

The Social Construction of Personal Identity

by

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Abstract

Can metaphysical facts about personal identity, understood as the diachronic identity of a person, be defined without making reference to our social practices? In this dissertation, I argue that personal identity is socially constructed, and therefore that metaphysical facts about personal identity cannot be defined without making reference to our social practices. I develop this argument by critically engaging with Buddhist-informed theories and social constitution theories about personal identity in the philosophy of mind.

Specifically, Buddhist-informed theories suggest that personal identity is socially and conceptually constructed based on our psychophysical continuity. Nevertheless, they claim that facts about our psychophysical continuity, which are metaphysical facts about personal identity, can be defined independently of our social practices. However, I suggest that claiming this only makes meaningful social practices impossible. Building upon social constitution theories of personal identity, I argue that our psychophysical continuity is inextricably connected to our social practices, such that whether an individual meaningfully preserves their psychophysical continuity in part depends on whether there are social resources and support available for self-understanding, self-development, or recovery. For this reason, I suggest that personal identity is socially constructed, and metaphysical facts about personal identity cannot be defined without making reference to our social practices.

This argument implies that the identity of a person is not only a fact to be determined but also something to be facilitated through our collective effort, including our effort to provide better resources and support in our society. I illustrate the implication by discussing the relation between narrative identity and personal well-being with examples of the imposter phenomenon and rationalization. In the end, I suggest two potential research directions for future work. The first

research direction concerns how we may better facilitate personal identity to promote personal well-being. The second research direction concerns how our social infrastructure shapes our cognitive dispositions (such as memory and attention) and emotional identification (such as attachment), and thereby affects our sense of personal identity and well-being.

Lay Summary

In this dissertation, I explore the following question: Can metaphysical facts about personal identity be defined without making reference to our social practices? Traditional theories on personal identity in philosophy of mind often assume an affirmative answer to this question. However, I take the opposite stance. That is, I argue that metaphysical facts about personal identity cannot be defined without making reference to our social practices. This is because our psychophysical continuity is inextricably connected to our social practices in the following manner: whether we meaningfully persist as the same persons through having psychophysical continuity depends, at least partly, on whether there are social resources and support relevant for self-understanding and self-development. This view calls for a deeper understanding of how we may better facilitate personal identity through social resources and support.

Preface

The dissertation is original and independent work by Chieh-Ling Cheng. A version of chapter 5 has been accepted for publication: Cheng, Katherine Chieh-Ling. *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* (2022).

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I Introduction

1.1 Overview

Can metaphysical facts about personal identity, understood as the diachronic identity of a person, be defined without making reference to our social practices? In this dissertation, I argue that persons and personal identity are socially constructed, such that whether an individual persists as the same person through having psychophysical continuity depends, at least partly, on whether there are social support and resources available for self-understanding, self-development, or recovery. Since personal identity is socially constructed in this sense, metaphysical facts about personal identity cannot be defined without making reference to our social practices. I develop this argument by critically engaging with Buddhist-informed theories and social constitution theories about personal identity in analytic philosophy of mind.

There are two possible interpretations of the question “Can metaphysical facts about personal identity be defined without making reference to our social practices?” The first interpretation is that this question concerns whether personal identity can be defined to exhaustively consist in certain metaphysical facts which are defined independently of social practices. The second interpretation is that this question concerns whether personal identity can be defined such that the truth of claims about personal identity are based on certain metaphysical facts which are, themselves, defined independently of social practices. In this dissertation, I primarily focus on the first interpretation of the question rather than the second. However, these two interpretations are not clearly distinguished in the literature, and the discussion of the second interpretation of the question is sometimes taken to have direct bearing on the first. For this reason, discussions about the question “Can metaphysical facts about personal identity be defined without making reference to our social practices?” cannot help but shift between the two interpretations in this dissertation.

Specifically, Buddhist-informed theories, such as Derek Parfit's reductionism and Mark Siderits' Buddhist reductionism, suggest that personal identity is socially and conceptually constructed based on our psychophysical continuity. Nevertheless, they claim that facts about our psychophysical continuity, which are taken to determine the metaphysical facts about our personal identity, can be defined independently of our social practices, such as our practical considerations, which I explain later. This claim involves what I call *the separability assumption*, namely, the assumption that metaphysical facts about personal identity can be defined in separation from our social practices, such as our practical considerations.

I challenge the separability assumption to argue that metaphysical facts about personal identity *cannot* be defined without making reference to our social practices. To challenge the separability assumption is at the same time to consider the scope of metaphysical facts about personal identity, and to consider the scope of metaphysical facts about personal identity is to examine the metaphysical nature of persons. I examine recent social constitution theory,¹ and particularly Schechtman's Person Life View,² to argue that persons are partly constituted by social practices in the sense that whether an individual persists as the same person in part depends on whether there are social resources and support available for self-understanding, self-development, or recovery. Furthermore, understanding personal identity as socially constituted this way shows that personal identity is not only to be determined but also to be facilitated through collective effort.

Here, it is worth mentioning how I understand "practical considerations," since this notion is sometimes understood differently in the literature. In Buddhist-informed theories, as well as

¹ David Braddon-Mitchell and Kristie Miller, "How to Be a Conventional Person*," *The Monist* 87, no. 4 (2004): 457–74; Hilde Lindemann, *Holding and Letting Go: The Social Practice of Personal Identities* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Alfonso Muñoz-Corcuera, "Persistence Narrativism and the Determinacy of Personal Identity," *Philosophia* 49, no. 2 (2021): 723–39.

² Marya Schechtman, *Staying Alive: Personal Identity, Practical Concerns, and the Unity of a Life* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

traditional theories of personal identity in philosophy of mind, which I will discuss later, practical considerations are understood, more restrictively, to include moral responsibility, survival, self-interested concerns, and compensation. In recent social constitution theories, which I discuss in chapter 4, the notion of practical considerations is expanded to include things like being “given a name rather than a number” and being “referred to as ‘who’ instead of ‘what’;” these things do not necessarily fall under the four features described above but are nevertheless important features of persons in our society.³ I believe that the distinction between the restrictive and the expansive notions of practical considerations does not affect the overall arguments in this dissertation, and I will focus on the restrictive notion when discussing Buddhist-informed theories, which is done in chapter 2 and 3, and the expansive notion when discussing social constitution theories, which is done in chapter 4. Nevertheless, the social constructionist view I defend in the end involves the expansive notion.

In understanding practical considerations this way, I adopt the so-called paradigm case approach rather than definitional approach⁴ to the idea of practical considerations. The paradigm case approach is a descriptive approach; it aims to identify a class of activities that are clear examples of practical considerations. This approach has the advantage of accommodating the complexity of our practices rather than assuming a sharp distinction between social practices relevant for personal identity and other forms of practices.⁵

In this chapter, I explain the relevant literature to set the stage for my discussions in the rest of the dissertation. In section 1.2, I explain why I take contemporary Buddhist-informed theories

³ Hilde Lindemann Nelson, “What Child Is This?,” *Hastings Center Report* 32, no. 6 (2002): 33. See also Schechtman, *Staying Alive*, 72.

⁴ Kimberley Brownlee, “Features of a Paradigm Case of Civil Disobedience,” *Res Publica* 10, no. 4 (2004): 337–51.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 338–339.

to be my starting point in developing my argument. In section 1.3, I describe traditional discussions on personal identity in analytic philosophy of mind and explain why I will not delve into those discussions in this dissertation. In section 1.4, I lay out the chapter plans to explain how I will develop a social constructionist view of personal identity, and what its implications are.

1.2 Buddhist-Informed Theories as Revisionist Theories

Contemporary Buddhist-informed theories are theories in analytic philosophy of mind that are closely related to traditional discussions about personal identity in terms of psychophysical continuity, but that nevertheless suggest that personal identity is socially and conceptually constructed. Their claim about personal identity as socially and conceptually constructed make contemporary Buddhist-informed theories a natural starting point for discussing the social construction of personal identity. Furthermore, given their close relation to traditional discussions about personal identity, discussions about contemporary Buddhist-informed theories help to examine assumptions in traditional discussions about personal identity in analytic philosophy of mind.

Furthermore, Buddhist-informed theories are sometimes taken to offer a revisionist account about social practices surrounding personal identity, which suggests that social practices including our practical considerations need to be justified and revised in light of metaphysical facts about personal identity.⁶ The revisionist account receives criticisms from the descriptivist account about social practices surrounding personal identity, most notably provided by Susan Wolf and Christine Korsgaard. This account describes the importance of our practical considerations in contributing

⁶ Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*, Ashgate World Philosophies Series (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015).

to a rich and meaningful life and suggests that our practical considerations have little to do with metaphysical facts about personal identity.⁷ The rich discussions between these two accounts provide conceptual resources for thinking about the relation between metaphysical facts about personal identity and social practices. Since I discuss Buddhist-informed theories in light of Wolf's and Korsgaard's criticisms later in the dissertation, it is worth explaining the tension between the revisionist account and the descriptivist account here, and especially by situating them in their respective philosophical traditions.

The revisionist account primarily includes contemporary Buddhist-informed theories on personal identity, such as Derek Parfit's reductionism⁸ and Mark Siderits' Buddhist reductionism.⁹ Parfit sometimes makes reference to Indian Buddhist philosophy when discussing personal identity, and his reductionism is often compared with relevant theories in Buddhist philosophy.¹⁰ As for Siderits, he is explicit in drawing ideas from Indian Buddhist philosophy to revise Parfit's reductionism. Exactly how Siderits does so will be further explained in chapter 3. Here I only aim to briefly outline the central ideas in the two reductionist views. Also, it is worth mentioning that while Parfit's and Siderits' reductionist views are Buddhist-informed, their reductionist views involve specific interpretations of ideas in particular traditions in Indian Buddhist philosophy. Such interpretations are subject to challenges and do not reflect all the rich and complex traditions in

⁷ The distinction can also be found in Monima Chadha, "Eliminating Selves and Persons," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 7, no. 3 (2021): 273–94.

⁸ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*.

⁹ Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy*.

¹⁰ For more discussions about Parfit's reductionism in relation to Buddhist philosophy, see Matthew Kapstein, "Collins, Parfit, and the Problem of Personal Identity in Two Philosophical Traditions: A Review of 'Selfless Persons' and 'Reasons and Persons,'" *Philosophy East and West* 36, no. 3 (1986): 289–98; Jim Stone, "Parfit and the Buddha: Why There Are No People," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48, no. 3 (1988): 519–32; Steven Collins, "A Buddhist Debate About the Self; and Remarks on Buddhism in the Work of Derek Parfit and Galen Strawson," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 25, no. 5 (1997): 467–93; Stephen Harris, "Altruism in the Charnel Ground: Śāntideva and Parfit on Anātman, Reductionism and Benevolence," in *Ethics without Self, Dharma without Atman: Western and Buddhist Philosophical Traditions in Dialogue*, ed. Gordon F. Davis, Sophia Studies in Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures (Springer International Publishing, 2018), 219–34; Matthew Kapstein, "Collins and Parfit Three Decades On," *Sophia* 57, no. 2 (2018): 207–10.

Indian Buddhist philosophy.¹¹ It is then important not to equate their Buddhist-informed theories with theories in Indian Buddhist philosophy themselves.

According to Parfit's and Siderits' reductionism, a person can be reduced to a continuous series of psychophysical events; the metaphysical reality of a person just consists in a continuous series of psychophysical events. There is nothing else that constitutes their metaphysical existence. What this means is that while we normally think of ourselves as having diachronic identity, in reality there is nothing that grounds or justifies our sense of persistence or personal identity.¹² Our sense of personal identity involves the idea that there is an "I" that exists across time and remains unchanged. However, there is no such thing metaphysically speaking. Instead, there is only a continuous series of psychophysical events, which is constantly changing. A continuous series of psychophysical events, which is constantly changing, is insufficient for personal identity in the metaphysical sense, which is supposed to involve something unchanged. According to Parfit and Siderits, the thing that seems to remain unchanged in our personal identity, namely, an illusory ego that constitutes the essence of a person, is a result of conceptual imposition, and is just a mental representation or a linguistic construction.

While some may claim that the construction of personal identity is important for our practical lives and thereby needs to be valued, reductionists like Parfit and Siderits suggest otherwise. On their views, the fact that personal identity is a mere construction rather than a metaphysical fact shows that belief in personal identity needs to be either discarded or revised, and so do the various personal and social practices associated with it.¹³ Such personal and social practices involve both our prudential concerns and moral practices, which I take to fall under the blanket term "practical

¹¹ For example, see Amber Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy: Metaphysics as Ethics* (Routledge, 2014).

¹² In this dissertation, I use 'personal identity' and 'personal persistence' interchangeably.

¹³ This is the case in part because they believe that such a construction does more harm than good.

considerations.” Parfit believes that our practical considerations, such as self-interested concerns, commonly involve a sense of personal identity. Once we realize that personal identity does not matter, we will, and should, revise our self-interested concerns, such that we see no strict distinction between ourselves and others, and thereby come to engage in utilitarian practices. Siderits echoes this point to suggest that revision of our sense of personal identity leads to a consequentialist rendering of self-interested concerns, such that I think of a future life as *mine* not because I really am the same person as the individual who lives the future life, but merely because thinking this way allows me to promote the utility that I am in a position to promote.¹⁴

The central idea in Parfit’s and Siderits’ reductionism as described above—namely, a clear understanding of our metaphysical nature helps to better revise our practical considerations—comes from a revisionist project in Buddhist philosophy. Such a revisionist project aims to suggest a major change in our ordinary considerations by eliminating “the delusional assumptions that ground many interpersonal relationships including familial ones, such as a false sense of ownership of others and the projection of security and permanence in what is actually an ever-changing dynamic between ever-changing people.”¹⁵ In doing so, it seeks to reduce suffering and promote practices better conducive to the Buddhist conception of liberation, such as the cultivation of compassion and loving-kindness.

