation. The sense of mineness involved in narrative actions, on the other hand, is not bound to one's past. For example, I can do something narratively that I am genuinely scared to do; I act narratively just because I endorsed the decision, and the sense of mineness is not correlated with ease.

This partial incongruence, as well as their partial congruence, should be taken as a hint as to where and how habitual agency can be employed in narrative agency. One of the problems identified with respect to narrative agency was spelling out how narrative decisions were concretely drawn into everyday actions in a diachronic and pervasive manner, rather than resting on the top conceptual level; without this missing piece, talk of narrative actions remains short-legged and vague. I argue that the thick temporality of habits makes them suitable candidates to better structure narrative agency; and this is because as narrative decisions can be carried out through habits in virtue of their structural kinship *and* of their discrepancy. The general idea is that habitual action can be seen as a form, and an embodied one, of narrative agency: the habits one develops are functional to carrying out one's narrative decisions and enact one's narrative self-conception. The next paragraph focusses on detailing this hypothesis, starting precisely from their discrepancy and working towards their congruence.

2. Habits and narrative agency

The idea is then that habitual and narrative agency can be fitted within one another; and, in particular, that in order for narrative agency to be carried out, it must lean on habitual agency. The best way to sketch the idea in its gross outlines is to first offer an example, and an easy one at that, where we can suppose that an *explicitly* narrative decision has been taken and has to be carried out. Let's suppose, then, that I think of myself as a curiosity-driven person, having a narrative self-conception in this sense and deciding, at 18 years old, that I want to develop this inclination. The world at this age is

your oyster, so I am still at liberty to make decisions that match my inclinations. I might enhance my narrative self-conception, or simply go along with it, by deciding to study something that piques and challenges my curiosity, say, philosophy. The narrative decision is made, and actions such as signing up for a philosophy degree are quite clearly narrative in this sense, as they spring from my self-conception and adehere to my plans. But once the easy part is done, it is not enough that I decide to study philosophy. I *also* have to *study* it. I certainly cannot hope that each day I am enrolled at the university I will wake up as full of energizing enthusiasm as the day I first decided to enroll; this enthusiasm may be long-lasting but it will be hardly present each morning. In order for me to go through with my decision, I will have to make it sure that I study even when there is no enthusiasm whatsoever; otherwise my goal of feeding my curiosity will be quite short-legged. The curiosity itself, just like the enthusiasm, cannot always be present. Curiosity is a strong motivator; one wants to know, and happens to be entertained in knowing; but it is easily killed. It is the run of the mill that has to be faced now.

It is here that habitual agency comes easily in support. Again, for simplicity's sake, habits explicitly purposive to one's goal offer a less barbed start. Explicitly chosen habits allow to fulfil my narrative decision. I cannot hope to pass my philosophy exams if I do not study. I cannot hope to study if every morning I have to deliberate over coffee whether I should study or not that day. This option would be too demanding: as if every morning I had to re-take my decision, remind myself I want this degree and why, pump myself up, and then decide I want to go to the library. The unfeasibility of this picture is tied to the temporal and cognitive effort it would require, but not just that – I would then have to organize my environment anew everyday as well, for example. If I have to commit every morning anew to go to the library, this means that I might not have woken up in time to go the library, since I had not decided yet if I wanted to go. (Other circumstances to be decided would be, for example, which library should I go to? What should I bring with me in the backpack? Am I eating out or am I coming back home for lunch? Am I studying alone or with friends? Etc.). But the most effective way to deal with the practical demands of my narrative decision is the development of habits that support it. That is, I can develop habits that will dispense me from getting stuck in the morning, habits that will assure that the narrative decision is carried out. Thus, for example, I might decide that I will study every working day; and thus set up an alarm and prepare accordingly.

Not all narrative actions, though, are habitual actions. Some actions that are narrative are only carried out once, as we discussed: getting married is a deeply narrative action – I love this person and I plan to spend my life with her, for example – but only happens once. Of course people can get married multiple times, but we would not say, except jokingly, that one is in the habit of getting married. This is the kind of narrative action that fits within an intentionalist reading of action, and can be understood

within the standard framework without problems. It belongs to a linear dimension of narrative agency: it is a turning point.

But such punctual narrative actions cannot stand alone. They are achievements of narrative agency, and as such they shine particularly bright; but for them to take place at all, they must rest, as they do, on several others building blocks. Narrative actions of this kind are not lightning strikes in a clear sky: they do not appear randomly to change one's life from a moment to the other. That would be the contrary of a narrative, an event that has no precedent or consequent; a miracle (or an accident). Rather, they come about rather and have a particular feeling because they draw on previous actions, and foreshadow and preannounce further actions. Marriage is a narrative action because it is a narrative accomplishment; it stands out not by contrast but by intensity. There would be no wedding day without a terrain of previous narrative actions building up to it that are not as intense but much more frequent; and there would no wedding day if not in light of future actions of the sort. In this sense habits do not just permit the realization of narrative decisions, but also allow more complex narrative decisions to come about.

