

Personal Identity Management*

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Introduction

I'm the kind of philosopher that should like to contribute to people's success in living their lives.¹ One way in which I imagine myself to be able to do this is by showing that we might overcome some of our practical problems by improving our understanding of what is at stake in these problems. One way to improve this understanding is to make a very general move away from the question "What should I do?" to the question "Who should I be?" That is, rather than thoughtlessly accepting that practical problems just are to be understood in terms of what to do, my suggestion is here that it might be a good strategy to try to understand such problems in terms of who to be.²

Restricting myself to those cases in which this is a useful move, I should like to add a second move that will be more controversial, namely to replace the question "Who should I be?" by yet another question, namely: "How can I determine the best alternative of myself?"³ In the present paper I intend to develop and defend a way to address this

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¹ Cf. Pettit (2004); Henrich (1997), Freundlieb, 2003.

² Bransen (2004b).

³ Bransen (2000, 2002, 2006)

last question, a way I shall label ‘identity management’, and that I shall propose as an edifying characterisation of what living a life amounts to in certain disturbing situations.

The paper is in four parts. In sections 1 to 3 I shall develop my account of identity management, paying attention to the idea of an alternative of oneself (section 1), to the kind of activity involved (section 2), and to the normativity involved (section 3). In the final section I shall contrast my account with three different ways to understand identity management, ways that have become rather common sense in two research traditions that offered a home to the legacy of Ervin Goffman’s pioneering work on identity management: postmodern philosophy and social and behavioural science.

1. The idea of an alternative of oneself

I have characterised an alternative of oneself as

a continuation of the person one is, such that (1) this alternative is wholeheartedly moved to make one of the available choices, and (2) this alternative succeeds in reconciling from her perspective the reasons for this one choice with the crucial characteristics of one’s own motivational profile.⁴

I added on that occasion a comment saying that a proper analysis of the phrase “is a continuation of the person one is” would require an explication of how I appropriate and combine some themes from the work of David Velleman and Marya Schechtman. In the first part of this section I shall provide and discuss this explication.

⁴ Bransen (2006).

In his seminal paper “Self to Self”⁵ David Velleman develops an account of what he calls a reflexive mode of presentation in which he distinguishes between a notional and an actual subject that are, in the reflexive mode of presentation, unselfconsciously related by sharing the same first-personal perspective. Let me unpack this a bit. The actual subject is just the subject of a current thought who is entertaining the mental content of this thought from the first-person perspective. If I think that David Velleman wrote ‘Self to Self’, I am the actual subject of this thought. The notional subject is a subject introduced as part of the mental content of a thought, or as implied by the mental content’s being what it is. In my thought David Velleman appears as a notional subject who is introduced as the one who experienced writing ‘Self to Self’. In this example the actual subject and the notional subject do not share the same first-personal perspective. But if I think I wrote ‘Selfless Self-Love’ I am the actual subject of this thought, but also the notional subject mentioned in the thought, and in this case both subjects are related by sharing the same first-personal perspective.

Using these notions allows us to make sense of many expressions that seem to be difficult to understand and that are often discussed by philosophers interested in personal identity. One interesting feature of the analysis is the idea that in the ordinary reflexive mode of presentation the notional subject is *unselfconsciously* related to the actual subject as sharing the same first-personal perspective. The idea is that individuating the notional subject requires in ordinary cases merely the presentation of a mental content as experienced from the notional subject’s perspective. No additional attention needs to be paid to the identity of the notional subject. If I remember writing ‘Selfless Self-Love’ what I do remember is what it was like from the first-personal perspective to write that text. I don’t need to pay explicit, conscious attention to the identity of the notional

⁵ Velleman (1996).

subject, me, Jan Bransen, and I don't need to be aware of some identity relation holding between this notional subject and the actual subject, me, Jan Bransen, to gain first-personal access as the actual subject to the perspective of the notional subject who wrote 'Selfless Self-Love'. The first-personal access the actual subject has to the notional subject's perspective takes place unselfconsciously. Where the phenomenology doesn't allow such an unselfconscious access, we have reason to believe a relation of selfhood is lacking.

There are, according to Velleman, two types of mental states that display the right kind of phenomenology: memory and intention. Discussing Locke's memory theory Velleman argues that memory typically implies the actual subject having unselfconscious access to the notional subject's perspective. My actual memory of writing 'Selfless Self-Love' presents a notional subject whose first-personal perspective of actually writing that paper is unselfconsciously shared by me. And in framing an intention I use a similar structure: my actual intention to present the paper I am writing now in Sydney anticipates a notional subject who will read this paper because of this intention, which implies that the actual subject has an unselfconscious access to the perspective of the notional subject. As Velleman says: as an actual subject I can both project and *send* my intention into the future.⁶

The framework provided by Velleman's analysis is useful. I think, however, that it can, and should, be supplemented by a deeper account of why memory and intention ordinarily display the right phenomenology for an unselfconscious access to a single first-personal perspective. I think this is needed to answer a worry that might be raised in terms of the holism of the mental. Such a worry has been raised before with respect to memory,⁷ and can equally well be made with respect to intention. The idea is that a

⁶ Velleman (1996), 71.