Such a revisionist project, however, is not present in the descriptivist account, which primarily includes theories on personal identity in analytic philosophy, such as Korsgaard’s two-standpoint

¹⁴ Parfit’s and Siderits’ views will be further explained in chapter 2 and 3.

¹⁵ Emily McRae, “Detachment in Buddhist and Stoic Ethics: Ataraxia and Apatheia and Equanimity,” in *Ethics without Self, Dharma without Atman: Western and Buddhist Philosophical Traditions in Dialogue*, ed. Gordon F. Davis, Sophia Studies in Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures (Springer International Publishing, 2018), 73–89.

theory¹⁶ and Wolf's "personal identity does matter" view.¹⁷ According to Korsgaard's and Wolf's views, psychophysical facts about persons do not by themselves tell us whether we are justified to have a sense of personal identity, nor do they lend revisionary force for our practical considerations. For Wolf, this is because our sense of personal identity, as well as its associated practical considerations, is integral to a rich and meaningful life regardless of what metaphysical facts about persons may be. Given that personal identity is integral to a rich and meaningful life, personal identity does matter, and the reason for this comes from what we value in our practical lives. Korsgaard accepts this point but argues for it from a Kantian perspective. According to Korsgaard, our practical considerations have to do with what she calls the standpoint of practical reasoning, from which we cannot help but see ourselves as persisting agents. The standpoint of practical reasoning cannot be reduced to what she calls the standpoint of theoretical reasoning, from which we understand our psychophysical constitution. Given that our practical considerations are associated with a distinctive standpoint, they have little to do with facts about the metaphysical constituents of personal identity such as psychophysical continuity.

Wolf's and Korsgaard's views about personal identity can be understood as agreeing with Parfit and Siderits on the idea that personal identity is a conceptual construction, but disagreeing with the idea that such a conceptual construction, along with its associated concerns and practices, needs to be revised in light of metaphysical or psychophysical facts. This is because such a conceptual construction has practical importance, which I further explain in the next chapter, and for this reason needs to be described and preserved rather than revised.

The tension between the revisionist account and the descriptivist account represents a tension

¹⁶ Christine M. Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 18, no. 2 (1989): 101–32.

¹⁷ Susan Wolf, "Self-Interest and Interest in Selves," *Ethics* 96, no. 4 (1986): 704–20.

between the two distinct intuitions about how we should understand personal identity as constructed in relation to our psychophysical constitution. To examine Buddhist-informed theories in light of their critics, which I do in the next chapter, is then at the same time to address such competing intuitions. Furthermore, addressing such competing intuitions helps to shed light on how we may better understand the construction of personal identity.

Here, some may object that the distinction between the revisionist and descriptivist accounts is inaccurate. According to this objection, the main difference between, on the one hand, Parfit's and Siderits' Buddhist-informed theories and, on the other hand, Korsgaard's and Wolf's critiques has to do with whether the ascription of personal identity merely has contingent utility. In Parfit's and Siderits' Buddhist-informed theories, the ascription of personal identity has contingent utility, such that the ascription of personal identity is important for social practices. By contrast, in Korsgaard's and Wolf's critiques, the ascription of personal identity is necessary for social practices as opposed to merely having contingent utility. The classification of Parfit's and Siderits' theories as revisionist, and Korsgaard's and Wolf's critiques as descriptivist, is then problematic, according to the objection.

It is true that Buddhist-informed theories suggest that in Parfit's and Siderits' Buddhist-informed theories, the ascription of personal identity has contingent utility, whereas in Korsgaard's and Wolf's critiques, the ascription of personal identity is necessary for social practices. However, this point seems to only illustrate the revisionist-descriptivist distinction. That is, it is exactly because the ascription of personal identity only has contingent utility that Buddhist-informed theories suggest a need to revise our social practices in relation to personal identity based on relevant metaphysical facts. Furthermore, it is exactly because personal identity is considered necessary for social practices that Korsgaard and Wolf suggest that we should not modify social

practices based on metaphysical facts.

A possible interpretation of the above objection may be that some Buddhist-informed theories may be considered descriptivist to some extent. For example, in Siderits' Buddhist reductionism, which I discuss in chapter 3, accepts that the ascription of personal identity is descriptively important for our social practices, including our moral deliberation. However, an important reason why this point is accepted in Siderits' Buddhist reductionism is that this point does not contradict with metaphysical facts about persons and therefore need not be revised; it is not accepted simply because of reasons from the conventional or practical realm. For this reason, Buddhist-informed theories such as Siderits' view are still better categorized as revisionist accounts.

1.3 Traditional Debates on Personal Identity

While this project has implications for the debates about personal identity, I refrain from delving into the traditional debates between psychological continuity theories and physical continuity theories in the rest of the chapters, even though some of the debates remain in the background of my discussions. In this section, I explain why I do not delve into the traditional debates between psychological and physical continuity theories.

According to the traditional debate about personal identity, personal identity is understood as a matter of *metaphysical identity*, which is a one-to-one, transitive, determinate relation. Since the identity relation here is understood as a metaphysical relation, the identity of a person is taken to be determined by the psychological or physical constitution of the person, and the determination of such a matter is independent of one's personal or social interests, such as one's interest in evading legal punishments for one's past wrongdoings. The issue under debate here is whether personal identity metaphysically construed has primarily to do with our psychological constitution,

or whether it has primarily to do with our physical constitution.

Psychological continuity theories, sometimes called neo-Lockean theories, suggest that the identity of a person has primarily to do with our psychological constitution. In particular, they suggest that personal identity lies in the causal continuity or connectedness between psychological states.¹⁸ For them, whether a person, P₁, at time t₁ and a person, P₂, at time t₂ are one and the same person depends on whether there is some proper psychological causal continuity or connectedness between P₁ and P₂. Furthermore, the idea of proper causal continuity or connectedness is commonly understood in terms of memory or quasi-memory.

By contrast, physical continuity theories suggest that personal identity has primarily to do with our physical constitution. In particular, they define the diachronic identity of a person in terms of the causal continuity or connectedness between physical or biological states.¹⁹ For them, whether P₁ at time t₁ and P₂ at time t₂ are one and the same person depends on whether there is some proper physical causal continuity or connectedness between P₁ and P₂. The most prominent physical continuity theory in recent years is animalism,²⁰ which suggests that we are animals, and that our diachronic identity consists in our biological persistence.

Neo-Lockean theories are typically taken to better capture some of our important concerns associated with personal identity, such as the practical concerns about moral responsibility and

¹⁸ John Perry, "Can the Self Divide?," *The Journal of Philosophy* 69, no. 16 (1972): 463–88; Sydney Shoemaker, "Persons and Their Pasts," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1970): 269–85; David Lewis, "The Identities of Persons," in *Survival and Identity*, ed. Amelie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 17–40; Sydney Shoemaker and Richard Swinburne, *Personal Identity* (B. Blackwell, 1984).

¹⁹ Paul F. Snowdon, "The Person and the Human Mind: Issues in Ancient and Modern Philosophy," in *Persons, Animals, Ourselves*, ed. Christopher Gill (Oxford University Press, 1990), 83–108; Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Eric T. Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 1997); David Mackie, "Personal Identity and Dead People," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 95, no. 3 (1999): 219–42.

²⁰ Eric T. Olson, *What Are We? A Study in Personal Ontology* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Paul F. Snowdon, *Persons, Animals, Ourselves* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Stephan Blatti and Paul F. Snowdon, *Animalism: New Essays on Persons, Animals, and Identity* (Oxford University Press UK, 2016); Allison Krile Thornton, "Varieties of Animalism," *Philosophy Compass* 11, no. 9 (2016): 515–26; Andrew M. Bailey and Peter Van Elswyk, "Generic Animalism," *Journal of Philosophy*, forthcoming.

personal survival.²¹ According to neo-Lockean theories, we are concerned about personal identity because we are concerned about whether P₂ at time t₂ can be held morally accountable for something done by P₁ at some previous point in time, or whether P₁ at t₁ can be reasonably claimed to survive as P₂ at t₂. Nevertheless, for neo-Lockean theorists, the fact that we have practical concerns associated with personal identity does not mean that personal identity is a practical matter. Instead, it only means that our practical concerns are underlain by the metaphysical facts about identity.²² Since personal identity metaphysically construed underlies our practical concerns, neo-Lockean theorists typically define psychological continuity with an eye to such practical concerns, and thereby better explain our important concerns associated with personal identity. Furthermore, neo-Lockean theorists typically emphasize the higher-order psychological capacities of persons, such as self-consciousness and moral agency. Given that such higher-order capacities emphasized by neo-Lockean theorists are critical for practical concerns, it is not surprising that neo-Lockean theories better explain our important practical concerns associated with personal identity.

By contrast, animalists suggest that their theories better explain the relation between the person and non-person stages in typical human development. On their view, while we are always biological organisms, we are not always persons in the neo-Lockean sense. For example, when I am a fetus, or when I enter a permanent vegetative state (PVS), I do not have the relevant psychological capacities to be counted as a neo-Lockean person. Nevertheless, the fetus or the individual in PVS is still “me” in some important sense.²³ By arguing that the non-person fetus or individual in PVS is still “me,” animalists charge neo-Lockean theories with being problematically

²¹ Schechtman, *Staying Alive*; David Shoemaker, “The Stony Metaphysical Heart of Animalism,” in *Animalism*, ed. Stephan Blatti and Paul F. Snowdon (Oxford University Press, 2016), 303–28.

²² This is true except for Derek Parfit, who takes himself as a psychological continuity theorist but claims that personal identity does not matter.

²³ Eric T. Olson, “Was I Ever a Fetus?,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57, no. 1 (1997): 95–110.

committed to person essentialism, namely, the idea that we are essentially persons.²⁴ This commitment is problematic because it implies that we are always neo-Lockean persons and never just animals or biological organisms. However, according to animalists, this implication is simply wrong. Animalists thus maintain that we are more fundamentally animals or biological organisms rather than neo-Lockean persons, and that our diachronic identity lies in our biological persistence. Furthermore, by defining personal identity in terms of biological persistence, animalists claim that personal identity has little to do with our practical concerns.²⁵

The debate between neo-Lockean theories and animalism comes down to two questions. The first question is whether we are more fundamentally animals or neo-Lockean persons,²⁶ and the second question is whether personal identity has primarily to do with our biological persistence or practical concerns. There are ways to address these two questions to move the debate forward. One way is to address the first question by suggesting that the distinction between animals and neo-Lockean persons is problematic, and that neo-Lockean persons are either continuous with²⁷ or constituted by human animals.²⁸ Another way is to address the second question by suggesting a pluralistic notion of personal identity, such that “personal identity” can mean different things in different contexts.²⁹

However, I think the debate can really benefit from a critical examination of the metaphysical understanding of personal identity, namely, the understanding of personal identity as a matter of

²⁴ Olson, *The Human Animal*, 22–24; Eric T Olson and Karsten Witt, “Against Person Essentialism,” *Mind* 129, no. 515 (2020): 715–35.

²⁵ Olson, *The Human Animal*, 70.

²⁶ Lynne Rudder Baker, “What Am I?,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 59, no. 1 (1999): 151–59; David DeGrazia, “Are We Essentially Persons? Olson, Baker, and a Reply,” *The Philosophical Forum* 33, no. 1 (2002): 101–20; Schechtman, *Staying Alive*; Kevin W. Sharpe, “Animalism and Person Essentialism,” *Metaphysica* 16, no. 1 (2015): 53–72.

²⁷ Marya Schechtman, “Personhood and the Practical,” *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 31, no. 4 (2010): 271–83.

²⁸ Baker, “What Am I?”

²⁹ David W. Shoemaker, “Personal Identity and Practical Concerns,” *Mind* 116, no. 462 (2007): 317–57.

metaphysical identity determinable independently of our interests. Several philosophers have criticized such an understanding,³⁰ and I take them to suggest that our conception of personal identity is itself informed by our social practices and practical interests. Given that our conception of personal identity is informed by our practices and interests, it seems what is taken to be a metaphysical fact in the traditional debate is in fact shaped by our practices and interests. It is then futile to try to determine what constitutes personal identity without trying to understand how the notion of personal identity is shaped by our various practices and interests.

By taking seriously the idea that the notion of personal identity is shaped by our practices and interests, I believe we need to move towards the idea that personal identity, even in its metaphysical sense, is practically informed. That is, we need to move from the idea that personal identity is something determinable independently of our interests to the idea that personal identity is something shaped by our practices and interests. For this reason, I focus on the literature that discusses this topic more directly, namely, the revisionist account and the descriptivist account as explained in the previous section. Both the revisionist and the descriptivist accounts agree that our sense of personal identity is shaped by our practices and interests, but they disagree on whether our sense of personal identity as shaped by our practices and interests is justified. The revisionist account claims that since there is no personal identity at the metaphysical level, our sense of personal identity as practically informed is not justified. By contrast, the descriptivist account claims that our sense of personal identity as practically informed is justified regardless of whether there is personal identity at the metaphysical level.