This provisional sketch of the relations of habits and narrative is clearly a top-down account: the idea is that habits can be employed in concretizing narrative decisions. While this is not the definitive form of the relationship I endorse, it is useful to first explore it, as it offers a clear-cut picture of at least one side of the relation. Some work in this sense has already been done. Drawing an ontological link between narrative agency and «identity-shaping habits», Niels Wagner's (2020) offers a similar solution. While Wagner's description of habits differs from the one I sketched in the previous pages, the insight is clearly the same: «identity-shaping habits» can be employed in supporting narrative agency form by sustaining and concretizing narrative decisions. In his example, a girl taking up biking develops over time a habit of biking and, meanwhile, starts thinking of herself as a cyclist. The narrative decision is carried out in several steps, not all of which are habitual: if one wants to keep healthy and go biking, they will have to procure the appropriate materials, such as a bike and a helmet; find a suitable place and a suitable time in one's schedule; but nonetheless, the intent to go biking will have to translate, at some point, in the actual biking. The first times will no doubt require both effort and explicit intentionality in going out biking. With each new instantiation of the biking taking place, the action will feel less forced; less and less resistance to the biking is offered until the situations turns on its head and it will be easier to go biking that not to go. Reaching of this point of naturalness fulfils the narrative decision that had been taken – as biking is now something one does with a frequency and easiness that can justify calling it mine, making it appear in my narrative self-conception. The more one exercises it, the less resistance will be felt; this statement has to be interpreted not metaphorically but literally. Cognitive resistance to biking, or exercising in general,

can of course be an obstacle; but it is a literal physical resistance that is weakened, as one's embodiment is affected by repetition. Each new instantiation of the habit strengthens one's body as well as one's narrative decision.

Wagner characterizes as «identity-shaping habits» those that contribute to one's self-characterization and are «voluntary expressions of what we care about»; that «involve a significant degree of commitment»; that are «reason-receptive», that is, they can be justified and explained through reason and in relation to one's life; and finally, that «influence one's unified perspective on life» and «change one's embodiment enduringly» (Wagner 2020, 7 ff.). Habits that respond to these requirements are identity-shaping because they express one's interests and change significantly one's psychological and physiological make-up. In particular, habits shape one's self-characterization by modifying embodiment and thus one's first person perspective. The role that habits play in narrative self-constitution then goes much in the direction endorsed by Mackenzie and West.

The notion of habits here favoured is of intentionalist favour, as habits are put to work as means to an end: identity-shaping habits are those endorsed by narrative agency. Wagner mentions habits established by other means than voluntarily initiation such as «punctuality or behavioral quirks», and acknowledges that these also inform someone's identity, although not to the point of being identity-shaping.

3. The narratable character of habits

If this is correct, habitual actions are particularly suited to constitute, at least in part, the content of narrative agency and to lend plausibility to its claims. This just amounts to saying that when we make claims about some narrative accomplishment – «I finally ran the Marathon under 3 hours, it took me two years of training» -, habitual actions that we have done regularly in the past are particularly suited to be narrated, because they were habitual actions developed for a narrative goal. The continuous effort that has been made toward the goal can of course take other forms than habitual action, such as reacting to turns of fortunes and changings of heart. But habitual actions' recursive and inertial character makes them optimal not just for off-loading narrative agency onto them, but also to be narrated and express the constitutive relation they hold in respect to the agent.

Within Køster's (2017) scalar approach to narrativity, habits seem to be narratable. Not all habits, of course: in the form in which they are found at the neural level, they seem not to have narrative forms following the arguments by Abbott on the unnarratibility of such processes (2008). But the functional level of embodiment, on the other hand, appears to be narratable, thanks to the same traits that allow them to develop narrative decisions.

The narratable character of habits can be understood by referencing to Carr's account, given that his account of what makes actions narratable is certainly close to the description of habits I have given. In Carr's account, action was conceptualized as narrative in the first place thanks to its primitive configuration in the form of protentional-retentional awareness; this form is later characterized, in active experiences, as the means-ends structure of action, which provides the temporal configuration of action. Now, this description of action and the characters that make it narratable fits habits as they, too, are a form of configured action, and exhibit means-ends structure that Carr individuates as paralleling that of narrative structure.