⁷ Dennett (1973), Slors (2001).

memory makes a chance to be taken for what it is (namely, a memory) only when it fits in a whole network of related and supporting mental states. If a memory of meeting my older brother in Cleveland is planted in my brain, but isn't backed up by lots of other memories of my older brother (because I have none), as well as memories of my trip to Cleveland (where I never was), then the memory is unlikely to survive as a memory and will in any case disturb the unselfconscious access the actual subject is supposed to have to the perspective of the memory's notional subject. And something similar will happen with respect to intentions that are far enough removed from a subject's motivational profile. That is, if I intend to speak Portugese in Lisbon next week, or intend to be forgiving to the guy that kicks me in the head, or intend to rob a bank, but I never learned Portugese, and the guy has been harassing me for many years, and I'm a very shy and morally respectable citizen, it is unlikely that these intentions will survive as intentions and they will in any case disturb the unselfconscious access I am supposed to have to the perspective of the anticipated notional subject.

Marya Schechtman has developed the concept of empathic access that I believe can be useful here.⁸ She presents this kind of access as the missing ingredient in accounts of personal identity that "must define the difference between ordinary personal development and identity-destroying psychological discontinuity".⁹ Empathic access is the kind of access an actual subject has to the perspective of a notional subject when the actual subject is able to experience enough sympathy for the emotions, thoughts and feelings of the notional subject and their role in giving weight to the notional subject's impulses, considerations, and other motivating factors. As I take it this means that the first-personal perspective to be shared by both subjects is primarily characterised in terms of its motivational and evaluative profile. The idea is that in matters of personal

⁸ Schechtman (2001).

⁹ Schechtman (2001), 96.

identity the relevant perspective of actual and notional subjects is not a point of *view* but a point of “*agential orientation*”. It is not a perspective that is sufficiently identified by merely thinking of the vantage point associated with an imagined seeing, but a perspective that is characteristically ‘colored’ by the subject’s stance towards the world and himself *as agent*. And my suggestion now is that the unselfconscious access the actual subject is supposed to have to the perspective of the notional subject is part of the phenomenology of memory and intention only if it is backed up by the actual subject’s empathic access to the notional subject’s perspective.

I am committing myself here to a rather strong view. I am not suggesting it is Schechtman’s view. What I am claiming here is that empathic access in Schechtman’s sense is a requirement for unselfconscious access in Velleman’s sense. And my argument for that claim is based on the distinction between a perspective conceived of as the vantage point of an imagined seeing and a perspective conceived of as the vantage point of an *agential response*. This distinction can be explained a bit further by associating it with the distinction between an agent and a mere subject of experience, as introduced by Korsgaard in her attack on Parfit’s account of personal identity.¹⁰ Korsgaard argues that a person is not so much a mere subject of experience, but is an agent concerned to maintain his unity in practice as well as in principle. An agent is characterised primarily by his having a certain motivational and evaluative profile. An agent is situated by being *engaged in a scenario*, inclined to take certain *prima facie* reasons as *his* reasons in an unselfconscious way. An actual subject, wondering what to do, will therefore only be able to experience the relevant kind of unselfconsciousness if the reasons in question that would move the notional subject are such that the actual subject does sympathize with the prospect of his performing the actions for which these reasons are reasons.

¹⁰ Korsgaard (1989).

It might be important to note that I am not offering an account of personal identity. I merely have tried to explain what it means to say that an alternative of oneself is a continuation of the person one is. What this means is that a person who faces a difficult choice and wonders who he should be has qua actual subject empathic and unselfconscious access to the first-personal perspectives of the alternatives of himself that are qua notional subjects reflexively presented in his deliberations.¹¹

The other two features mentioned in my definition of an alternative of oneself are needed firstly, to distinguish between different alternatives of oneself and, secondly, to highlight their being alternatives of the same person. Let me say a word on each. Alternatives never come alone. If there is merely one, there is none. This means it is imperative to find a way to distinguish between different alternatives of oneself. I propose to view them as wholeheartedly motivated to choose different courses of action in the situation at hand. This allows for a smooth transition from the traditional way of conceiving of a practical problem (“What should I do?”) to the way I favour. The proposal doesn’t reduce alternatives *of* oneself to alternatives *for* oneself¹², because the difference is not located in the different courses of action, but in the wholeheartedness with which each alternative embraces a particular course of action as the most

¹¹ My attempt is to distinguish between a phenomenological point of view and an agential (motivational-cum-evaluative) point of view, the latter differing from the former in a way similar to the attempt of Rovane (1998) to distinguish between a phenomenological and a rational point of view. I prefer to speak about a motivational-cum-evaluative point of view that is normative just like Rovane’s rational point of view. My emphasis on multiple alternatives is difficult to square with the idea of a rational point of view (there seems to be only one conceivable), and I want to include, in the characterisation of the perspective, reference to the particular, idiosyncratic reasons in play. See section 3 on the kind of commitment involved.