Nevertheless, physical continuity theorists, and most psychological continuity theorists, may not welcome the idea of personal identity as practically informed. For them, either it is the case

³⁰ Wolf, “Self-Interest and Interest in Selves”; Korsgaard, “Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency”; Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Cornell University Press, 1996).

that an individual at t_1 is one and the same person as an individual at t_2 , or it is the case that they are different. There should be some metaphysical criterion that offers a determinate answer to the question of personal identity regardless of our practical considerations.

The question, however, is whether it is indeed the case that there is or should be such a metaphysical criterion. As critics have pointed out, neo-Lockean theories are motivated by practical considerations such as the interests in moral responsibility and self-concerns.³¹ Neo-Lockean theorists understand persons as self-conscious beings and define personal identity in terms of psychological continuity primarily because they seek to explain what grounds our moral responsibility and self-concerns. It is then already implicit in neo-Lockean theories that the notion of personal identity is practically informed. A similar point can be made about animalism. Animalism is motivated by the practical interests in our existence and development as material beings. Proponents of animalism understand persons as animals or biological organisms and define personal identity in terms of biological persistence primarily because they seek to explain the existence and development of a material being. It is implicit in animalist theories that the notion of personal identity is practically informed by the interest in explaining the development of a material being. Given that both neo-Lockean theories and animalism are themselves motivated by practical considerations, it is problematic for proponents of those views to claim that there is or should be some metaphysical criterion that helps to determine personal identity regardless of what our practical considerations are.

Neo-Lockean theorists and animalists may argue that it is one thing to claim that a metaphysical theory of personal identity is motivated by practical considerations, but it is quite another to claim that personal identity is itself shaped by, or dependent upon, practical

³¹ Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*.

considerations. For example, a virologist may be motivated by the desire to prevent infectious diseases, but this does not imply that viruses are then dependent upon practical considerations. To show that personal identity is itself shaped by, or dependent upon, practical considerations, one needs to provide some further evidence or argument.

While the distinction between the two claims makes sense for non-human objects, I do not think it applies to discussions about human beings, and even other beings with self-consciousness. When it comes to self-conscious beings, the practical considerations that shape a theory tend to also shape the things under theorization as well. This is the case because self-conscious beings have the ability and tendency to make true what is ascribed to them. For instance, individuals who are perceived to be powerless or inferior may internalize this conception and thereby behave accordingly. For instance, a researcher that is motivated by the desire to understand the situations of such individuals, or the goal to design better social policies for them, may unwittingly make the individuals feel (even more) powerless or inferior through carrying their pre-conception into their interactions with the individuals so described. Further discussions on this point can be found in my social constructionist view in chapter 4. However, entities without self-consciousness, such as viruses, are indifferent to how they are described by theorists. A virus does not internalize whatever preconceptions a virologist has of it.

Due to the ability and tendency of self-conscious beings to make true what is ascribed to them, theories of personal identity as motivated by practical considerations can inform how a person sees and constitutes themselves as diachronic beings, thereby making personal identity itself dependent upon practical considerations. For this reason, the claim that a metaphysical theory of personal identity is motivated by practical considerations immediately invites the concern that personal identity is itself shaped by, or dependent upon, practical considerations. But even if these two

claims do have some important differences, the discussions that personal identity is a practical matter can still shed light on the idea that a metaphysical theory of personal identity is motivated by practical considerations, thereby benefiting the traditional debate between psychological and physical continuity theories.³²

Thus, even though I do not delve into the traditional debate between psychological and physical continuity theories in this dissertation, the discussions in this dissertation can still help to move the traditional debate forward, namely, by inviting psychological and physical continuity theorists to critically examine their theoretical assumptions.

1.4 Chapter Plans

In this section, I explain what I do in each of the chapters. It is worth mentioning that some of these chapters, such as chapter 4 and chapter 5, were initially written in the format of stand-alone articles with the goal of journal submission. Nevertheless, the discussions in these chapters are connected to one another as well as to the rest of the dissertation.

In chapter 2, I start with Parfit's reductionism, which is an important Buddhist-informed theory of personal identity in analytic philosophy of mind. Parfit's reductionism suggests that personal identity is socially and conceptually constructed based on our psychological continuity. Nevertheless, it claims that facts about our psychophysical continuity, which are metaphysical facts about personal identity, can be defined independently of our social practices. For this reason, it involves what I call the separability assumption. Accepting the separability assumption leads to several problems for Parfit's reductionism. Specifically, Parfit's reductionism, as a revisionist account about social practices surrounding personal identity, suggests that metaphysical facts

³² In this way, my claim that practical considerations constitute personal identity can be taken to offer an alternative theory to this traditional debate.

about personal identity lend a justificatory force for practical considerations, in part because such facts can be determined without making reference to practical considerations. Nevertheless, I suggest that Parfit's view faces several challenges: it (1) fails to satisfactorily explain why the justification of our practical considerations depends on the metaphysical nature of persons, (2) discounts the standpoint that is constitutive of our practical considerations, (3) is preceded by a normative assumption even though it is presented as neutral to normative issues, and (4) entails the impossibility of meaningful practices. Discussions of such challenges are based on relevant criticisms from the descriptivist account, such as Wolf's and Korsgaard's views.

In chapter 3, I discuss Siderits' Buddhist reductionism. Compared to Parfit's reductionism, Siderits' Buddhist reductionism explicitly draws on conceptual resources from Buddhist philosophy to argue for reductionism about personal identity. In doing so, Siderits presents Buddhist reductionism as a better version of reductionism, such that it better explains how personal identity can be constructed on the basis of psychophysical continuity, with facts about our psychophysical continuity defined independently of our social practices. He also suggests that Buddhist reductionism helps to address worries from descriptivists, as explained in the previous chapter. However, I suggest that Siderits' Buddhist reductionism not only does not fully address worries from descriptivists but also faces a problem of its own, which has to do with the impossibility of meaningful social practices. That is, Siderits' Buddhist reductionism has the consequence that there cannot be meaningful social practices. Furthermore, the reason why Siderits' Buddhist reductionism does not fully address worries from descriptivists, and why it further faces problems of its own, is that Siderits' Buddhist reductionism also involves the separability assumption just like Parfit's reductionism does. In the end, I suggest that we need to challenge the separability assumption.

In chapter 4, I challenge the separability assumption by arguing that personal identity is socially constructed and therefore metaphysical facts about personal identity *cannot* be defined without making reference to our social practices. I argue that personal identity is socially constructed in the sense that whether an individual persists as the same person through their psychophysical continuity in part depends on whether there are social resources and support available for self-understanding, self-development, or recovery. Furthermore, understanding personal identity as socially constituted this way shows that personal identity is not only to be determined but also to be facilitated through collective effort.

In chapter 5, I discuss an implication of the social constructionist view of personal identity: understanding personal identity as socially constructed allows us to examine how we may better construct self-narratives to constitute our personal identity in relation to personal well-being; it also urges us to consider how the work to better construct self-narratives requires collective effort, such as the effort to change relevant social infrastructure. I explain this point by considering how self-narratives can get in the way of our personal well-being when affective identification leads to inflexible self-images, illustrated with the example of imposter syndrome. I propose that a flexible self-image indicates healthy self-narratives, namely, self-narratives with constructive affective identification; furthermore, relevant social infrastructure needs to be in place to allow individuals to foster such healthy self-narratives.

In chapter 6, I summarize my discussions to indicate some future research directions, which have to do with the following questions: (1) how social infrastructure shapes cognitive dispositions and affective identification, (2) how changes in our cognitive dispositions and affective identification affect our personal identity and personal well-being, and (3) how we may better facilitate personal identity to promote personal well-being.

II Personal Identity as a Construct and the Separability Assumption

2.1 Overview

In chapter 2, I examine the question of whether metaphysical facts about personal identity can be defined without making reference to our social practices through discussing Parfit's reductionism and its critics. I argue that the problems with Parfit's reductionism cast doubt on the idea that normative practices depend on our metaphysical views about persons.

In section 2.2, I explain Parfit's reductionism about personal identity, and how Parfit's reductionism involves the separability assumption. In section 2.3, I explain what Parfit's reductionism implies for our social practices, such as our practical considerations. From section 2.4 to section 2.6, I draw on Wolf's and Korsgaard's views to indicate problems with Parfit's reductionism: such problems have to do with the justification for normative practices, the standpoint constitutive of normative and prudential reasoning, and the impossibility of practical considerations. In section 2.7, I suggest that Wolf's and Korsgaard's views nevertheless also involve the separability assumption; furthermore, this assumption makes their views unable to properly explain the relation between metaphysical facts about personal identity and practical considerations. In section 2.8, I lay out two possible ways to move forward.

2.2 Parfit's Reductionism

According to Parfit, a person is reducible to some psychological relation. In particular, what matters in the continued existence of a person lies in what he calls *Relation R*. On his view, Relation R is *psychological continuity and/or connectedness with any cause*. Psychological connectedness is "the holding of particular direct psychological connections," where direct psychological connections include direct memories, an intention's leading to a later action, and the continuing

existence of a psychological feature.³³ As for psychological continuity, it is “the holding of overlapping chains of strong connectedness,” where strong connectedness means enough direct psychological connections.³⁴ Psychological continuity can be viewed as a stronger form of psychological connectedness.

The psychological connections involved in psychological continuity and connectedness are essentially causal connections. For Parfit, such causal connections do not have to be *normal* causal connections, in the sense of how human psychology normally works. Instead, Parfit claims that such causal connections can be *any kinds of* causal connections, in the sense that in a thought experiment scenario, a replica of a person *P*, whose psychological connections with *P* are artificially created, can still be viewed as psychologically continuous with *P*.

To be clear, Parfit’s theory, in reducing a person to some psychological relation, does not deny that a person has a body; nor does it deny that the *actual existence* of a person tends to depend on the existence of a body. Moreover, it does not deny that *epistemologically* speaking, we tend to determine the continued existence of a person based on the continued existence of bodily features. What Parfit’s theory claims, instead, is that the nature of a person, or what a person’s continued existence essentially involves, may be different from what a person’s actual existence tends to involve, or from how a person’s continued existence tends to be determined in common practices.

When it comes to the nature of a person, Parfit claims, it has to do only with psychological continuity and/or connectedness, rather than bodily or physical continuity. This point can also be seen in Parfit’s claim that psychological continuity and/or connectedness can be mediated by *any*

³³ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 205-206.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 206. Parfit admits that it is difficult to define to what extent direct psychological connections are *enough* psychological connections, but he nevertheless stipulates that there are enough direct psychological connections “if the number of connections, over any day, is at least half of the number of direct connections that hold, over every day, in the lives of nearly every actual person.”

cause. Given that the continued existence of a person does not depend essentially on normal psychological causal connections, which are mediated by bodily continuity, bodily continuity is then not essential for the continued existence of a person.

Parfit's theory is then opposed to the physical continuity theories, namely, theories that define a person in terms of some physical or bodily continuity.³⁵ Nevertheless, Parfit's psychological continuity theory is similar to a physical continuity theory in that both are committed to an *impersonalist* project. By adopting an impersonalist project, Parfit suggests that "[t]hough persons exist, we could give a *complete* description of reality without claiming that persons exist."³⁶ In other words, Parfit believes that the reality about persons can be explained by some impersonal descriptions without anything missing. Furthermore, for Parfit, such impersonal descriptions are descriptions about Relation R. By describing the existence of some psychological continuity and/or connectedness, Parfit claims that he offers a complete explanation about the existence of a person.

But unlike physical continuity theorists, as well as most other psychological continuity theorists, Parfit argues that adopting an impersonalist project implies accepting the idea that *personal identity does not matter*. If impersonal facts, such as facts about psychological continuity, are all there are when it comes to the continued existence of a person, then it follows that when one knows about relevant impersonal facts, one already knows everything about the continued existence of a person. It is then not meaningful to insist on asking whether someone at t_1 is identical to someone at t_2 , given that one already knows everything about the existence of the person. Thus, on Parfit's view, personal identity does not matter. Still, this does not mean that questions about personal identity can never be asked. Instead, this only means that the answer to the question about

³⁵ Prominent physical continuity theories in contemporary analytic philosophy see Eric T. Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Paul F. Snowdon, *Persons, Animals, Ourselves* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

³⁶ *Ibid*, 212.

personal identity can be arbitrary. It is in this sense that Parfit claims that the identity of a person can be *indeterminate*, just like the identity of a nation or a club.³⁷

Suppose a club exists for several years and during this time its members hold regular meetings. But for some reason one day the members decide not to gather and hold meetings anymore. Several years later, half of the original club members decide to resume meetings under the same name of the club and the same rules. Since the existence of a club just consists in its members holding meetings, Parfit claims that the club continues to exist. Nevertheless, one can always ask whether those people start a new club several years later, one that is only similar but not identical to the original club, or whether one and the same club is reconvened several years later. While these kinds of questions can be asked, Parfit claims that there are no non-arbitrary answers to these questions. The issue about personal identity is the same.³⁸

Furthermore, the arbitrary identity of the club is even clearer if we also consider the scenario where the other half of the original club members also decide to resume meetings under the same name of the club and the same rules, but they are nevertheless determined to keep their club separate from the club organized by the first half of the original club members. In this case, there would be two clubs with the same name and the same rules, and both of them can be said to be causally continuous with the original club. One can then ask whether both of them are identical to the original club, whether only one of them is identical to the original club, or whether both of them are distinct from the original one. Once again, the answer will be arbitrary. The identity of a person is arbitrary in a similar way.