There is one element missing. The notion of narrative action developed by Carr was also sustained by the notion of the agent as the narrator: the practical position that the agent takes in regard to their own action allows the quasi-retrospective point of view that organizes the action and makes it narrative. It would seem that this point of view should be absent in habits – after all, I have argued precisely that habits dispense with the need for cognitive effort. Carr admits that this point of view may be implicit, that is, not one we have to be aware of: the baseball player eternally throwing his ball is not thinking in the process, but the quasi-retrospectivity of the agent is nonetheless present, if unthematized. Its presence can be detected by asking for explanations: it can be evoked and in being called forth it provides a narrative of their action. So perhaps this route is open to habits as well.

But I want to point out that when we look at the way habits explain and are explained, we are immediately taken from the single instantiation of the habit, to the whole habit – that is, the constitutive kind of explanation of habits afford is an explanation that does not, of necessity, relate to the point of view of the author. It explains by contextualizing, rather than by rationalizing; it explains by referring to the whole habit, and the point of view of the narrator then can be found not with reference to the single instantiation, but to the whole habit. If this is correct, then, it is the habit as a *whole* that is narratable, not in any of its single instantiation. What is narrated is not the internal configuration of the habit, that is, the coordinated sequence through which the habitual action unfolds, but the habit in its entirety: it is the serial character of habits that is expressed narratively, the continuity of conduct they constitute and that is expressed in habitual explanations. It is this longer, extended this is the timescales on which habits are significant for narrative agency.

This can be shown by making reference to the second-person epistemology that is proper of habits. Pollard argues that habits have a second-person epistemology as a way of pointing out that very often one is not aware of all the habits one has; they have to be pointed out to them. The agent themselves is too close to notice. Now, this particular epistemology coexists with the first-personal point of view that is instead constitutive of the way habits relate to reasons. That is, if A points out B's habit, B might not have been aware of possessing; nonetheless, B is still free and able to give suitable reason

of the habit. But what kind of explanation is it? It is, again, a constitutive explanation. The object of the explanation is the single habit, but what is referred to as explanans is the whole habit. It is, I argue, the means-ends structure of the whole habit that is narratable; not the internal configuration, or not just that, of the habit.

These very same traits also render habits, to some extent, *readable*: habits can be noticed and understood as habits. This point was already implicit in the notion of the second-personal epistemology habits afford, and in the notion of habits as social and shared modes of conduct. The cycling habit developed by the cyclist can be observed by others that can also understand the cycling as habitual; that is, not a series of accidentally quasi-identical instantiations of biking, but as a habit. The fact that habits are social and shared means that the neighbours do not need to ask themselves what the girl is doing. They know very well what a bike is and what biking is, and understand the activity as habitual. The materiality and publicity of habits also affords this readability, as habits both rely on and modify elements of the material environment. That is, by the same token the girl considers herself a cyclist, her neighbour may also consider her a cyclist, even if they never spoke.

In accordance with the radial readings of habits and the scalar reading of narrativity, not all habits exhibit the same degree of readability. Habits of thought, for example, may be more difficult to detect: a man may have a habit of anxiously second guessing himself, but of course this is not something that is perceptible. The habit comes to the light when he second-guesses himself a time too many and accidentally paralyzes his decision-making process, leading to inactivity: this is noticed. Other habits can be even harder to detect.

There is something interesting to be extracted from this availability of habits to be 'read'. First, it allows to disengage the narrative dimension from a purely self-reflective activity: habits lay out in the open, and can constitute a basis over which persons form narratives of other persons. The development of other people's narratives about us sparks from habitual ways of conduct that are proper of the person. As such, they constitute an intersubjective terrain over which narrative self-conceptions can be not only enacted, but also negotiated.

Second, the readability of habits is limited, as habits might be isolated incorrectly or read incorrectly. The incorrect isolation of a habit might happen when a given series of actions is taken to be habitual whereas it is only incidental: I might think the neighbour has a habit of walking the dog in the middle of the night, but perhaps my neighbour has no such habit and would rather sleep, and just has to deal with an insomniac dog. He may appear to me as a dedicated, animal-loving person while he is seething with rage. The incorrect reading of a habit might happen when one misunderstands the meaning of the habit. For example, I might notice that my colleague Daniele leaves for lunch at 11.45 AM, and think he has a habit of eating early. But this is not the case: he leaves by 11.45 AM because the queue

in the refectory is so long, he has to get there early to have lunch at an acceptable time. It is still true that Daniele leaves early for lunch, and has a habit of doing so; but it would be incorrect to say that Daniele is in the habit of eating early. The man with the habit of second-guessing himself may appear lazy or unmotivated, whereas he is just stuck. Equally, the cyclist from Wagner's example may be seen from the neighbours taking up the bike and be branded as a cyclist, but perhaps what appears to be a cyclist may be someone that simply cannot afford a car. Of course this wouldn't render her cycling less habitual, but it would not make *being a cyclist* part of her identity. That is, the observation of a habit is hardly conclusive on the nature of the habit, and can be extremely misleading if one tries, on the basis of the habit alone, to draw a narrative conclusion. Does this contrast with my previous statement, that habits can be understood because they are socially shared modes of conduct? I think it offers rather a refinement of that statement, as it helps understand that, beyond the simplified view offered so far, habits do not exist in isolation. Habits can be interpreted and read because they are socially shared modes of conduct; but they do not yield a unique interpretation nor do they compel a single reading. Without further clues, contextual or dialogical, it is hard to gauge precisely what narrative self-conception is the habit in service of. Consequently, it is also difficult to narrate only on the basis of habits.