¹² I have developed this distinction on a number of occasions (Bransen, 1996, 2000). The basic idea is that alternatives *for* oneself need not have anything more in common (they need not be similar in any other respect) than their relation as an alternative to a specific deliberator. I may wonder whether to go to the movies or to my friend’s, and these have nothing in common except the fact that I reflect on them now as possible places to visit. The idea of an alternative *of* oneself, however, gives the agent an altogether different role: it is the person with respect to which the alternatives in question are relevantly similar, not merely because the agent is the deliberating subject reflecting on them as alternative means to fill in some logical space, but in the first place because the agent is the object of which these alternatives are different *qualifications*.

appropriate. “Wholeheartedness” is a notion taken from Frankfurt¹³, and so is the kind of move proposed. That is, the idea of an alternative of oneself was first introduced to improve Frankfurt’s proposal to think of free agency not as the world-oriented capacity to do what you want to do but as the will-oriented capacity to endorse what you want to do.¹⁴ On my proposal, then, alternatives of oneself can be identified in terms of the course of action they choose. But the idea is as well that this is merely an identification “from the outside”. The actual subject wondering what to do, does not need this external identification to gain access to the perspective of his alternatives. The actual subject can directly think from the inside -- unselfconsciously, in Velleman’s terminology -- what it would be like for each notional subject to wholeheartedly embrace one of the available courses of action.

It might be difficult to articulate in a sufficiently compelling way how from each alternatives’ perspective the balance of reasons supports unequivocally one particular course of action. But this difficulty is not a matter of taking pains to exercise one’s empathic capacities. After all, the reasons in play are all reasons of one’s own. Access -- empathic as well as unselfconscious -- is not the difficulty in discerning and appreciating the first-personal perspective of the alternatives of oneself. Wholeheartedness is. My proposal to address practical problems by focussing on the quality of alternatives of oneself is precisely meant to acknowledge this difficulty of determining a course of action unequivocally supported by the balance of reasons. What I suggest is that the agent should try to develop various deliberately onesided, yet wholehearted, motivational profiles. Accessing such profiles, or so I suggest, will allow the agent to experience his agent-regret and agent-satisfaction in a mental dry run free of charge.

¹³ Frankfurt (1988, 1992). On Frankfurt’s account wholeheartedness is a feature of a person’s will if it displays an internal consistency and coherence such that the person is completely satisfied with the content of his will and does, therefore, simply have no interest in making any changes to his will.

¹⁴ Bransen (1996).

This introduces the final feature mentioned in my definition of an alternative of oneself. The idea of this feature is that it need not merely be the case that the actual subject wondering what to do, needs empathic and unselfconscious access to the first-personal perspective of each alternative of himself, but also that these notional subjects need an anticipated backward-looking empathic and unselfconscious access to the first-personal perspective of the actual subject.¹⁵ This is of course what is implied by the very idea of actual and notional subject sharing the same first-personal perspective. To be sure, identity relations are symmetrical.

Yet, to account for the fact that two or more motivationally distinct alternatives of oneself both have unselfconscious and empathic access to the actual subject's first-personal perspective we need to assume that this perspective has an underdetermined, or at least poly-interpretable motivational and evaluative profile. The identity involved is vague. This should not come as a surprise. It is exactly what we started with. The actual subject, after all, is wondering what to do, and this means at least that his motivational profile is ambivalent or indeterminate. This might mean that we are unable to identify this motivational profile "from the outside", but this need not worry us here since the empathic and unselfconscious access to this perspective that we need to attribute to each alternative of oneself does not require such an external identification. On my proposal this means that each anticipated notional subject has a perspective that unselfconsciously implies a particular interpretation of the crucial features of the actual subject's motivational and evaluative profile. These various interpretations are needed to allow each alternative of oneself both to wholeheartedly embrace one possible course of action and to reconcile the balance of reasons that support this course of action with the

¹⁵ In a way this anticipated backward-looking access that a notional subject is supposed to have to the actual subject's perspective, would require a reciprocal transposition of the adjectives 'actual' and 'notional'. For easy reference I shall, however, use 'actual' to denote the subject who has to choose between alternatives of himself, and shall use 'notional' to denote the alternative subjects.

motivational and evaluative profile of the actual subject's perspective that the alternative empathically and unselfconsciously shares.

Let me conclude this section by emphasizing that I am intentionally and literally talking about determinable alternatives of oneself as notional subjects with their own first-personal perspective. I am not merely proposing a more complex language that could help us reconstruct the gist of our deliberations as involving reasons for action that reduce to reasons for redefinitions of oneself. In talking about alternatives of oneself I aim to stimulate our imagination to experience in a dry run what it would be like to live the life of one of the alternatives of oneself. My hope is that such an imagined, anticipated experience might reveal the agent-regret and agent-satisfaction that, as I shall argue in the following two sections, could play a role in determining the best alternative of oneself. My claim should not, however, be understood as implying in an uncomplicated way the clear and distinct presence of these alternatives as *possibilia*. The claim is merely that it makes sense to think about certain kinds of practical problems as problems that involve a choice between alternatives of oneself, the problem mainly being a matter of finding (or making) the resources to determine these alternatives vividly enough as both onesided and wholehearted.