Controversies arise regarding exactly how to understand Parfit's reductionism about persons

³⁷ Ibid, 213, 240

³⁸ Ibid, 213–214.

and personal identity. For instance, it is unclear exactly what it means to claim that persons do exist, but their diachronic existence just consists in some psychological continuity and/or connectedness. Here, one interpretation is that Parfit's reductionism is committed to a four-dimensionalist perduring view of persons, in which a person is a perduring object that extends over time by having temporal parts.³⁹ On this interpretation, a person as a perduring object really exists, but the existence of such an object just consists in its temporal parts, with one temporal part psychologically continuous or connected with another temporal part. However, it is questionable whether Parfit's reductionism of persons should indeed be interpreted as a four-dimensionalist view about persons. For Parfit, a person is perhaps more like a construct, without determinate or non-arbitrary identity, but a perduring object is usually taken as something that has determinate identity. Furthermore, a perduring object is taken as something that extends through time by having temporal parts, but it is arguable that something can be taken as a temporal part only when there is already an identifiable whole. Given that the existence of a person just consists in some causal continuity of psychological states and there is no non-arbitrary identity of a person, it is questionable whether a person can indeed be said to have temporal parts in a meaningful sense.

Another interpretation, then, is that Parfit's reductionism is committed to the idea that a person is taken as "a construct made up of person-stages,"⁴⁰ where person-stages are subjects of experiences that last for more than a few seconds, are able to carry out meaningful activities, and have ontological status.⁴¹ On this interpretation, a person as an abstract entity really exists, but its

³⁹ See Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*, 55. See also Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Cornell University Press, 1996). It is worth noting that Schechtman initially takes Parfit's reductionist view to be different from the four-dimensionalist views of David Lewis and John Perry, but she later claims that the contrast between the reductionist view and the four-dimensionalist view is perhaps superficial, for "anyone who holds a reductionist view of persons must also hold a four-dimensionalist view." I thus take her as interpreting Parfit's view as a four-dimensionalist view.

⁴⁰ Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*, 55.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 9–12.

existence just consists in the person-stages, with one psychologically continuous or connected with one another. While this interpretation is right in taking a person as a construct, it is still problematic because of how person-stages are construed. Parfit appears to deny that there exist subjects of experiences in any substantial sense. In particular, he suggests that the unity of consciousness, whether it is synchronic or diachronic, does not need to be explained by positing the existence of subjects of experiences, but can instead be explained solely by the fact that different experiential states can be co-conscious.⁴² It then seems that he would claim that the existence of persons consists in psychological continuity or connectedness but not subjects of experiences connected through psychological continuity.

All these points are meant to highlight the complexity of interpreting Parfit's reductionism. This complexity will be relevant when it comes to the discussion of Buddhist reductionism in chapter 3. As I will discuss in chapter 3, Siderits' version of Buddhist reductionism presents itself as a better alternative to Parfit's reductionism, in the sense that it better explains the idea that persons do exist but their existence just consists in some impersonal relations, and it avoids the problems of Parfit's reductionism that will be discussed later in this chapter. Furthermore, the claim about persons and personal identity as constructs in Parfit's reductionism is informed by Indian Buddhist philosophy. Parfit explicitly makes reference to the following passage from Buddhist texts, among others, to show that his reductionism is a view that "Buddha would have agreed," and so his view is "not merely part of one cultural tradition" but may also be "the true view about all people at all times."⁴³

At the beginning of their conversation the king politely asks the monk his name, and

⁴² Parfit, *Reason and Persons*, 250.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 273

receives the following reply: ‘Sir, I am known as “Nagasena”; my fellows in the religious life address me as “Nagasena”. Although my parents gave (me) the name “Nagasena” ... it is just an appellation, a form of speech, a description, a conventional usage. “Nagasena” is only a name, for no person is found here.’⁴⁴

Parfit’s ideas that persons and personal identity are constructs can thus arguably be better understood in Buddhist terms,⁴⁵ which is what Siderits does in his version of Buddhist reductionism. I will discuss Siderits’ version of Buddhist reductionism in chapter 3, and conclude that his version of Buddhist reductionism not only does not avoid the problems of Parfit’s reductionism completely but also faces its own problem.

To sum up, Parfit’s reductionism suggests that (1) a person is reducible to some psychological continuity and/or connectedness, (2) the reality about persons can be explained by impersonal, descriptive, psychological facts without anything missing, and (3) personal identity can be indeterminate or arbitrary. In suggesting so, Parfit’s reductionism is about capturing the nature of persons, understood in terms of physical/psychological relations or organizations but *not* also in terms of the values or interests of persons. In this sense, Parfit’s reductionism involves the separability assumption, which is the assumption that metaphysical facts about personal identity can be determined without making reference to our practical considerations.

⁴⁴ Parfit quotes this passage from Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravada Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 182–83. But this passage is initially from Milindapañha, a Buddhist text written in around the first century B.C. that documents the dialogues between King Milinda, who was an Indo-Greek king, and Nagasena, a Buddhist monk. See Thomas William Rhys Davids, *The Milinda Panha: The Questions of King Milinda* (Jazzybee Verlag, 2017).

⁴⁵ For more discussions about Parfit’s reductionism in relation to Indian Buddhist philosophy, see Collins, “A Buddhist Debate About the Self; and Remarks on Buddhism in the Work of Derek Parfit and Galen Strawson”; Kapstein, “Collins, Parfit, and the Problem of Personal Identity in Two Philosophical Traditions: A Review of ‘Selfless Persons’ and ‘Reasons and Persons’”; Kapstein, “Collins and Parfit Three Decades On.”

2.3. Metaphysical Facts and Practical Considerations

The point that reductionism involves the separability assumption can be further seen in Parfit's idea that reductionism provides justificatory forces for our practical considerations, including our normative and prudential practices. In this section, I explain Parfit's idea that reductionism provides justificatory forces for our practical considerations.

According to Parfit, common views about rationality and morality assume the non-reductionist view of persons. The non-reductionist conception of persons involves the following three components: (1) a person is not reducible to psychological continuity and/or connectedness, (2) the continued existence of a person involves some "further fact" in addition to facts about psychological continuity, and (3) personal identity is determinate.

On Parfit's view, the non-reductionist view of persons leads to certain ideas about self-interest and the separateness of persons. Traditional self-interest theories⁴⁶ commonly assume the following ideas about the rationality of promoting self-interest. A rational person is supposed to make sure that things go as well as possible for themselves. A person would be irrational if they do something with the knowledge that it will make their life worse. And a rational person needs to be *equally* concerned about all the parts of their personal future.⁴⁷ These ideas are grounded in a non-reductionist view of persons, for it is with the belief that one has some special relation with one's personal future, namely, some determinate relation of identity grounded in the so-called "further fact," that one believes that rationality has to do with making sure that things go as well as possible for one's personal future.

Furthermore, people including self-interest theorists commonly think that it is rational to

⁴⁶ According to Parfit, these theories include hedonistic theories, which suggest that well-being depends on having pleasure, desire satisfaction theories, which maintain that well-being depends on satisfying certain desires, and objective list theories, which hold that well-being depends on having some objective goods.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 307.

believe in the deep separateness of persons. In particular, they believe that there is a deep distinction between oneself and others, such that one has a special relation with one's personal future but does not have that kind of special relation with others or their personal futures. On Parfit's view, this idea is also grounded in a non-reductionist view of persons, for it is with the belief that one has some determinate identity over time, which functions to distinguish oneself from others, that one comes to think that it is rational to believe in the deep separateness of persons, where the boundaries between persons are like those between "the squares on a chessboard, dividing what is all pure white from what is all jet black."⁴⁸

These ideas about the rationality of self-interest and the separateness of persons, grounded in the non-reductionist view of persons, further lead to certain moral beliefs. One moral belief is that it is morally permissible (though irrational) for one to intentionally undermine one's future interests. Since according to self-interest theories, a rational being needs to have equal concerns for all the parts of one's personal future, failing to do so is thus irrational. However, since there is a deep separation between oneself and others, one has autonomy with regard to one's own life, as long as by doing so one does not also harm others. Another moral belief is that burdens placed on a person can be compensated and morally outweighed by benefits given to the person later in their life, but cannot be compensated or morally outweighed by benefits given to other persons. Given that there is a deep separation between oneself and others, it does not make sense to claim that one's loss can be compensated by the gain of others.

However, Parfit suggests, it follows from the truth of reductionism that such beliefs about morality and rationality need to be modified. According to Parfit, the truth of reductionism implies the falsity of the non-reductionist view of persons, upon which beliefs about self-interest and deep

⁴⁸ Ibid, 339.

personal separateness depend. He takes the non-reductionist view so described also as a metaphysical view of persons, and for this reason, he takes it to contradict reductionism. Since non-reductionism is false, its associated beliefs about rationality and morality are no longer justified.⁴⁹ Those beliefs and their associated practices thus need to be modified in accordance with a true metaphysical view of persons, namely, reductionism.

In particular, reductionism implies that a person is not rationally required to care equally about all the parts of their personal future. Instead, one can rationally care less about one's distant future. Since reductionism suggests that the continued existence of a person consists solely in psychological continuity and/or connectedness, one's concern about one's personal future can have "a discount rate" corresponding to the degree of psychological connectedness. That is to say, one is rationally justified to care *less* about one's distant future as compared to one's near future, since one's psychological connection with one's distant future is *weaker* compared to one's psychological connection with one's near future.⁵⁰

Furthermore, reductionism implies that it is not rational to believe that there is a deep distinction between oneself and others.⁵¹ Since reductionism suggests that a person is reducible to psychological continuity and/or connectedness, and that one can also have psychological continuity and/or connectedness with other people, one does not have a special relation with one's personal future, a relation that one does not have with other people. While there is still a difference between oneself and others, such a difference is only in degree but not in kind.

These implications further suggest that the claims about autonomy and compensation discussed previously need to be modified. It is no longer the case that it is not morally wrong for

⁴⁹ Derek Parfit, "Comments," *Ethics* 96, no. 4 (1986): 833.

⁵⁰ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 313.

⁵¹ While Parfit does not directly state this, I think that this is clear from his later discussions about paternalism and compensation. *Ibid*, 313, 329-330.

a person to intentionally undermine their future interests, especially when the future interests are not undermined too much. While reductionism allows a person to rationally care less about the distant future, it also suggests that the decrease in their concerns needs to be proportional to the decrease in psychological connectedness. When the discount rate is not proportional to the decrease in psychological connectedness, a person is not acting rationally. What's more, a person is also doing something morally wrong. For people generally agree that it is morally wrong to do something that harms other people's interests, and since it follows from reductionism that there is no deep difference between one's relation to one's personal future and one's relation to others, it is then also morally wrong to do something that harms one's future interests. Paternalism is then justified under such a circumstance.

In addition, it is no longer justified to think that the burdens placed on a person can be compensated and morally outweighed by later benefits given to the person later in their life but cannot be compensated nor morally outweighed by benefits given to other persons. Instead, the burdens placed on a person may or may not be compensated, or morally outweighed, by later benefits given to the person later in their life, depending on whether the decrease in psychological connectedness is properly taken into account.⁵²

All these show that Parfit takes normative and prudential practices to depend on our metaphysical commitments about persons. Common normative and prudential practices are problematic *because* they assume a non-reductionist theory about the nature of persons. Reductionism, as a theory of persons that correctly describes the real nature of persons, serves to modify common normative and prudential practices. A metaphysical theory of persons is not meant to reflect the attitudes that we commonly have (or we commonly think that we should have); nor

⁵² Parfit offers a detailed discussion on compensation, but since this is not my focus here, I will not delve into the discussion. For more discussion, see *ibid*, 336–339.

is it meant to be consistent with our practices. Our metaphysical commitments about persons are the things to which our normative and prudential practices should be responsive, rather than the things that are shaped by our normative and prudential practices.

This point is further illustrated by the impersonalist project of reductionism, explained in the last section. The impersonalist project of reductionism aims to give an impersonal description about the reality of persons that is complete and not circular. Such a project is pursued through reasoning with the use of thought experiments and analogies, without paying attention to the role personhood plays in normative and prudential practices. The idea implicit in the impersonalist project of reductionism is that the truth of a metaphysical view of persons, whatever that means, is independent of normative and prudential practices. Furthermore, it is because a metaphysical view of persons is independent of normative and prudential practices in this sense that it serves as a basis on which common normative and prudential practices are to be examined and modified.

However, it is questionable whether normative and prudential practices indeed depend on our ontological commitments about persons in the sense described above. Some critiques of Parfit's view point in this direction, even though most of them do not directly argue for this point. In what follows, I will focus on the critiques from Susan Wolf and Christine Korsgaard, not only because I think their critiques suggest that normative and prudential practices do not depend on our ontological commitments about persons, but also because their discussions will be useful for engaging with Buddhist reductionism later in chapter 3.