4. The relations of habitual and narrative dimensions

This point can also be made by appealing to the many-one relation that can be found between habits and narrative. I first pointed out this aspect on the basis of the discrepancy to be found in the temporal dimension of habits and narrative. I argued that a single narrative decision was underscored by multiple instances of a habit. This is due to the fact that while habits and narrative go in the same general direction (they are both future-oriented), habits run recursively, while narrative move unidirectionally forward. I argued that the recursive character of habitual actions dovetails into the linear, progressive conception of narrative agency: habits fill precisely the timescale of action where narrative cannot be employed.

But it is not just the diachronic dimension that sees multiple instance of habit in relation to a narrative; the synchronic instantiation of a narrative decision, as well, requires more than one habit. A single habit cannot hold up the practical end of the narrative decision: rather, multiple habits are employed in any given narrative goal at the same time, as in the course of employing one's narrative agency, one makes uses of a great quantity and varied quality of habitual actions. Such habitual actions, further, are not easily pried apart: habits tend to be heavily interrelated and concur to the stabilization of conduct in a practical unity. This remark rests simply in the nature of habits: they interpenetrate each other. In the case of our cyclist, the development of the habit to go biking also, for example,

involves a myriad of different habits, in different ways. In the first place, it will involve habits that she has already developed. Second, it will lead to develop more habits than just that of biking. More importantly, beyond the kind of activity-specific habits she may develop, the habit as a mode of conduct will have long-lasting effects: it may affect, for example, her understanding of her own body as athletic and capable; shape the way she perceives her environment, perhaps developing a love for the woods or a dislike for car-centric infrastructure. The habits developed cannot all be controlled or known: indeed, it is the point of habituation that it no longer requires control or attention. Habits fill in precisely the lower-intensity dimension of narrative agency as they allow to distribute the narrative effort diachronically and transactionally.

The importance of this point lays in that it helps bring to the fore that more than one habits concurs to the development of the narrative instance in a given moment: narrative agency does not have a one-to-one relation to habitual agency.

These remarks help demarcate the realm of habits from that of narrative: the details of their workings are not of the kind that need interest narrative agency, and they specify a decision in ways that are *unattainable* for the narrative part. Habitual actions are not just a transparent reflection of the narrative decision; rather, the point is exactly that the practical dimensions of the narrative decision are handled over to habits precisely because habits exercise an autonomous form of self-organization that *cannot* be specified at the narrative level.

These remarks are meant to dispel any temptation to equate habitual and narrative dimensions; that is, to either draw a direct and simple, one-to-one equation between a habit and a narrative decision, or to argue that habits *are* narratives, embodied ones. The urge to collapse them onto one another could be prompted by the fact that, after all, I have argued that habits already constitute part of identity, and organize action and experience. I have also argued that habits are somehow redeable and narratable; why then not argue that habits just *are* narratives?

Endorsing a coincidence of this sort would mean understanding habits as proceeding directly from narrative and, at the same time, to understand narrative as explicating itself exactly through habits. Some of the elements I have already evidenced run counter this hypothesis, that would oversimplify the relation of habit and narrative while bringing back some of the problems typical of narrative approaches. If the narrative dimension was adherent and the same as the habitual one, then an accurate description of a person's habits would suffice to provide the narrative dimension of this person. In particular, in order for this proposal to work, we would need to establish a univocal meaning to habits, dragging the habit-concept closer to a mechanistic or behaviourist understanding than a pragmatist one.

What I have been trying to show, instead, is that some sort of gap has to be safeguarded between habits and narrative. This is conceptually necessary in order to preserve what habits and narrative, respectively, do in experience. Habits and narrative dimensions are communicating, but not identical. Habits do precisely what cannot be done at the narrative level: they deal with the practical dimension of employing narrative decisions in ways that are not in themselves narrative, impossible to bring to narration, and that would burden cognitive activities. The importance for habits is that they allow to see an embodied dimension of narrativity that shape's one point of view that not only actualizes the narrative decision, but allows it to actually seep into the structure of embodiment of the agent. The multiplicity they present on synchronic and diachronic dimensions with respect to a narrative decision further indicates that habits underdetermine the narrative dimension. It must also be pointed out that habits, as I have argued, do not present within themselves the distance that is needed in order for them to be narratable.