2. What is identity management?

Once the concept of an alternative of oneself as developed in the previous section is in place I can begin to explain why I should like to appropriate the phrase “identity management” for the kind of activity I should like people to engage in in living their lives and facing difficult choices. Despite the fact that the phrase is *en vogue* in a variety of research traditions that seem to challenge the plausibility of my picture, I feel that the phrase could contribute to a better understanding of what it means to determine the best

alternative of oneself. To substantiate this intuition I shall discuss in this section three characteristic features of management as an activity. Doubts about the plausibility of my picture, as these might be raised by those working in other research traditions, will be postponed until the final section.

Management has been characterised in many different ways.¹⁶ Yet, it is rather easy to identify three constantly recurring themes in most characterisations of management as an activity. Whenever there is room for management there is a process taking place that can go better or worse and managing this process means (1) making efforts that (2) contribute to (3) the improvement of the process.

Firstly, the efforts made by the manager can be manifold, but obviously they will entail activities to do with monitoring the process (acquiring relevant knowledge) and regulating the process (planning, organizing and controlling when the process is typically a matter of shared intentional activity, or influencing and manipulating when the process is typically a matter of natural, law-governed activity).

The assumption is, secondly, that these efforts can be effective: it should be possible for the manager to contribute to the way in which the process takes place. Monitoring an earthquake is not a managerial job; but regulating the lava streams to reduce the damage is.

Finally, managing is always a normative affair. It is directed at improving the process, seeing to it that it goes better rather than worse. This is often interpreted in terms of goals to be achieved. Such goals need not be thought of as end-results of the process, as if process and goal are sequentially related in time. Processes can realize or constitute their goals by reaching a certain quality in the way in which they take place. A song, for instance, can be thought of as the goal of a process in which musicians cooperate

¹⁶ Mintzberg (1973)

successfully. But in such a case the goal is not a state of affairs that remains once the process is over. The goal exists in the process having a certain quality, and ‘exists in’ can be interpreted here in many ways.¹⁷

In talking about identity management the above characterisation raises a couple of questions. First we need to be clear about the process involved, and about its relation to identity as its result or goal. Then we need to be clear about what monitoring this process means and requires, and about the ways in which efforts can be made, and by who, to influence the process in positive ways. And then, of course, we need to be clear about the normativity involved. What does it mean for the process in question to go better or worse?

The basic idea captured by my wish to appropriate the phrase ‘identity management’ for the task of determining the best alternative of oneself is the idea that living a life can insightfully be understood as a process to be managed, a process that involves, at least from time to time, solving practical problems by making difficult choices and that is related to its identity as its goal or *telos*. This gives us an idea of the process involved in identity management: a human life. It gives us also an idea of the monitoring and of the effective efforts involved: human lives do not just happen or take place: they are lived, and living a life means, at least once in a while, facing practical problems, and solving them by determining the best alternative of oneself. Finally, it gives us an idea of how identity is involved in living a life: as the goal or *telos* of a life. This claim -- that the identity involved in living a life has a crucial normative role to play in the process -- is no doubt the most obscure and controversial part of the picture I try to develop and defend. I will return to it in the next section.

¹⁷ One can think of emergence, realisation, constitution, supervenience, etc. I prefer to remain silent here on what would be the best interpretation.

The verb “to determine” is as complex and multi-faceted as the verb “to manage”. The verb has a long philosophical history¹⁸ that allows us to identify an intrinsic ambiguity in the activity, related to another ambiguity in the domains of application involved.

Clarifying these ambiguities might help in pointing out how management as an activity can be mapped onto determination as an activity.

The basic ambiguity in the verb “to determine” concerns the distinction between ‘making’ and ‘finding’. A detective’s job can serve as a paradigm. When a detective determines what is the case, we take this to mean that he *discovers* what is the case. But this standardly involves that he *creates* an intelligible pattern that allows him to reconstruct the causal history of the phenomena to be explained. So, part of the determination is a matter of *finding* a real pattern out there: the causal history connecting a series of events to a set of results. But another part of the determination is a matter of *making* an intelligible pattern: the narrative that makes sense of the results as produced by a history. Sorting out the finding and the making bit by distinguishing between the domains of reality and intelligibility is appealing, but might be misleading as well, especially in those cases where an object’s reality is intrinsically connected to the object’s intelligibility. I believe this to be the case in matters of minded agency. Think about *homo faber* examples to see that a reverse mapping might sometimes be intuitively just as plausible. Consider the example of a young toddler trying to build a tower with blocks of different sizes. To succeed in *making* a tower it seems the toddler should *discover* the intelligibility of gravitational patterns. The structure of such an example is rather similar to the structure of the detective example. There is ‘making’ and ‘finding’ involved, as well as domains of reality and intelligibility. But now the intelligibility is not made, but the reality is, by finding the intelligibility. Ordinary language might seem to connect the verb “to

¹⁸ Cf Bransen (1991)

determine” more straightforwardly to the detective’s job than to the toddler’s job, but it seems the verb is used correctly in *homo faber* cases, especially in the designing phase. As we say, an architect has to determine the details of a building plan, and a novelist has to determine what to write, and this seems to be just as much a matter of *discovering* an intelligible story as of *making* it up.