2.4. The Justification for Our Practical Considerations

One influential critique of Parfit's view is Susan Wolf's critique. She disagrees with Parfit by arguing that there is little connection between our practical considerations, such as our normative

and prudential practices, and the metaphysical constitution of a person.⁵³ She argues for this point by suggesting that our practical considerations are justified by their ensuring a good form of life in the practical realm but not by a true metaphysical view of persons. I will explain Wolf's view in what follows. I suggest that her critique shows that Parfit's view remains unsatisfactory, for it does not give a good answer regarding why it is a metaphysical theory of persons, rather than things in the practical realm, that should serve as a primary basis for deciding what normative and prudential practices to adopt.

Wolf develops her argument by focusing on the rational justification for self-interested concerns. According to Wolf, to see what justifies our self-interested concerns, we need to see what self-interested concerns typically involve. On her view, self-interested concerns involve concerns about *a person* that is oneself, as opposed to other psychophysical entities, and concerns about *oneself*, as opposed to others.⁵⁴ Both of the two components of self-interested concerns are justified independently of a metaphysical view of persons, for reasons explained below. Thus, we have reasons to preserve our current practices of self-interested concerns regardless of which metaphysical view of persons is true.

On Wolf's view, we are justified to care about persons as opposed to other psychophysical entities, such as momentary subjects of experiences, for the following two reasons. First, persons have valuable features such as the ability to form diverse ideas and the exhibition of moral virtues. Second, caring about persons enables a good form of life, a life in which meaningful relationships, moral actions, and personal growth are possible. The rational justification for caring about persons comes from the fact that we value the features associated with persons, as well as the fact that we

⁵³ Susan Wolf, "Self-Interest and Interest in Selves," *Ethics* 96, no. 4 (1986): 704–20.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 705.

want to live a good life. Our concerns about persons, regardless of what persons metaphysically are, then have everything to do with “the moral and more generally evaluative conclusions that explain and result from our having the kinds of attachments and interests we do.”⁵⁵

Furthermore, Wolf claims, we care about ourselves rather than others because that is what we do. It is unclear whether we do need justification for it, and it may be impossible, both conceptually and biologically, not to care especially about oneself.⁵⁶ It then does not seem that a metaphysical theory of persons is relevant here. Furthermore, if some justification is needed at all, the justification also comes from what a good form of life is. In other words, we are justified to care about ourselves because doing so leads to a good form of life. It is this latter claim, namely, if some justification is needed at all, the justification also comes from what a good form of life is, that I want to focus on.

This claim, namely, the claim that we are justified to care about ourselves because doing so leads to a good form of life, is plausible because we typically think that people need to be able to take care of themselves to some extent in order for, say, a personal relationship to work. Furthermore, this aspect of self-interested concerns does not necessarily license egoism. She suggests that “[we] have reasons to care about humanity at large and reasons to treat people in certain ways whether we care about them or not.”⁵⁷ In other words, whether or not we in fact care about ourselves and others, we are justified in caring about ourselves and others because doing so leads to a good form of life. In addition, Wolf suggests that once we further examine what makes a life meaningful, which, on her view, is a life with “active engagement in projects of worth,”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid, 713.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 719.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Wolf does not explain why we have such reasons. Her idea may be that caring about humanity at large ensures a good form of life.

⁵⁸ Susan Wolf, *The Variety of Values: Essays on Morality, Meaning, and Love* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 109.

we will find that the distinction between self-interest and the interests of others is blurred, for a worthwhile project is usually a project that promotes not only one's self-interest but also the interests of others, according to Wolf.⁵⁹

Thus, overall, the rational justification for self-interested concerns, including the concerns about persons and the concerns about oneself, has little to do with the metaphysical nature of persons but more to do with what ensures a good form of life. This view presents a serious challenge to Parfit's view, for if self-interested concerns are justified by their practical significance rather than by a true metaphysical view of persons, then Parfit is wrong in claiming that common practices of self-interested concerns need to be modified in light of reductionism. He may still be right in claiming that such practices rest upon a non-reductionist view of persons. However, given that their justification has little to do with metaphysical theories of persons, the point that such practices rest upon a non-reductionist view does not matter, according to Wolf's view.⁶⁰

It is worth further exploring exactly what Wolf means by claiming that normative and prudential practices are justified by their ensuring a good form of life but not by a true metaphysical view of persons. I think Wolf does not mean that normative and prudential practices are justified because they produce "good effects" in the practical realm, as Parfit takes her view to be.⁶¹ Instead, I think what Wolf in fact means is that our practices are justified because they produce effects *that we take to be good*. In other words, an important part of the reason why certain practices are justified has to do with our values and interests. As Wolf suggests, a reductionist view of persons

⁵⁹ This point is nevertheless a controversial point. Objections to this point see Steven M. Cahn and Christine Vitrano, "Living Well," *Think* 13, no. 38 (2014): 13–23.

⁶⁰ One may wonder whether this point implies that it does not matter if our practices rest upon a false view of persons, or that we cannot form a metaphysical view of persons at all apart from our practical considerations. My interpretation sides with the latter; that is, it implies that we cannot form a metaphysical view of persons at all apart from our practical considerations. Nevertheless Wolf herself does not seem to discuss the implication so it is unclear which one she in fact endorses.

⁶¹ Parfit, "Comments," 832–33.

arguably does not ensure a good form of life, but if it does, the acceptance of the reductionist view and its associated practices is still grounded in our willingness to accept the relevant form of life as a good form of life. This may be the case because we come to realize that, for example, it actually conforms to our values and interests that we care about our personal future with a discount rate. I think it is in this sense that Wolf holds that the justification for normative practices comes from “the surface of the world.”⁶²

If Wolf is right that the justification for normative and prudential practices primarily comes from the practical realm, then contrary to Parfit’s view, reductionism as a metaphysical theory of persons does not serve as a basis for settling normative issues and modifying normative practices. Just because a metaphysical theory is true, it does not necessarily mean that the metaphysical theory can tell us what we are rationally or morally justified to do. In facing Wolf’s objection, Parfit does not seem to have a good response. He insists that the justification for our normative and prudential practices should come from a metaphysical theory of persons. He may think that if certain practices conform to the values and interests that we take to be essential to human practical lives, then we have “a good reason” to adopt those practices.⁶³ Still, he would think that having a good reason like this is different from having justification.⁶⁴ But the question is why this is the case. The problem for Parfit’s view is then that his view is unable to give a satisfactory answer regarding why it is a metaphysical theory of persons that serves as a primary basis for setting normative and prudential issues.

Here, some may wonder whether Wolf’s and Parfit’s views cannot be made compatible. The idea goes: Parfit’s view may be understood as seeking to explain the rationality of caring for our

⁶² Wolf, “Self-Interest and Interest in Selves,” 713.

⁶³ Parfit, “Comments,” 833.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

future events based on how they are metaphysically related to our present lives. As for Wolf's view, it concerns the issue of what justifies caring at all. Since they concern different issues, they are not necessarily opposed to one another.

It is unclear whether Parfit indeed seeks to explain the rationality of caring for our future events only, as opposed to the metaethical issue of what justifies caring at all. Given that Parfit maintains that a metaphysical theory of persons serves as a basis for settling normative issues and modifying normative practices, his view is about the metaethical issue of what justifies caring. But even if his view is indeed only about the rationality of caring for our future events, his view would still be incompatible with Wolf's view, for the following reason. If Wolf is right that the justification for caring comes from "the surface of the world" as opposed to some metaphysical facts, then the rationality of caring for our future events would come from such a surface or practical realm, having to do with what is considered valuable about persons or what enables a good form of life, rather than with any deep metaphysical fact. However, this implication is exactly what Parfit rejects.

2.5. Persons as Practical Necessity from the Standpoint of Deliberative Reasoning

Another influential critique of Parfit's view comes from Christine Korsgaard.⁶⁵ Korsgaard agrees with Wolf that the justification for normative practices has little to do with the metaphysical constitution of a person. Korsgaard nevertheless goes further to argue that while normative practices depend on a particular view of persons, that view is not a metaphysical view but rather a pragmatic view. Insofar as the justification for normative practices comes from the practical realm, and insofar as normative practices depend only on a practical view of persons, normative practices

⁶⁵ Christine M. Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 18, no. 2 (1989): 101–32.

have little to do with a metaphysical view of persons. Furthermore, she suggests that Parfit's reductionism depends on a particular normative assumption about persons.

According to Korsgaard, what is essential to our normative practices is agency. For Korsgaard, agency is something that is imposed upon us due to the reflective structure of the mind.⁶⁶ We are self-conscious beings, which means that we are aware of our instincts, desires, and other psychological phenomena. We then have to decide whether we want to endorse those instincts and desires as well as to allow them to motivate our actions. We can choose not to do anything about those instincts and desires, but that itself is a decision as well. The necessity of making choices is what Korsgaard calls the "human plight."⁶⁷ Because of such a human plight, Korsgaard claims, we self-conscious human beings necessarily see ourselves as agents, as having an authorial relationship to our actions and choices, for from our deliberative standpoint, it is we who choose to, or not to, endorse certain instincts and desires, and to decide what actions to take.

Such a view about agency is not a metaphysical view; rather, it is a pragmatic view. Here, Korsgaard follows the Kantian idea that self-conscious beings view themselves from two different standpoints, the standpoint of theoretical reasoning and the standpoint of practical reasoning. From the theoretical standpoint, we view ourselves as natural phenomena, with behaviors determined by natural forces, but from the practical or deliberative standpoint, we view ourselves as agents, who choose and authorize actions. The practical standpoint cannot be reduced to the theoretical or metaphysical standpoint, but the fact that it cannot be reduced to the theoretical standpoint has nothing to do with the "further facts" that Parfit describes. Thus, agency only has to do with the standpoint that a self-conscious being necessarily occupies rather than some metaphysical further

⁶⁶ Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94. See also Christine M. Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–26.

⁶⁷ Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 23.

facts. The view that we are agents is for this reason a pragmatic view but not a metaphysical view.

While Korsgaard claims that the view about agency is a pragmatic view but not a metaphysical view, she also suggests that an agent must be a continuing person that is not reducible to psychological continuity,⁶⁸ for the following two reasons. First, claiming that a person is reducible to psychological continuity is claiming that what matters about a person is only their experiences, which is what Parfit sometimes claims. But if a person is necessarily an agent, then what matters about a person should not only be their experiences but also their choices and actions. Furthermore, Korsgaard claims that it is better to take experiences as things that a person does⁶⁹ than to take choices and actions as things that a person experiences.

Second, claiming that a person is reducible to psychological continuity discounts the idea that a person *leads* a certain life, with particular practical identities and associated plans of life, but agency depends exactly on the idea that a person leads a certain life. According to Korsgaard, a rational agent needs to make choices on the basis of reasons. This is so because of the Kantian ideas about freedom and self-determination, which Korsgaard endorses. The reasons that guide a person's choices then come from the following two things. The first thing is Kant's categorical imperative, and the second thing is what Korsgaard calls the moral law. While the categorical imperative suggests that one should act only on a maxim that one could will to be a law, the moral law tells an agent to "act only on maxims that all rational beings could agree to act on together in

⁶⁸ This poses a larger question about the relation between the pragmatic view and the metaphysical view about persons. While Korsgaard sometimes claims that there is no direct relation between the pragmatic view, which looks at the constitution of persons from the standpoint of practical reasoning, and the metaphysical view, which looks at the constitution of persons from the standpoint of theoretical reasoning, Korsgaard seems to sometimes also suggest that the pragmatic view of persons as agents has constraints on the metaphysical view of persons. Here I lean towards the idea that the understanding of persons as agency has constraints on the metaphysical view of persons.

⁶⁹ It is nevertheless questionable whether all experiences can be viewed this way. When a person is sitting outside and enjoying the summer breeze, the person's experience of summer breeze does not seem to be something the person does.

a workable cooperative system.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, while the categorical imperative is universal, the moral law has to do with an agent’s practical identities. An agent’s conceptions of their practical identities, such as a parent, a friend, a citizen, or a member of a particular ethnic group, determine the moral laws from which the agent derives their reasons.⁷¹ According to Korsgaard, such practical identities are contingent, and one can choose whether or not to be committed to those practical identities. And when one does so, one at the same time takes on particular commitments and projects associated with those practical identities, and these commitments and projects are usually what guide our actions. Agency, then, depends on one’s actively accepting certain practical identities, taking on relevant commitments and projects, and leading a certain life. However, Korsgaard claims, the idea of a person as someone that *leads* a certain life is discounted by reductionism. Reductionism can at best be described as claiming that a person *experiences* a certain life.

Korsgaard’s view about a person as an agent, again, is not a metaphysical view but rather a pragmatic view. It is a view about what normative practices require, and it suggests that such practices require a conception of persons as agents due to the reflective structure of our mind.⁷² Furthermore, this conception of persons is required by normative practices regardless of the metaphysical constitution of persons. A metaphysical theory of persons then does not provide a basis for settling normative issues, for a metaphysical theory of persons does not tell us what conception of persons we should employ in our normative thinking. It follows that even when

⁷⁰ Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 99.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁷² Korsgaard’s claim about the necessity of agency is then more like a transcendental claim. Her view is not that agency is necessary because it is required by normative practices, but that agency is necessary because it is a necessary result of our being self-conscious. There is nevertheless a question of whether a self-conscious being entails having the kind of agency that Korsgaard describes. Other philosophers question this point, for example, see Thomas Nagel, “Universality and the Reflective Self,” in *The Sources of Normativity*, ed. Christine M. Korsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 200–209.

reductionism is true, we will still be justified to have a non-reductionist conception of persons, and to engage in the normative practices that are associated with a non-reductionist conception of persons, for such a non-reductionist conception is not meant to reflect the metaphysical nature of persons in the first place. Korsgaard then rejects the normative implications that Parfit makes based on his reductionism.