5. From habits to narrative

So far I have argued that habitual actions are in a particular happy position to underlie and support narrative agency, and to allow narrative self-conceptions to seep into the level of action. The approach developed proceeds from the top down: it considers habits intentionally bred for narratively defined purposes, subordinated to narrative dimensions as means to an end.

Once this hypothesis has been established to a minimum of credibility, a further step may be made. The argument proceeds by analogy: if habits geared narratively concretize narrative agency, what kind of influence can have on narrative agency habits that are not so narratively engendered? The question is due to the fact that the same structural kinship that allows habits to be worked within a narrative and have narratable character, is at work in those habits that have not been produced under narrative processes. Does this make them narratable on their own, even when developed for other reasons that narrative ones? More importantly, does it make them relevant to one's narrative self-conception?

The first and immediate reply that can be given to this suggestion is that intentionally adopted habits belong properly to one's narrative dimension because the narrative decision has been consciously taken, and endorsed reflectively and narratively by the agent. Wagner, for example, argues that habits that are not so intentionally developed do not belong to one's narrative self-conception, as they do not fulfil previously narrative decisions: «Slaving away in a mine excavating stones, for example, can become automatic and thus arguably considered habitual; nonetheless, most likely, it will not be particularly rewarding» (Wagner 2020). One may be enslaved and not consider being a slave in a

mine part of their identity, justifiably enough; even if they have developed habits that are proper of an enslaved miner.

Luckily we are not forced to postulate or enforce a narrative identity on somebody *just* because of their habits. Indeed, I have been stressing that narrative and habits are not the same, and that the relationship is more embroidered than a direct connection. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the same mechanism is at work in both habits produced through narrative self-reflection, and habits spontaneously acquired through the course of one's life. I am referring in particular to the way habits shape one's embodied dimension and one's point of view, thus informing their first personal perspective. While the man enslaved may not recognize being a slave as a part of his self-conception, slaving away in a mine will influence his physiology and psychology in ways that are not consciously controllable and hardly reversible.

To argue that since such habits are not narratively endorsed, then they have no place in one's narrative, is to risk a hyper-voluntarist, if not fictionalist, notion of narrative identity. Wouldn't life be easy if we got to choose our own identities, to repudiate what we have not chosen, to highlight what we have made of ourselves? But it is not so. By arguing that only habits intentionally developed are relevant to one's narrative self-conception, the notion of habits adopted has to be mutilated of its characteristics: indeed, so far, habits so understood are still understandable within an intentional framework. It involves then as means to an end, disregarding the practical rationality brought about by habits, not 'through' habits.

The following then relies explicitly on the richness that pragmatism assign to habits. Habits allow a mastery and understanding of the environment and its demands that are far more detailed, sensitive, than the discursive, cognitive takes; they develop as way of coping with the environment natural and social, preceding by a long shot discursive self-understanding and overflowing it in any case. So habits both precede and exceeds cognitive achievements; certainly habitual action precedes narrative agency. As a result, habits establish a practical coherence: it is simply the fact that both organism and environment exhibit demands, deficiencies, and constraints, and possibilities, and these have to be coordinated somehow if the organism is to survive. Such practical coherence does not have to be absolute – one develops habits that can be more or less slightly contradictory, but they have to be amenable to work together somehow. To this it must be added that one gets born in a world that has already attained a large level of practical coherence through social and cultural habits. These are habits that are inherited mostly unconsciously; as are most habits. They are not taken up with the express desire to be taken up; they are *picked up* as one is doing something else. This can be expressed by saying that habits are not done for habits' sake; in most cases, habits are not external reasons (cfr.

Pollard 2003).[43] Habits like weeds tend to grow where is space for them, and with special ease where there is a practical need for them. As I take up habits, both voluntarily and involuntarily, they come to shape the way I interact with the world, the kind of people I'm brought into contact with, the way of dealing with the environment. Habits so acquired already express and constitute a field of interests, preferences, and sensibilities; they already modify one's embodied perspective, and one's very notions of what is possible or available, and what is not; in short, they do not just precede the narrative dimension, but also constitute its limits and possibilities.

In considering the top-down process described before, arguing that habits as a way of carrying out previously decided decisions, what is called in to work is the conservative character of habits: the fact that once established they carry on the agent's decision. Here instead both the interconnectedness of habits and their projective character are at work. Habits are active even when not overt; and are projective in the sense that they are not task-specific: they shape general ways of dealing with practical situations, and such ways are likely to overflow the limit of the single practice to which we may develop them. The hypothesis then is that habits are relevant to narrative dimensions not only derivatively: but that they organize conduct in a way that is equally narratable. This narratibility though is not inherited by way of the habit being subordinated to a narrative self-conception, but is produced by the habit autonomously – is inherent in the concept of habit as structuring serial conduct.