I do not intend to solve these ambiguities one way or another. Instead, I am happy to point them out and to use them in order to clarify the variety of activities associated with the attempt to determine the best alternative of oneself. It seems to me that in discussing a person’s self or identity we should accept that the ambiguities involved in the process are intrinsic to it. That is, I should like to argue that we cannot distinguish neatly between the ontology of the self and its intelligibility, nor between the activity of finding and of making. Determining the best alternative of oneself, I claim, is something we do, and can do, and know how to do, even if we cannot at a theoretical level give a non-ambiguous account of what such an activity consists in.

Even so, we can insightfully describe this activity as identity management, or at least I shall try to do so here. Managing, as said, involves monitoring a process, and regulating it by influencing the quality or the direction of the process, such that its goal is better achieved. In the case of identity management this means monitoring a life, and living it, precisely at those moments where living that life requires an interpretation of the direction the life should take, i.e. of this life’s telos. Such moments are the paradigmatic practical problems, that feature prominently in most work on free will, and that always seem to involve difficult choices.¹⁹ These are the moments that seem to introduce

¹⁹ Think of Sartre’s young man who faced the difficult choice of staying home to care for his mother or joining the army to fight for his country (Sartre, 1946), Friedman’s housewife willing to pursue a career of herself but also willing to stay home to care for her children (Friedman, 1986), Frankfurt’s unwilling addict who wants to take a drug but also wants to refrain from taking it (Frankfurt, 1971), Bransen’s Muslim girl who likes to dance and have fun at school parties, but who also wants to be a good daughter to her father (Bransen, 2000).

themselves by means of the question “What should I do?”, and that I should like to recast by taking them to be asking “Who should I be?”. Determining the best alternative of oneself in such a situation implies on my proposal the attempt both to discern these alternatives and to seek unselfconscious and empathic access to their first-personal perspectives. Whether or not this amounts to discovering these perspectives or creating them, and whether or not this should be understood as a psychological exercise in the domain of intelligibility or a metaphysical exercise in the domain of reality I prefer to leave open. It is in any case a creative achievement of the imagination, guided by and governed by the normativity I have so far merely hinted at by speaking of identity as the telos of a life.²⁰ Of course, there are many ways in which such a process of identity management might be distorted in particular cases. People can fail to monitor their lives and lack appropriate self-knowledge. They can deceive themselves. Their imagination might be limited, and they might lack the kind of caring and scaffolding environment that we often seem to need to be able to engage in productive processes of identity management. But whether or not such a process might be disturbed by whatever sort of external contingency, I shall have to say something more substantial about the normativity in question to be able to identify in a sufficiently precise way what it means for a person to engage in a process of identity management. What makes an alternative of oneself better than another, and, relatedly, in what sense does a life go better when it is lived in the attempt to determine the best alternative?

3. Identity as a deontic relation

²⁰ Cf. Mackenzie (this volume). I see my discussion of identity as a deontic relation (next section) as an alternative to Mackenzie’s attempt to explain that there are norms governing our practical identity that constrain the external perspective that enables us to evaluate the transformative power of our imaginative projections.

A crucial feature of my account of practical identity is the prominent role that it gives to practical problems. The idea is not, of course, that living a life is an agony that takes us from problem to problem. Rather, the idea is that questions of identity merely matter when the flow of one's life gets stuck, and in addition -- importantly -- that understanding how one can regain the flow of one's life in such difficult situations is highly relevant to clarifying our understanding of practical identity. The prominence of practical problems provides us not only with a range of useful concepts to understand identity: actual subject and notional subjects, unselfconscious and empathic access, determination as a multiply ambiguous activity, identity management as directed at the telos of one's life. It also provides us with an explanation of why understanding personal identity involves both a story of identity as a relation and of identity as essential characterisation.²¹ This is so, because on the account proposed here identity is both a deontic relation between an actual subject and its alternatives and, at the same time, the motivational-cum-evaluative essence that governs this relation as the telos of the person's life. Let me explain.

To say that the relation between an actual subject and its alternatives is deontic is to say that the subjects in question are committed or entitled to share their first-personal perspectives. Thinking of this relation as deontic allows us to capture what seems to be the case with respect to this relation from both the actual subject's perspective at the time the practical problem is pressing, and the best alternative's perspective at the time the problem is solved and the flow of life regained.