It is worth using Korsgaard's view about agency to examine Parfit's reductionism even though some parts of Korsgaard's view may be challenged, such as her claim that agents must have freedom of will and obey Kantian moral laws.⁷³ When facing Korsgaard's objection, Parfit will likely reject the idea that agency is imposed upon us by the reflective structure of consciousness. He may grant that persons are agents, but he will likely hold that persons are agents "only because of the way in which we talk."⁷⁴ Agency is then only contingent upon our linguistic practices, rather than something unavoidable because of the standpoint we necessarily occupy in deliberative thinking. Furthermore, such linguistic practices falsely assume a non-reductionist view of persons that is a metaphysical view. Parfit will thus reject Korsgaard's idea that one is justified to think of oneself as an agent, a continuing person that leads a life and authorizes actions, and he will accept reductionism instead.

However, it is unclear whether persons are agents indeed only because of the way we talk. It is arguable that the way we talk is shaped by the way we deliberate. One speaks of oneself as an agent because it reflects the psychological phenomena of deliberative reasoning and decision making, which involve one's occupying a standpoint distinct from the standpoint in virtue of which impersonal phenomena are characterized, according to Korsgaard. It is then unclear whether our

⁷³ For instance, see Thomas Nagel, "Universality and the Reflective Self"; Schechtman, Marya, "Making Ourselves Whole," *Ethical Perspectives*, no. 2 (2014): 175–98; David Cummiskey, "Ego-Less Agency: Dharma-Responsiveness Without Kantian Autonomy," *Zygon* 55, no. 2 (2020): 497–518.

⁷⁴ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 223.

thinking of ourselves as agents can indeed be replaced by the reductionist view of persons, a view that attempts to reduce the reality about persons to impersonal phenomena. The challenge that Parfit's view faces is then how to properly counter the idea that agency implies that the reality about persons cannot entirely be reduced to some impersonal phenomena.

Furthermore, Korsgaard suggests that Parfit's reductionism involves a normative assumption by discounting the practical standpoint. While Parfit's reductionism is presented as a metaphysical theory with some initial neutrality with regard to normative theories, it is "preceded by a *moral* assumption—the assumption that life is a series of experiences and so that a person is first and foremost a locus of experiences."⁷⁵ It is because Parfit starts with this assumption, and then argues that there is no subject of experience, that Parfit concludes that a person is just a bunch of experiences with different degrees of psychological connectedness rather than an agent that leads a life, make choices, and exerts actions.

Exactly why the assumption so described is a moral assumption is not fully explained by Korsgaard. But I think her idea goes as follows. Since we necessarily think of ourselves as agents due to the reflective structure of our mind, and since such thinking from the standpoint of practical reasoning is constitutive of our normative, practical, engaged lives, discounting the practical standpoint while privileging the theoretical standpoint is to choose one standpoint over another. Such a choice is a moral choice, for privileging the theoretical standpoint amounts to dismissing our normative lives. Parfit's reductionism is thus preceded by a moral assumption due to its moral choice of privileging the theoretical standpoint in theorizing the nature of persons.⁷⁶

In sum, Korsgaard's view echoes Wolf's view to show that Parfit's theory faces the problem

⁷⁵ Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency," 131.

⁷⁶ Ibid, footnote 47.

of explaining how a metaphysical theory may serve as a basis for settling normative issues. While Wolf suggests that the justification of normative practices does not come from a metaphysical theory of persons, Korsgaard suggests that normative practices constitutively involve a standpoint irreducible to the standpoint from which a metaphysical theory is conducted. In addition, by discounting such a standpoint, Parfit's reductionism is preceded by a normative assumption. All these cast doubt on the idea that normative practices depend on our ontological commitments about persons, as presented in Parfit's view.

2.6. The Extreme Claim

But even if Parfit's view is not preceded by a normative assumption, and even if Parfit is right that the justification of normative and prudential practices primarily depends on having a true metaphysical theory, and that the conception of persons involved in such practices needs to be revised in light of a true metaphysical view, Parfit's view still faces another problem. This problem, originally raised by Thomas Reid and Joseph Butler to criticize John Locke's theory of personal identity, suggests that if reductionism is true, then meaningful practices will become impossible; thus, there is something wrong with reductionism. This problem is discussed by Parfit, and he labels the claim that reductionism makes meaningful practical considerations impossible as *the extreme claim*. The idea is that reductionism, by ending up making practical considerations (such as our normative and prudential concerns) impossible, goes to an extreme. So if the extreme claim is true, then reductionism would be problematic. In what follows, I will explain the worry behind the extreme claim, particularly focusing on the claim that reductionism makes meaningful self-interested concerns impossible. I will then discuss Parfit's argument against the extreme claim. In the end, I will suggest that the extreme claim remains as a problem for Parfit's reductionism.

The worry behind the extreme claim, particularly the claim that reductionism makes meaningful self-interested concerns impossible, goes like this: If a person is reducible to psychological continuity, then, strictly speaking, the present self in the psychological series is distinct from the future selves to which it is psychologically connected. But if the present self is distinct from those future selves, then the present self has no reason to care about whatever would happen to the future selves. If I know that someone would suffer tomorrow, and that someone is only a person, a self, or a set of psychological states that are co-conscious that is psychologically connected to me at this moment, but that it is strictly speaking not me, then it does not seem that I would have any reason to care about that someone.

Parfit believes that this worry already presupposes a non-reductionist view of persons. It assumes that the continued existence of a person needs to involve some further fact—namely, the fact that the future someone is *me*—than the facts of psychological continuity. Furthermore, since it already presupposes non-reductionism, it assumes that reductionism is “less deep,” thereby claiming that knowing about psychological continuity is not sufficient for having reasons for self-interested concerns.⁷⁷

However, if one accepts reductionism, then one would see what fundamentally matters regarding the continued existence of a person just is psychological continuity, or Relation R. One then does not need to know any further fact than the fact of Relation R to have reasons to care about one’s future. Instead, Relation R alone should give one a justifying reason for caring about one’s personal future. Parfit calls this claim, namely, that Relation R alone gives one a justifying reason for caring about their personal future, *the moderate claim*. He thinks that reductionists can embrace the moderate claim instead of being forced to accept the extreme claim.

⁷⁷ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 313.

However, it is unclear exactly why the moderate claim must be true. Parfit admits that he does not have an independent argument for the moderate claim, even though he believes that the moderate claim is true.⁷⁸ His view is thus unsatisfactory. Here, a common worry about the moderate claim is that if one cares about one's future simply because there is some psychological continuity, one would be caring about one's future in the way that a revolutionary is concerned about whether "'The Cause' will live on" through the work of others,⁷⁹ and the worry is that this is not the kind of self-interested concerns that we typically think that we have. I do not think that this worry presents a good objection to the moderate claim, for Parfit seems to be exactly claiming that one should care about one's future only in that way.

Instead, I think that the real problem with the moderate claim is this: The moderate claim assumes that one will still have reasons to care about oneself at present even when one accepts the truth of reductionism.⁸⁰ Insofar as one has reasons to care about oneself at present, and insofar as one believes that what fundamentally matters is Relation R, one will have reasons to care about one's personal future. However, it is unclear whether the concern about one's personal future indeed primarily builds upon the concern about one's present life. In fact, it seems to be the other way around. It is arguable that one cares about one's present life as embedded in a particular ongoing stretch, which includes some of the past and some of the future, and one's representation of them, as explained below. For instance, students often care about their grades for a class project because they have put a great amount of effort into their work, and feel they deserve a good grade as a result of their effort. Or, they care about their grades because they are planning to apply for graduate schools, and worry that a not-very-outstanding GPA will hurt their chances. In this way,

⁷⁸ Ibid, 311.

⁷⁹ Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*, 59.

⁸⁰ A similar point see Andrew Brennan, *Conditions of Identity: A Study of Identity and Survival* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

they care about their present life (i.e., getting a particular grade for a particular class project) because it builds upon a particular past (e.g., the effort they put into their work), and potentially leads to a particular future (e.g., going to graduate schools). They also care about their present life because of how it is represented in relation to other life events (e.g., “grades reflect effort” and “a high GPA is required for graduate school applications”). They do not care about their future because they care about their present life.

The moderate claim, then, is problematic by suggesting that one’s concerns about one’s future primarily extends from one’s concerns about one’s present life through psychological continuity and/or connectedness. Reductionists may object to this reasoning by arguing that it is not true that one needs to consider some past and future in order to be concerned about the present, for as long as there is a person that is me, the fact that this person is me automatically gives me a reason to be concerned about this person, regardless of whether I will also care about the person’s past or future. My issue with this potential objection is that it is unclear why the fact that a person is me should automatically give me a reason to be concerned about this person at present, if I do not also care about my past or future. Whatever happens at present will soon die away. As long as the past and the future are not of my concern, it does not seem that I have much reason to care about what happens to me now. An objection here may be that non-human animals with no memory of the past and no anticipation of the future can still be concerned about themselves here and now. In fact, it may be part of animals’ biological instinct that animals, human beings and non-human beings alike, have concerns for themselves here and now, such that they eat and avoid danger, whether or not they consciously care about their past or future. I do not wish to deny this point. Rather, my point is that one would have *no reason* to be concerned about oneself here and now even when one has the ability to do so, if one does not also care about one’s past and future.

This problem of the moderate claim further suggests that if one accepts the truth of reductionism, one will not care about anything at all, including one's present life. For accepting the truth of reductionism means rejecting the belief that one is a continuing person with a determinate identity over time. Without seeing oneself as a continuing person with a determinate identity over time, one loses the ground for seeing one's life as a whole from which different moments of life derive values and meanings. One then not only has no reason to care about one's personal future, but also has no reason to care about one's present life. In this sense, the extreme claim remains as a problem for Parfit's view. Here, it is important to note that, by claiming that one needs to see one's life as a whole from which different moments of life derive values and meanings, I do not mean to suggest that the value and meaning of the present couldn't be finally constituted until the last moment of my life. Instead, I only mean to suggest that one sees one's present life as having certain meaning and value because one sees it as embedded in an ongoing stretch.

A possible objection here concerns whether pain in the present is not in its own bad. That is, if one sees one's present life as having certain meaning and value only because one sees it as embedded in an ongoing stretch of life, then pain would be bad only because it is connected to one's personal past or future. However, it seems that an individual even with amnesia can see pain in the present as bad without any memory of how this instance of pain is connected to their personal past, or any concern about how the instance of pain implies for their personal future. In this way, one's present life can have meaning and value regardless of whether it is seen as embedded in an ongoing stretch, contrary to what I suggested previously.

I admit that it is plausible for an individual in some circumstance to see present pain as bad without any memory of how this instance of pain is connected to their personal past, or any concern

about how it implies for their personal future. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether the individual is capable of seeing present pain as bad not because they have learned previously to see it as embedded in an ongoing stretch of life. That is, having learned to situate pain in an ongoing stretch of life such as through narrative construction, one becomes capable of seeing pain as bad, and as something that needs to be adverted rather than ignored or endured; however, once one becomes capable of this, one need not always think of the temporal connections to see present pain as bad. The quality of badness is then attributed to the pain itself, even though strictly speaking, pain gains this quality only through its perceived relations with other life events. The objection then does not undermine my argument.

But even if my above conjecture is wrong, namely, it is not the case that individuals are capable of seeing present pain as bad because they have learned previously to see it as embedded in an ongoing stretch of life, the objection is still not sufficient for defending the moderate claim. That is, it only shows that in some circumstances, individuals are able to see their present lives as having meaning and value regardless of past or future, but it fails to account for the complex evaluations we have of our present lives in light of their temporal connections in many other circumstances. The extreme claim, then, remains as a problem for Parfit's reductionism.

The fact that the extreme claim remains as a problem for Parfit's reductionism shows that there is something wrong with taking our social practices such as our practical considerations to depend on our metaphysical commitments about persons. For when one takes our practical considerations to depend on our metaphysical commitments about persons, one ends up with a metaphysical theory that makes our practical considerations impossible.⁸¹

⁸¹ My discussion so far only considers a reductionist ontology but not a non-reductionist ontology, such as an ontology that suggests a person is their eternal soul that is not reductive to some psychological continuity. There is then a question of whether a non-reductionist ontology would lead to the same problem. That is, suppose one accepts a non-reductionist ontology, claiming that a person is their eternal soul that is not reductive to some psychological continuity,

2.7 Practical Identity?

As explained in the discussions from section 2.4 to section 2.6, Parfit's view, a view that takes our practical considerations to depend on our metaphysical commitments about persons and personal identity, faces several problems. To avoid the problems, one may argue that persons have two different aspects, the metaphysical aspect and the practical aspect, and the same goes for personal identity. Once one makes a distinction between personal identity in the metaphysical sense and personal identity in the practical sense, one can then suggest that practical considerations only involve personal identity in the practical sense (i.e., practical identity) but not in the metaphysical sense (i.e., metaphysical identity). One can even suggest that Parfit's view faces all the problems described above exactly because he does not maintain a distinction between metaphysical identity and practical identity.