6. The crisis of habits and the emergence of narrative

As I have argued, there is no direct isomorphism to be found between habits and narrative dimensions. That is, the argument is not that the mere presence of such habits informs directly a narrative self-conception, without mediation. When dealing with the top-down aspect of this relationship, the interpretative moment is present from the start, in the form of the narrative decision that preceded the implementation of habits. In considering whether habits may shape narrative dimensions from the bottom-up, we have to consider then whether such an interpretative gap is available; or, which is the same, where the narratable character of habits, their potential for narrativity, gets narrated. The answer to this had already been anticipated, when discussing the narratability of habits and how it affords a narrative distance: when habits are questioned, and in the kind of explanations they afford. The claim may be generalized now to this: it is when habits enter into a crisis that we are compelled to revise the situation in order to identify where and how such failing came about; a reflective phase that occasions an explicit narration of habits. It is at this point that the way such habits have been impacting our self-conceptions and practical dealings with the world may be examined.

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[43] Of course one might pick up the habit for habits' sake, that is, one can be motivated to do something in order to acquire the habit for it.

Before delving deeper into this aspect, it is worth pointing out that the idea is not so different from the one considered so far; only, it is approached from the other way around, so to speak. I first argued that narrative decisions can be actualized through habits; the starting point was given by the narrative decision, the narrative character of such decision trickling down to habits. Now, instead, the starting point is *in medias res*: the narrative reflection and decision as the outcome of a practical crisis and the re-elaboration it compels.

The idea is then that the narrative potential habits bear emerges at the breakdown of habits, where we are forced to recognize our own habits and reorganize action; and to this extent we can recognize their influence and either endorse or disregard them:

> [habits'] crisis pushes agents to become aware of what they are doing, to become conscious of their own dispositions toward others and of their responsibility within a previously unproblematic transaction. Consequently, habit change and habit crisis show a crucial transformative power. (Canditto & Dreon 2021, 2)

In the reconstruction of the problematic situation, the agent is bound to analyse their habits and their workings. In such moments, the occasion rises to revise one's course of actions, and take in reflectively the circumstances that have brought them to this point.

Suppose I have been drinking regularly for years, as many do: spending nights out with friends, enjoying the hospitality of academic conferences, and developing a habit of drinking in such social circumstances. Suppose also that the situation is fairly under control, that is, I haven't developed an addiction, so that my relationship with alcohol is not problematic, and quite unthematized. It is, after all, a widely spread habit. It is not until a problem arises that I am forced to pay attention to how such habit functions within the economy of my life: for example, I am invited to a night out that involves no drinking. When I go, I might find out that I am not enjoying the party very much; that I am uncomfortable, struggling to strike an easy conversation. Perhaps it had never dawned on me just how much of my social prowess is connected to drinking (possibly, to other people drinking too). But the situation now arises that compels me to ask myself, Why am I not having fun? Eventually inquiry into this problematic situation will yield that it is the lack of mild intoxication that is preventing me from having fun. This, in turn, compels a new realization over myself – that I have relied heavily on alcohol to have a good time; and while this had escaped my notice, it surely reveals a relationship with alcohol that acquires new meaning. It is not the case that I had not noticed before that I drink, but rather, that I had not understood the habit, and what exactly the habit was doing for me. The problematic situation compels to spell out the factors involved. The habit of drinking socially gets a narrative form, along the lines of «I need to drink in order to feel at ease».

Clearly this revelation is forced upon a person. Does this mean that such habits were part of my narrative self-conception or identity *before* getting narrated? I would not say so, as I have just been arguing that I did not know about this correlation between drinking and sociality; and I have been arguing that there is more to the relation of habits and narrative that a straight transmission line. Nonetheless, the habit has structured my practical dealings with the world in ways that, narratively endorsed or not, have their persistence and will have their effects. Merely denying it will not resolve my awkward position at the party. Once the habit has been brought to the light of narrative elaboration, though, I am in the position to modify it. In order to modify it, I have to acknowledge that it does impact my behavior; that it is, in a way that is to be negotiated, part of me. If I denied this, I would have no reason to modify it. It is only by accepting it as part of myself that I can modify it.

Notice that the habit can be understood narratively in more than one way; it has to be fitted within my self-conception. I am not forced to think of myself as an alcoholic, or a socially inept person. It is more plausible that in reflecting on it, I see it connected with other elements of my narrative self-conception: for example, I might understand it in connection with my confidence issues; with the company I have been keeping, if it is a company prone to drink; etc. The narrative scenario is far from being determined by the habit.