Firstly, the introduction of alternatives of oneself is motivated by the person's facing a difficult choice, a choice that is bound to have an impact on the course and character of

²¹ On my account, then, the reidentification question and the characterisation question as identified and distinguished by Marya Schechtman (Schechtman, 1996, 1-2; 68-69) are more deeply connected than Schechtman's distinction seems to allow. I guess this also means that I disagree with David Velleman about whether or not we should distinguish between metaphysical, psychological and agentic questions concerning self or identity (Velleman, 2006, 3-9). However, I don't have the space to argue for this here.

the person's life. The fact that the choice is difficult, that the person is confronted with a practical problem reveals -- as has been argued convincingly by Taylor²² -- that the situation is governed by an underlying normativity that requires articulation. That is, the situation presents itself to the actual subject as precious: each option is such that choosing against it will be costly. That means each option is valuable: there are *prima facie* compelling reasons to take either course of action. In my terminology this will be reformulated by saying that the actual subject seems to have a *commitment* to share both alternatives' perspectives. Thus, to use a famous example, it seems to be the case, from the actual subject's point of view, that Sartre's young man is both committed to share the perspective of the alternative of himself who is wholeheartedly willing to join the Resistance and the perspective of the other alternative of himself who is wholeheartedly willing to stay with his old, ill mother. That the choice is difficult, that there are important, forceful reasons as well as agent-regret and agent-satisfaction on both sides of what is to be done, shows that the relation that holds between actual subject and notional subjects is a normatively significant one, a relation best described as deontic.

Secondly, from the point of view of the notional alternatives of oneself the relation appears in a different, but still importantly deontic guise. The alternatives should be imagined as wholeheartedly in favour of only one of the available courses of action, and as successful in reconciling from their point of view the balance of their reasons with the actual subject's *prima facie* reasons. As such the alternatives will appear as *entitled* to unselfconsciously and empathically share the actual subject's first personal perspective. This entitlement will be based, as discussed above, on a specific interpretation of the crucial features of the actual subject's motivational and evaluative profile. The idea is too, and the hope for the person is such, that in managing his identity he will be able to

²² Taylor 1976, 1977.

determine which of these alternative notional subjects is *more* entitled to share the actual subject's perspective, in virtue of providing a better interpretation of the telos of the person's life. The one that is more entitled is the one that's the best, that will contribute most to the flourishing of the person's life, or, using a notion introduced above, to the success of achieving the telos of the person's life.

The resulting picture is this. The actual subject's perspective on his predicament is such that he is *committed* to unselfconsciously and empathically share the perspectives of two (or more) incompatible alternatives of himself. That is why his identity is at risk in the practical problem, and why he needs to engage in identity management. In contrast, the notional subjects' perspectives on the course of their life is such that they are both *entitled* to unselfconsciously and empathically share the perspective of one and the same actual subject. When the person imagines what the world and his stance towards it look like from the perspective of the alternatives of himself, he will be able to find the means to relativize his commitments, and should get the opportunity to act on his entitlements and solve his practical problem.

The main question is, of course, what criterion a person will be able to use to decide between his alternatives, i.e. to determine which one is the best. How are we to determine which interpretation of the telos of a life is the better one? The account developed so far gives us some hints. For one thing, the account highlights the importance of practical problems as necessitating identity management. Questions of identity, I have stressed, matter, and perhaps even *merely* matter, in cases where the indeterminacy of one's identity interrupts the flow of one's life. This gives us a clue: identity management is successful if it succeeds in eliminating practical problems, i.e. if it succeeds in creating a continuous peace of mind, and, thereby, a life in flow. This suggestion requires careful attention. There are many ways to eliminate practical problems and to save one's peace of mind. Two obvious extremes suggest themselves.

On the one hand we can think of persons that are so narrow-minded, or insensitive, that they altogether fail to recognize practical problems. Such persons are incapable of experiencing normative dilemmas. We might use the philosophical notion of a wanton to characterise such persons. On the other hand we can think of persons that are so fully in control of themselves, so powerfully decisive, that they can always resolve practical problems at a stroke, by firmly picking an option and wholeheartedly sticking to their choice.²³ In both extremes the peace of mind is unrelated to the experience of regaining the flow of one's life, to the efforts made by engaging in identity management, to success as an achievement.

Avoiding these extremes emphasizes that the criterion of peace of mind is a seriously situated, local, contingent criterion. It differs from the kind of criterion proposed by people working in a Kantian tradition, such as Carol Rovane's "overall rational unity", although it shares the normative, or deontic interpretation of identity.²⁴ It is congenial to narrative accounts of personal identity, although it emphasizes, perhaps more than most narrative accounts²⁵, that the telos of a life has normative import, that a person is not entitled to live every life that is narratively possible. The criterion proposed takes into account as relevant (1) the particular features of the motivational and evaluative profile of the person as these are the result of whatever normatively relevant development,²⁶ (2) the particular features of the practical problem at hand as these give rise to the determination of relevant alternatives of oneself, and (3) the particular features of all other agents involved in the problematic situation as these may respond to the person's

²³ Compare this to Frankfurt's observation about wholeheartedness as a matter of self-satisfaction that "the essential non-occurrence [of any interest in making changes to the condition of one's psychic system] is neither deliberately contrived nor wantonly unselfconscious." Frankfurt (1992, 105).

²⁴ Rovane (1998).

²⁵ Cf. Schechtman (1996, 135), Velleman (2006, 221-3).

²⁶ This may imply the biological evolution of the person's human nature, the cultural history of the person's conceptual and normative schemes, as well as the personal development of the individual's biography.

deliberations by asking further reasons. Each of these factors will influence the balance of reasons.