Korsgaard takes this approach, and it is also implicit in Wolf's view. As explained above, Wolf suggests that our practical considerations are justified by their ensuring a good form of life in the practical realm but not by a true metaphysical view of persons. This suggestion can be taken to claim that even though our practical considerations involve a sense of personal identity, such a sense of personal identity is justified by its leading to a good form of life, rather than by a metaphysical view of personal identity. In this sense, Wolf's view can be taken to suggest a distinction between practical identity and metaphysical identity. Such a distinction is explicit in Korsgaard's view since Korsgaard separates the standpoint of practical reasoning, which is associated with our diachronic agency and normative deliberation, from the standpoint of

would one be better able to defend that claim that our practical considerations depend on our metaphysical commitment about persons. Perhaps. But such a non-reductionist view may nevertheless face the problem of how to properly explain such an eternal soul that is non-reductive to some psychological continuity.

theoretical reasoning, which is associated with our metaphysical theorizing. Due to this separation, Korsgaard's view is usually taken to suggest a view of practical or pragmatic identity, namely, a form of personal identity associated with our practical or pragmatic purposes rather than our metaphysical constitution.⁸²

Given that both Wolf and Korsgaard explicitly claim that justifications for practical considerations have little to do with our metaphysical identity, as explained in 2.4 and 2.6, it is reasonable to attribute the claim about practical identity in separation from metaphysical identity to their views. However, Korsgaard herself sometimes suggests in her writing that the pragmatic view of persons as diachronic agents leaves constraints on the metaphysical view of personal identity.⁸³ That is, she suggests that the discussion on agency, which is associated with a deliberative standpoint of reasoning, has some implication on how we theorize our psychological continuity. It follows that it is unclear if there is in fact a form of practical identity in separation from metaphysical identity.

In this way, while Korsgaard's view appears to argue for a form of personal identity (i.e., practical identity) that has little or nothing to do with our metaphysical identity, and is also commonly interpreted this way,⁸⁴ it is unclear whether such a form of personal identity indeed exists. In fact, I believe that personal identity as we understand in our social practices, including our practical considerations, is closely connected to our psychophysical continuity. This point is discussed in chapter 4.

⁸² For example, see Kim Atkins and Catriona Mackenzie, eds., *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁸³ Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency," 121.

⁸⁴ For example, see Atkins and Mackenzie, *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency*.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed Parfit's reductionism, which is a Buddhist-informed theory about personal identity. This theory suggests that personal identity is a construct, and that our social practices surrounding personal identity depend on metaphysical facts about our psychological continuity. Furthermore, metaphysical facts about our psychological continuity are defined independently of our social practices, which is why they can lend justificatory forces for our social practices. Since metaphysical facts about our psychological continuity are defined independently of our social practices in Parfit's reductionism, Parfit's reductionism involves the separability assumption.

By involving the separability assumption, Parfit's reductionism faces the following problems, as suggested by Wolf's and Korsgaard's criticisms. First, Parfit's view fails to satisfactorily explain why the justification of normative and prudential practices depends on the metaphysical facts about personal identity.⁸⁵ Second, it discounts the standpoint constitutive of deliberative reasoning that is essential for normative practices when theorizing the nature of persons. Third, it is preceded by a normative assumption even though it is presented as neutral on normative issues. Finally, its truth entails the impossibility of practical considerations.

The problems as faced by Parfit's reductionism cast doubt on the separability assumption. It suggests that one cannot meaningfully take personal identity to be a construct having to do with our conceptual or social practices while at the same time holding the separability assumption. One way to address this issue is to claim that personal identity as conceptually constructed is a matter of practical identity, having little to do with our metaphysical identity, which is constituted by our psychological continuity. However, it is not always clear whether the theorizing of our practical

⁸⁵ This is not to suggest that Parfit does not explain why a metaphysical theory can serve as the basis for settling prudential or normative issues at all. Instead, this is simply to suggest that Parfit's explanation is not satisfying.

identity does not also leave implications for the theorizing of our metaphysical identity. It is then unclear whether the idea of practical identity does help with the attempt to maintain the separability assumption while holding that personal identity is a construct having to do with our conceptual or social practices. It follows that one is left with the following options: One can (1) give up on the separability assumption, (2) further explain the idea of personal identity as a construction in relation to our psychological or psychophysical facts, or (3) give up on the claim that personal identity is a construct. (3) has been widely discussed in the traditional theories about personal identity with no apparent fruitful results, as indicated in section 1.3. For this reason, I focus on (1) and (2) in the following discussions. In particular, I discuss the option of further explaining how personal identity as a construct is related to our psychological or psychophysical facts in chapter 3, and the option of giving up on the separability assumption in chapter 4.

III Personal Identity as a Conventional Construction

3.1 Overview

In this chapter, I discuss Siderits' Buddhist reductionism to explore how one may further explain the idea of personal identity as a construction in relation to our psychological or psychophysical facts. Siderits' Buddhist reductionism follows Parfit's reductionism to accept the following three points. First, personal identity is a conceptual construction. Secondly, metaphysical facts about personal identity, which are facts about our psychophysical continuity, can be defined without making references to our social practices, including our practical considerations (i.e., the separability assumption). Finally, metaphysical facts about personal identity are taken to lend justificatory or revisionary forces for our social practices. Nevertheless, Siderits believes that Parfit's view is not always clear on the idea of personal identity as a construction in relation to our psychological or psychophysical continuity, and his Buddhist reductionism helps to shed light on this idea.

As explained previously in section 2.2, there is an important issue that arises when interpreting Parfit's reductionism. This issue is that it is unclear exactly what Parfit means with the core reductionist claim, namely, the claim that persons do exist but their metaphysical existence consists solely in impersonal phenomena. It seems that if the metaphysical existence of a person consists solely in some impersonal phenomena, then the impersonal phenomena are what really exist, metaphysically speaking. Persons should then be eliminated from our ontology. By contrast, if persons can be granted ontological status, then it seems that their existence should involve some "further facts" in addition to those of impersonal phenomena. But if this is the case, the truth of non-reductionism should then be accepted. Siderits draws upon conceptual resources from Indian Buddhist philosophy to further explain how persons do exist, with their identity constructed in our

social practices, but their existence, in the sense of their “ultimate reality,” consists solely in impersonal phenomena. In doing so, Siderits claims that his Buddhist reductionism avoids the problems with Parfit’s reductionism as discussed in the previous chapters and is for this reason better than Parfit’s reductionism.

However, I think that Siderits’ Buddhist reductionism not only does not entirely avoid the problems with Parfit’s reductionism, but it also faces its own problem. All these problems offer reasons for questioning the separability assumption. In section 3.2, I explain Siderits’ Buddhist Reductionism about persons and personal identity, and how it involves the separability assumption. In section 3.3, I explain what Siderits’ Buddhist Reductionism implies for our practical considerations. In sections 3.4 and 3.5, I suggest that Siderits’ Buddhist reductionism not only does not avoid the problems with Parfit’s reductionism entirely but also faces its own problem, which has to do with resorting to a consequentialist principle in explaining our practical considerations. I then conclude in section 3.6 that we should question the separability assumption rather than explaining the idea of personal identity as a construction in relation to our psychological or psychophysical facts without questioning that separability assumption.

3.2 Siderits’ Buddhist Reductionism

Siderits develops what he calls Buddhist reductionism by drawing on the philosophical resources from Abhidharma Buddhism. In particular, he utilizes the theory of “two truths” in Abhidharma Buddhism to claim that persons do exist, in the sense that they exist as a *conventional construction*, and that the metaphysical existence of persons consists solely in some impersonal organizations, in the sense that persons are *ultimately* just some psychophysical causal series. Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that Siderits’ utilization of the theory of two truths involves his own creative

interpretation and rational reconstruction of the Abhidharma in contemporary philosophical terms. As a result, his Buddhist reductionism goes beyond the things that are said in the Abhidharma tradition.⁸⁶ I will explain Siderits' Buddhist reductionism in what follows.

The theory of two truths in Abhidharma Buddhism is the theory that there are two kinds of truths, the conventional truth and the ultimate truth. Siderits takes the theory of two truths primarily as a semantic theory. According to this semantic theory, a sentence is conventionally true "if and only if it reliably leads to successful practice," and a sentence is ultimately true "if and only if it both corresponds to the facts and neither asserts nor presupposes the existence of what is not ultimately real."⁸⁷ The definitions of conventionally versus ultimately true sentences suggest that Siderits takes the theory of truth as also having a metaphysical commitment, which is that some things are ultimately real while others are not. According to Siderits, the things that are conventionally real are partite entities, while the things that are ultimately real are impartite entities.

Siderits suggests that all partite entities involve human conceptual construction and that for this reason, all partite entities are conventional.⁸⁸ Partite entities depend on our human conceptual construction because our intuition about what counts as one and the same partite entity depends on "our institutionally arranged interests."⁸⁹ We call something a chariot and treat it as an entity when its parts are organized in a particular way. But when the parts are not organized in that specific way, or when they are just randomly scattered around, we will not take there to be a chariot. In fact, we will not even take there to be an entity, constituted by chariot parts. The reason why we treat a bunch of things (i.e., wheels, felly, etc.) as together constituting one and the same chariot

⁸⁶ Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*, Second edition, Ashgate World Philosophies Series (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2015), 3–4.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 16.

⁸⁸ In other words, no partite entities are ultimately real. For this reason, Siderits thinks that the theory of two truths in Abhidharma Buddhism is committed to mereological nihilism.

⁸⁹ Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy*, 17.

when they are put together in a specific way, but not as constituting a chariot when they are put together in other ways, is that it is only when wheels, felly, etc. are put together in a specific way that they together function to serve our institutionally arranged interest, namely, the interest of transportation.⁹⁰

By contrast, ultimate existents are “how things objectively are.”⁹¹ While conventional existents depend on the conceptual construction of human beings—in the sense that the forces of subjective interests, cognitive limitations, and social conventions play into the individuation and categorization of such existents—ultimate existents are “independent of our subjective interests and cognitive limitations” and “free from contamination by mental construction.”⁹² Such ultimate existents are the impartite entities of which partite entities are constituted.⁹³

Siderits interprets the theory of truth as involving a dualistic semantics, with two distinct discourses, one of which describes conventional existents (i.e., partite entities) and the other of which describes ultimate existents (i.e., impartite entities).⁹⁴ Each of the discourses is “semantically insulated.”⁹⁵ One can determine the truth of a statement in the conventional discourse only in terms of how things conventionally are, and one can determine the truth of a statement in the ultimate discourse only in terms of how things ultimately are. But one cannot, for example, determine the truth of a conventional statement in terms of how things ultimately are. Still, the two discourses are not entirely unrelated. Instead, they are related in the sense that a conventional statement can only be true when the conventional existents it refers to indeed

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ In Abhidharma Buddhism, such ultimate existents are dharmas, which are momentary qualities whose existence does not depend on others. They include instances of color, shape, taste, such as the blue color and the square shape, as well as the empirical constituents of the world.

⁹⁴ Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy*, 98.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 191.

supervene on some ultimate existents, which are picked out by statements in the ultimate discourse. Conventional existents are thus still real even though they depend on human conceptual construction. They are real because while they depend on human conceptual construction, they also supervene on ultimate existents.

Siderits uses the theory of two truths to illustrate the reductionist thesis that persons do exist but their metaphysical existence just consists in some impersonal phenomena. This thesis includes two statements, the statement “persons do exist” and the statement “the existence of persons just consists in some impersonal phenomena.” Siderits suggests that the first statement is conventionally true but not ultimately true. It describes persons, which are conventional existents but not ultimate existents, for persons are partite entities that can be further analyzed into some impersonal phenomena. By contrast, the second statement—the statement “the existence of persons just consists in some impersonal phenomena”—is ultimately true but not conventionally true. This statement describes the ultimate nature of persons but not the conventional reality about persons. Specifically, such ultimate nature of a person is a causal series of impermanent, impersonal psychophysical elements. In Buddhist philosophy, these psychophysical elements are the five *skandhas* or psychophysical aggregates, which are form (anything corporeal or physical), feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness, understood as impersonal psychophysical processes.⁹⁶

Thus, persons do exist because they are conventionally real. The existence of a person is conventionally constructed based on a psychophysical causal series, and ‘person’ is a convenient designator for such a psychophysical causal series. But while persons do exist, the metaphysical existence of a person just consists in some impersonal phenomena. What grounds conventional

⁹⁶ Ibid, 37.

personhood is an impermanent, impersonal psychophysical causal series, which is what ultimately exists.

Here, some clarification is needed regarding the relation between the conventional reality about persons and the ultimately facts about persons. The relation between the two is a relation of dependence. That is, the conventional reality about persons depends upon the ultimate facts about persons. The relation is not a constitutive relation because a constitutive relation is akin to eliminativism, which Siderits rejects. While I sometimes describe the (metaphysical) existence of persons as solely consisting in psychophysical facts, what I mean is that the existence of a persons, in terms of their ultimate reality, solely consists in psychophysical facts.