It may seem that this approach runs the risk of inviting confabulatory practices, by promoting a selective reading of one's habits and the way they concur to one's narrative. To the contrary, I argue, habits as grounding and prompting narrative self-conceptions work as a sort of reality constraint: such confabulatory issues, while impossible to exclude, here find a concrete test, one which is not amenable to just any reading and that, further, is at least partially open to intersubjective inspection and negotiation. That is, the narratable character of habits constitute a leeway into the social constitution of narrative self-conceptions. This is because of the social and shared character of habits, so that it is not just the agent that can weave a narrative on the basis of their habits; other people, too, can do this. The person to which a habit is attributed as part of their narrative may negate it or accept it, but they are not free to do so unabashedly. I might get angry when my colleague calls me absent-minded, as I always have prided myself of being maniacally organized; but the burnt coffee in the shared kitchen says otherwise. Of course my colleague would hardly be justified in calling me an absent-minded person if I have burnt coffee in only one occasion, during a stressing workday. His narrative conception of me gains strength if I do this daily, and correctly informs his conception of me and thus his practical dealings with me. It is not just that I might register his comment on my absent-mindedness and think about it. It is the fact that Daniele will (rightly) treat me as a such person. He will not trust me to do the coffee, and will text me to remind me to turn the lights off before leaving. I might refuse furiously to acknowledge my absent-mindedness, but I cannot stop him from

thinking that of me – unless I change my ways. But in order to change my ways, I have to acknowledge that the description fits. Once again, this need not happen. I might never accept the remarks and defend myself against them; but if the habit is there, my defence and negation have no thrust.

Habits then constitute a share of narratable experiences that might be scrutinized interpersonally, and that are not amenable to be twisted in *any* way. Habits furnish a basis for narrative dimensions that is intersubjective. I am exposed through my habits, in a way that cannot be emendated quickly. Habits constitute for other a window into who I am; it is curious that often this window has to be opened from the outside, but once it is open, I can look through it as well.

This way of relating habitual and narrative agency can also accommodate the different phenomenological sense attached to each. This can be seen by the way habits contribute to a sense of ease in action and a familiarity with our everyday world, creating preferential channel of thought, perception and action. Habits guarantee a first personal familiarity with certain objects, places, and persons, and then contribute to the development of that sense of *mineness* that seems to overlap greatly with the sense of mineness, familiarity and ease that is associated to the exercise of narrative agency in its everyday manifestations. Under this hypothesis, the phenomenological sense of narrative actions is built upon that of habitual actions: that is, by taking care of the ordinary and the regular, habitual actions constitute the ground over which narrative actions can be carried on, and the particular phenomenology that is attached to them stands out from the ordinary, unproblematic familiarity of habitual actions. The phenomenological sense of narrative agency appears not in my everyday work, but on what is accomplished through this everyday work: frustration if it goes badly, relief and satisfaction if it goes well; these are built upon the back of the habitual, 'neutral' phenomenology of habitual actions that carried me to the end. The emotions of frustration would not register if I had not poured in the effort. The phenomenology of habitual agency then underlies the kind of phenomenology associated with narrative agency in its peak phases – mirroring the structure of relation that is to be found between these two approaches of agency.

This account allows to frame a different, more autonomous and productive role for the lived body in the narrative paradigm, and in particular to deploy the agentive and cognitive powers of the habitual body in narrative dimensions of experience. The embodied level acquires a different relevance, no longer appearing as an inert instrumental tool of narrative identity, or the impersonal container of narrative inscriptions. It is not just preserved from being thoroughly colonized by discursive self-narratives, but can also gain a narrative momentum. That is, habits do not just individuate a level where narrative self-conceptions get enacted, but are also involved in their production, albeit not just yet in narrative forms. In granting a degree of narrative generativity to the embodied dimension, we

are forcing open the hyper rationalistic nature of narrative, or, in different words, we are forcing narrative positions to abdicate to exclusive dominion over identity.

It seems then that the original thesis has been turned on its head, as I first argued that narratives employ habits, and now I'm saying the reverse, that habits employ narratives at their breaking points. The narrative dimension, I argue, is not wholly derivative of habitual dealings; still, it is not primary in trumping embodied experiences, either. Habitual actions structure one's narrative self-reflection, but do not determine it wholly; conversely, narrative dimensions draw from one's past embodied history, and further precipitate again over it. It draws from them and re-elaborates on them. Habitual and narrative dimensions are neither identical nor orthogonal to each other; rather, they form continuous forms of experiences. Narrative dimensions constitute an elaboration of the way habits order and organize embodied experiences: the narrative end may emerge out of the practical situation, rather than being already defined prior to action. It plays a reconstructive, rather than a representative role.