The emphasis on taking the perspective of the alternatives of oneself provides us with an interesting, and I think important, appreciation of peace of mind as a criterion for successful identity management. It also helps in distinguishing this criterion from Frankfurt's criterion of wholeheartedness, or at least in clarifying a less plausible from a more plausible interpretation of what seems to be involved in wholeheartedness. Taking the perspective of the alternatives of oneself allows us to experience the balance of reasons not as accomplished in a forward-looking way in the act of deliberation, but as entertained in a backward-looking way in the experience of proceeding with one's life. The balance of reasons finds expression then in a balance of agent-regret and agent-satisfaction.

This allows us to distinguish between wholeheartedness as a characteristic of an agent's perspective *prior to the fact*, and wholeheartedness as a characteristic of an agent's perspective *after the fact*. The first kind of wholeheartedness invokes the slightly misleading impression of decisionism also often associated with Frankfurt's earlier work on identification.²⁷ The latter kind of wholeheartedness, as I've used it throughout this paper to characterize the perspective of an alternative of oneself, is felt rather than made up, and shows itself in the peace of mind that results from an optimal balance of agent-satisfaction over agent-regret. It is the kind of wholeheartedness Frankfurt once construed as "tantamount to the enjoyment of a kind of self-satisfaction".²⁸

I am unsure whether peace of mind as I have discussed it here is just the same criterion Frankfurt has in mind in talking about wholeheartedness. On the one hand I see a bit of a distance between my story and Frankfurt's in that wholeheartedness appears to be

²⁷ See Bransen (1996).

²⁸ Frankfurt (1992), 105.

much of a *factum*, simply given in the structure of the will, something that cannot be managed and with respect to which it is unclear whether there is room for learning and development.²⁹ On my account, however, peace of mind is something one can strive for. It cannot be made up, *at will*, as we say, suggesting the arbitrariness of sheer willpower. But we can strive for it, and might learn to develop our capacities for it, by attempting to find access to the perspective of a deliberately onesided, yet wholehearted, alternative of ourselves, and to be sensitive to whether or not the balance of agent-regret and agent-satisfaction allows this alternative to regain the flow of our life. And on the other hand my story seems to differ from Frankfurt's in that there is a real role for others, on my account, in identity management. Other people will often play a role in generating practical problems, as well as in disturbing or warranting the person's peace of mind. Both roles are actually two sides of the same coin. Other people are interlocutors; they give and ask for reasons. As such they are present too in a variety of ways in the imaginative process of discerning and determining alternatives of oneself. This gives my story an externalistic tone, opening up as relevant the question of recognition.³⁰

4. Conflicting research traditions?

Let me sum up. I have suggested to run two questions together: "What should I do?" and "Who should I be?". I have argued that the context of deliberative agency provides useful conceptual tools for a plausible account of personal identity. And I have argued, the other way around, that paying attention to the question of personal identity may provide the best reasons for action in difficult situations. The resulting picture of identity management, however, might seem to conflict with what seems to be rather

²⁹ Frankfurt (1992), 104.

³⁰ I mention this in passing. I say something below on externalism, but nothing on recognition. See for this interesting theme Joel Anderson's work, e.g. Anderson & Honneth (2005).

commonsensical in two research traditions that, unlike the one I am working in, became a home for the phrase ‘identity management’.

I should like to say something about these other research traditions in this final section in order to defend my appropriation of the phrase ‘identity management’. And I think I should. After all the phrase was coined by Ervin Goffman in the late fifties of the previous century to denote what people do when they present themselves to their fellow human beings in everyday life.³¹ Continental, postmodern philosophers interested in the deconstruction of the subject of self-consciousness, as well as social and behavioural scientists mainly interested in processes of self-regulation have taken up the phrase from Goffman, and have done much to develop accounts of identity management along Goffmanian lines. In the light of these well-established research traditions I should at least try to explain my own use as congenial where possible and as justifiedly revisionary where needed.

4.1. Identity management strategies, impression management, self-determination, and personal identity as *telos*

Identity management has been widely studied, under an array of labels, by social and behavioural scientists over the last couple of decades.³² The literature and the variety of approaches are too extensive to say anything sensible about general assumptions underlying this research. But in order to situate my account of personal identity management as developed in this paper in relation to empirical psychological accounts, it is useful to distinguish between (1) ‘social identity management’, (2) ‘impression management’ and (3) ‘self-determination’.

³¹ Goffman (1956).

³² See Leary & Tangney (2003). Schenkler (1980), Leary & Kowalski (1990), Niens & Cairns (2003).

The first phrase is used within the context of social identity theory³³, according to which people don't have personal identities, but have identities in virtue of belonging to groups. Identity management strategies are within this context understood as processes through which individuals make choices to cope with threats to their identity due to their belonging to multiple, potentially conflicting groups. Although there is a potential danger of confusion in my appropriation of the phrase 'identity management' for something completely different, the danger is not likely to be considerable given the fact that I am clearly concerned with personal, not social identity. By restricting my attention to people's personal identities I am not of course denying that these identities have social dimensions; I'm just distinguishing my use of the term 'identity management' from how it is used within the context of social identity theory.

The second phrase denotes the kind of self-presentational activities that play a crucial role in Goffman's original study. The tendency nowadays is to make a further distinction between two types of activity that were taken together in Goffman's dramaturgical conception of identity management. There is, on the one hand, the activity of controlling information merely in order to influence the impressions formed by an audience without an interest in developing one's own self-understanding, and on the other hand the activity of constructing and integrating identity information available in social contexts in order to develop, identify, and determine a coherent sense of self.³⁴

The former type of activity is now categorised under the heading of impression management.³⁵ It is not the kind of activity in which identity functions as the telos of a life worthy of attention and concern. It is not, that is, the kind of activity I have had anything to say about in this paper. The latter type of activity has in particular become the target of a specific theory, Self-Determination Theory, developed over the past three

³³ Tajfel & Turner (1979).

³⁴ Schenkler (1986).

³⁵ Schenkler (2003).

decades by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan.³⁶ It would be worthwhile to investigate the differences and similarities between my philosophical account of personal identity management and Deci and Ryan's empirical account of self-determination, but this is not the place to do that. For present purposes it will suffice to note that the phrase 'identity management' is not used by Deci and Ryan, and is unlikely to produce obvious misunderstandings. My preference for 'personal identity' rather than 'self', and for 'management' rather than 'determination' (although that is, according to my account, the right characterisation of the key activity personal identity management consists in) is grounded in the following considerations that I mention here only in passing. By using 'personal identity' I aim to present my account as relevant for both the (metaphysical) re-identification question and the (psychological) characterisation question.³⁷ And by using 'management' I aim to emphasize that personal identity requires and is worthy of our attention and concern.

4.2. Identity, performativity, and externalism

Post-structuralist, feminist philosophers have argued for over two decades now that personal identity is a fundamentally embodied and relational feature of human life, and that the Enlightenment idea of an autonomous, purely mental self is unintelligible. For someone such as Judith Butler this entails that identity management can merely be a performative project.³⁸ Butler claims that there is no identity behind expressions of identity. Identity, she argues, "is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."³⁹ On such an understanding identity management is a matter of

³⁶ Deci & Ryan (1991, 2000), Ryan & Deci (2003).

³⁷ I am unable

³⁸ Butler (1990).

³⁹ Butler (1990), p. 33.

public presentation governed by a politics of recognition. Such performances cannot have much to do with my story about apparently purely mentalistic matters. Identity management does not, on such an account, involve interpretations of the normative import of one's motivational and evaluative profile from the point of view of imagined alternatives of oneself. And there is obviously no room in such performances for my story about the unselfconscious and empathic access to imagined points of view.

I should like to argue, however, that the distance between my and Butler's account, and their incompatibility, might be a consequence of an internalistic bias that is implicit in some strands in post-structuralist philosophy. That is, one might think (in fact, mistakenly) that on my account identity management can be divided into three phases: (1) an allegedly public phase in which one is confronted with a practical problem; (2) an allegedly private phase in which one tries to get access to the perspective of imagined alternatives of oneself; and (3) an allegedly second public phase in which one's best alternative solves the practical problem by taking one of the available courses of action. On this interpretation the second phase is crucial to my account and the allegedly private, internal, mentalistic character of this second phase obviously makes my account look obsolete, and dependent on a most implausible conception of the person as an autonomous, selfconscious subject. The internalism read into my account in this way is, however, not implied by my account nor accepted or defended by me. The public-private distinction should not be used in distinguishing different phases in personal identity management. Performativity should not be associated with what happens in overt and public space *as standing over against* a hidden and private mental space. Mental life is deeply heterogeneous, embodied and embedded.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Cf. Wilson (2004), Pettit (1998).

An externalist reading of my account, I should like to suggest, will provide us with the means to explain in what way my story is compatible with what is plausible in poststructuralist emphases on the performative character of identity management, as well as with the means to oppose consequences that diverge too radically, and without sufficient reasons, from what might be called “a deeper metaphysical grammar that has its roots in a common human embodied experience”.⁴¹ That is, in making up his mind a person has a specific first-personal responsibility for and access to his own attitude towards the scenario he finds himself in.⁴² This is so whether or not one sides with Goffman and argues that identity management is deeply and thoroughly a performative matter of presenting oneself to one’s fellow human beings in everyday life. The relevance of a specific first-personal relation to one’s own attitudes should not, and need not, be denied by an appropriate emphasis on the relational, embodied and embedded character of the kind of activity involved in making up one’s mind. That personal identity management involves the attempt to determine the best alternative of oneself, and that this involves an imagined unselfconscious and empathic access to this alternative’s perspective, is perfectly compatible with a strong externalist emphasis on the relational, embedded and embodied character of what such an attempt requires. I should like to stress, in fact, that discerning and determining alternatives of oneself might require a caregiving, scaffolding social environment, in which one can discuss and try out imagined perspectives with friends, parents, counsellors and the like. It is wrong, that is, to think of the dry run as happening off-line. Peace of mind, I should like to suggest, is a response-dependent quality that requires intersubjective recognition.⁴³

⁴¹ Slingerland (2004), 323.

⁴² Cf. Moran (2001).

⁴³ Bransen, 2004a.

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