The narrative dimension employs resources that are not extraneous to experience, but neither is narrative a mere mirror of such experiences. Framing the narrative dimension in the wake of the break-down of habitual agency allows to see that the narrative dimension does not appear unbounded by one's previous experience. Indeed, such narrative decisions would not be possible if not thanks to a background of habits that define one's possibilities and inclinations, and take care of the most trivial practical dealings. Narrative decisions do not happen ex nihilo: they are restricted and directed by one's previous habits, not last the ones that are socially and culturally available to them, and by material circumstances, as well. The active search for a new arrangement relies on previously accumulated resources, be them material, social, or cognitive; and the new arrangement to be worked out requires to be in line or coherent with at least the gross outlines of my emotional and intellectual life, and social life. This positions sees narrative self-conceptions not as flat-out repetitions of the history of one's body, or a by-product of one's habits, but rather as an achievement; still, it is not an achievement untethered from one's concrete history.

3.4. Conclusions

By providing a less cognitivist, more diachronic, distributed and embodied form of narrative agency, habitual agency can supply the tools to better structure the relation between embodied forms of experiences and their cognitive counterparts. The conservative character of habits can be exploited in structuring the way narrative self-conceptions are involved in embodied experiences, without requiring constant self-reflection and cognitive powers. Habits store part of our usual conduct: they are deposit and condensations of the agent's history, collocating them squarely in a (personal and interpersonal) story and in a (social and cultural) environment.

The kind of agency provided by habits affords a different outlook on the interaction between embodiment and narrative, and may play a mediating role between embodied and narrative selfhood, linking them together. We have seen how embodied experiences are generally understood in the debate as either as already narratively structured or ripe for narrative. Habits appear as a medium between body and narrativity: they are sensitive to self-narrative and can be employed in self-programming, in a way that other processes of our body are not. Being susceptible both to explicit direction but also conserving previous tendencies, habits can work as a transitional structure, showing how narrative decisions may be reflected and turned into effective structures of action.

Habits then have the right characteristics to be put at work in narrative debate at the level that mediates between bodily situations and narrative decisions – the level, so far obscure, of 'implicit' or micro-narratives, and their pivotal mediation role of communication and alterability of two levels otherwise badly connected. We have seen the concept of implicit narratives coming back time and again in the discussion as it furnishes the notion of a level that is both embodied and in the right kind of relation with embodied dimension, and as it allows to reach both up (to the cognitive level of discursive narrative self-conception) and down (how narrative self-conceptions end up informing embodied reactions). The concept was also invoked to furnish a layer of stability and reality to narrative claims: what do narrative self-conceptions lay their foundations? Well, in shorter narratives that structure everyday dealings of this particular person to the world. Micro-narratives served to establish a world-related credibility to narrative self-conceptions. Koster's take allowed us to translate this notion into that of a level that is narratable, suitable for narration; what exactly the characters of potential narratibility of this level remained obscure. I am not going to argue that habitual actions and habits make up all there is to the narratable, but they do exhibit characteristics that make them suitable to belong to this order, and that they constitute a large chunk of what is meant by action being ripe for narration. The employment of habits as agentive structures can thus fill the gap between narrative and embodied selfhood.

I had started the argument by pointing out that the way the interactions in which the persons consists were not detailed enough to understand what the locus of such interactions would be and how such integration of various social and personal activities is effected. I also argued that in fact we were short of a good framework for narrative agency, to understand how actions and interactions may take place narratively and how narrative self-conceptions, and narrative in generals, might be embodied, rather than resting on the top, cognitive level without seeping into the body. Throughout the chapter I argued that the notion of habit had the right requisites for filling out some of the gaps evidenced aas narrative action and habitual action share a conceptual kinship that can be found in the way their temporal partonomic structure and in their means-ends structure. The notion of narrative agency can be partially resolved into that of habits: habits establish a transitional level between more or less cognitively articulated forms of experience, and enable the person to embody their narrative self-conception. If this is correct, narrative and habits go hand in hand: developing a narrative self-conception requires also the creation of habitual structures of interaction that will allow that narrative to be brought on. The locus of interactions so defined, as habitually shaped, is maintained through bodily continuity, but not reducible to it. Bodily continuity then is necessary as it roots the possibility of the locus of interactions to be actualized; but I have also stressed that the habitual body that underlies this notion is not to be reduced to its physiology, but rather has to be understood as profoundly embedded in a social and material context. Habitual agency does not exhaust all there is to narrative agency nor to narrative self-conceptions: clearly, the linguistic and discursive dimension that is proper of narrative and that effects the passage from what is narratable to what is actually narrated, also exhibits other features and traits. Still, I hope to have shown how such features of narrative organization do not just require a bodily enactment, but also are constituted by it.

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