On this view, a person is not a perduring object that extends over time in virtue of having temporal parts, as suggested by those who invoke a four-dimensionalist interpretation of reductionism. Instead, a person is a conceptual construction based on a psychophysical causal series that is interdependent, impermanent, and ever-changing. Furthermore, a person is also not a construct made up of person-stages, understood as subjects of experiences that last for more than a few seconds and are able to carry out meaningful activities. Instead, a person is a construct based on a psychophysical casual series, which is impersonal and constantly changing.

But the main reason why Siderits thinks that it is important to get clear on the central reductionist idea, namely, that persons do exist but their metaphysical existence just consists in some impersonal events, is not that he worries about the four-dimensionalist interpretation or the “person-stages” interpretation of reductionism, even though I think Buddhist reductionism helps to show why those interpretations are not ideal. The main reason why Siderits wants to get clear on the central reductionist idea is that doing so helps prevent reductionism from collapsing into non-reductionism or eliminativism, as previously mentioned.

As explained previously, non-reductionism is the view that persons exist but their existence involves some further facts than those of physical or psychological continuity. As for eliminativism, it is the view that the existence of persons just consists in physical or psychological continuity and persons cannot really be said to exist. Reductionism is a “middle path” between the two.⁹⁷ It claims that while persons do exist, contrary to non-reductionism, the existence of persons does not involve any further fact; furthermore, while the existence of persons does not involve any further fact, contrary to eliminativism, persons do exist. This claim is difficult to defend because if persons do exist, it seems intuitive that the existence of persons would involve something more than physical or psychological continuity, as non-reductionists claim. And if the existence of persons does not involve something more than physical or psychological continuity, then it seems intuitive that persons cannot be said to exist, as eliminativists claim. A reductionist view, without properly explaining how persons can be said to exist while having their existence solely consist in impersonal series, either does not make sense, or collapses into one of the other two alternatives.

Siderits thinks that Buddhist reductionism helps explain how persons can be said to exist while having their existence solely consist in impersonal series by making the distinction between the conventional and the ultimate. Persons do exist at the conventional level, but since impersonal series are what ultimately exist, the existence of persons consists solely in impersonal psychophysical series. Furthermore, reductionism, interpreted as holding that persons exist conventionally but not ultimately, differs from non-reductionism, which can be interpreted as holding that persons exist both conventionally and ultimately; it also differs from eliminativism, which can be interpreted as holding that persons exist neither conventionally nor ultimately.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Ibid, 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 17.

In sum, Siderits' Buddhist reductionism agrees with Parfit's reductionism that a person is reducible to some impersonal causal series, namely, that a person does exist, but their metaphysical existence consists solely in an impersonal causal series. However, Siderits' Buddhist reductionism takes a further step by distinguishing between the conventional existents and the ultimate existents. With this distinction, Siderits' Buddhist reductionism suggests that persons do exist as a result of human conceptual construction, but what ultimately grounds the existence of a person is an impersonal psychophysical causal series.

Siderits' Buddhist reductionism would also agree with Parfit's reductionism that the reality about persons, understood in terms of the ultimate reality, can be completely explained by impersonal facts. While the conventional reality of a person depends partially on the existence of psychophysical causal series, and partially on conceptual construction, which occurs due to the interaction between different elements in the psychophysical causal series, the ultimate reality about persons just consists in some impersonal psychophysical facts.

Furthermore, Siderits' Buddhist reductionism would agree with Parfit's reductionism that personal identity can be indeterminate or arbitrary. Since a psychophysical causal series is conveniently designated as a person due to human interests and social conventions, the identity of a person is determined based on interests and conventions as well, rather than based on what ultimately exists in the world. However, there can be hard cases where conventional practices alone do not help to settle the issue of personal identity, and it is in this sense that personal identity can be indeterminate or arbitrary.

Nevertheless, Siderits' Buddhist reductionism disagrees with Parfit's reductionism regarding the impersonal nature of persons. Parfit suggests that the nature of persons consists in Relation R, namely, psychological continuity and/or connectedness with any cause. By contrast, Siderits

maintains that the nature of persons consists in psychophysical causal series, understood in terms of the five *skandhas*.

Still, given the distinction between the conventional existents and the ultimate existents, Siderits' Buddhist reductionism involves the separability assumption, which is the assumption that metaphysical facts about personal identity can be defined without making reference to our social practices. The metaphysical facts about personal identity are understood as the ultimate facts about personal identity in Siderits' Buddhist reductionism, whereas the conventional reality about persons and personal identity are associated with social practices. Such ultimate facts about personal identity are impersonal psychophysical facts. They can be defined independently of our social practices, but not the other way around, because ultimate existents are supposed to be "independent of our subjective interests and cognitive limitations" and "free from contamination by mental construction," as discussed previously; by contrast, conventional existents, which are associated with our social practices, supervene on ultimate facts.

3.3 Metaphysical Facts and Practical Considerations

The point that Buddhist reductionism involves the separability assumption can be further seen in Siderits' idea that Buddhist reductionism provides justificatory forces for our practical considerations, including our normative and prudential practices. Similar to Parfit's view, Siderits believes that Buddhist reductionism about persons has implications for our prudential and normative practices. Like Parfit, Siderits rejects the rationality of self-interest and the deep separateness of persons. Unlike Parfit, Siderits does not argue for a discount rate in self-interested concerns; nor does he discuss autonomy and paternalism or compensation. Instead, he emphasizes the alleviation of existential suffering and the justification of impartial benevolence. In what

follows, I will explain Siderits' view about the implications of Buddhist reductionism for our practical considerations. But before doing that, I need to further explain the construction and adoption of conventional personhood.

Siderits claims that “the point of the construction of persons is *the maximization of overall utility*.”⁹⁹ A collection of psychophysical elements comes to identify with some past and future psychophysical elements through the adoption of conventional personhood because doing so has the following advantage. The adoption and construction of personhood allow the executive functions of self-scrutiny, self-control, and self-revision, which turn out to be effective at “local utility maximizing,”¹⁰⁰ understood in terms of reducing pain occurring in or around the psychophysical causal series based on which the conventional personhood is constructed. Siderits calls this “a Consequentialist justification” for the adoption of the personhood convention.¹⁰¹

Such a consequentialist justification further explains the causal relations within a psychophysical causal series, and how the relations differ from those between collections of psychophysical elements from different psychophysical causal series. According to Siderits, a system that is effective at local utility maximizing is constructed out of a collection of psychophysical elements that exhibits a particular property. This property is *maximal causal connectedness* over time.¹⁰² While collections of psychophysical elements from different psychophysical causal series may also have causal interactions, such interactions do not exhibit the property of maximal causal connectedness. Sideris does not clearly explain why a system effective at local utility maximizing must be constructed out of a collection of psychophysical

⁹⁹ Ibid, 65, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 66.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, 65

elements that has maximal causal connectedness. It is also questionable whether the idea of maximal causal connectedness is unproblematic, which is a point I will further discuss in section 3.4.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the point here is that the construction and adoption of conventional personhood have a purpose or use of minimizing pain, and such a purpose or use is possible when a collection of psychophysical causal elements is organized in a particular way.

While the construction and adoption of conventional personhood are effective at utility maximizing, Siderits claims that conventional personhood also commonly leads to existential suffering and the belief in the deep separateness of persons, for the following two reasons. First, conventional personhood is associated with the executive functions of self-scrutiny, self-control, and self-revision, which commonly lead to the belief that there is an independent, permanent, long-lasting self that examines, regulates, and modifies the rest of the psychophysical activities in the causal series. But such a belief is a “cognitive error”¹⁰⁴ because such an independent, permanent, long-lasting self does not exist. Instead, there is only an interdependent, impermanent, ever-changing psychophysical causal series, which is what ultimately exists. Nevertheless, because of this cognitive error, one comes to believe that there exists deep separateness between oneself and others, thereby coming to engage in egoistic behaviors.

Second, socialization into personhood involves “turning a pleasure-seeking system (the small child) into the happiness-seeking system.”¹⁰⁵ But the project of seeking happiness requires that one sees one’s life as having meaning, which in turn requires that one sees one’s life as a narrative,

¹⁰³ For criticisms of the idea of maximal causal connectedness see Amber D. Carpenter, “Persons Keeping Their Karma Together,” in *The Moon Points Back*, ed. Koji Tanaka et al. (Oxford University Press, 2015), 1–44.

¹⁰⁴ Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy*, 129.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

with an “implicit *telos*” fulfilled by particular projects and plans.¹⁰⁶ According to Siderits, the belief in an independent self goes hand in hand with the conception of one’s life as a narrative, for the independent self serves as the central character of the narrative, who identifies with particular projects and plans, acts to carry out those projects and plans, and comes to have a sense of meaning from pursuing the projects and plans aligned with the implicit *telos* of the narrative.

Seeing one’s life as a narrative with an independent self as the central character maximizes utility, for this way of seeing one’s life enhances the capacities of self-scrutiny, self-control, and self-revision. The implicit *telos* of the narrative serves as an underlying principle based on which one, conceived of as an independent self, examines, regulates, and revises dispositions and actions so as to better carry out plans and projects.¹⁰⁷ However, while this way of seeing one’s life enhances executive functions and thereby promotes local utility, Siderits maintains that it also leads to existential suffering, with the realization that one will inevitably die one day. He offers two explanations regarding why this is the case. The first explanation is that the happiness-seeking enterprise requires that one “projects into the future [one’s] sense of unconditioned possibilities,”¹⁰⁸ but the realization of one’s mortality undermines this sense of unconditioned possibilities.¹⁰⁹ The second explanation is that the happiness-seeking enterprise requires meaning,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 44, 128. Siderits seems to derive the idea of the self-authored narrative from Marya Schechtman’s view. While Schechtman presents her view of narrative self-constitution as an alternative to reductionism, Siderits maintains that the narrative view is compatible with reductionism.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 128–129.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 30. This quote is initially from Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 228.

¹⁰⁹ It is unclear exactly why the happiness-seeking enterprise requires a sense of unconditioned possibilities. Siderits draws on Nagel’s view to explain that the sense of unconditioned possibilities is associated with one’s viewing one’s self from an internal or subjective perspective. But it is unclear whether such an internal perspective is also associated with the belief in an independent, permanent, long-lasting self. Presumably the belief in an independent, permanent, long-lasting self is what leads to suffering, and Siderits also recognizes that. But if such a belief is also associated with our viewing ourselves from an internal perspective, then getting rid of the belief of the self for the sake of alleviating existential suffering would mean getting rid of the internal perspective. But this does not seem like a consequence that Siderits would endorse, as it is arguable that conventional personhood involves such a perspective.

but the meaning of life and the value of one's projects lose their weights in the face of one's eventual death and the contingency of one's life.¹¹⁰ It is unclear whether these two explanations are indeed satisfying, for one may argue that eternal lives with unconditioned possibilities would not only be intolerable but also rob us of a sense of meaning, and therefore awareness of our own mortality does not necessarily lead to existential suffering.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, I will not go into detail about these explanations. Instead, I will grant these explanations and focus on other problems with Siderits' view, which I discuss in sections 3.4 and 3.5.

Siderits gives a further diagnosis of existential suffering. On his view, such existential suffering is a result of reifying personhood and falsely believing that there is an independent, permanent, and long-lasting self, as well as that one's life has a purpose. However, 'person' really is just a convenient designator for a psychophysical causal series. It is not associated with an independent, permanent, and long-lasting self, ultimately speaking. Furthermore, what is taken as "one's life" is also grounded by such a psychophysical causal series. There is no narrative with meaning and purpose, ultimately speaking. When one understands that there is no independent, permanent, and long-lasting self, and conventional personhood is adopted and constructed for the sake of utility maximization, then existential suffering will be alleviated. For while one sees that one's life does not have a point, one will also see that "there is a point to [one's] having a life."¹¹² And that point is exactly utility maximization, understood in terms of the reduction of pain and suffering.

Furthermore, once one understands that there is no independent, permanent, and long-lasting self, and that the point of one's having a life is the reduction of pain and suffering, one will see

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 129

¹¹¹ Bernard Williams, ed., "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality," in *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956–1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 82–100.

¹¹² Ibid.

that egoistic behaviors are unjustified; instead, impartial benevolence is what one ought to embrace. For when one understands that there is no independent self, one will understand that there is no deep separateness between oneself and others. And when one understands that the point of one's having a life is utility maximization, one will see that what really promotes utility maximization overall is to reduce pain and suffering regardless of where it occurs. As Siderits claims,

Our commonsense view of what is rational [i.e., egoistic behaviors] stems, they [i.e., Buddhist reductionists] claim, from taking too seriously what is really just a shortcut strategy for minimizing pain impersonally conceived. The fundamental obligation is to prevent pain, wherever it may occur. The personhood convention, with its associated view of what is rational, represents an effective strategy for preventing much avoidable pain. But where it is possible to prevent more pain by deviating from that strategy, we are obligated to do so.¹¹³

It is worth noting that Siderits' argument here hinges upon the idea of impersonal pain, but it remains questionable what it means for pain to be impersonal, or whether rendering pain impersonal makes it impossible to effectively remove pains and suffering. Issues about the idea of the impersonal pain are important ones, but they are nevertheless outside the scope of this dissertation, and for this reason I will not go into detail about the idea of impersonal pain.¹¹⁴ It is also worth noting that Siderits' argument involves the assumption that just because conventional personhood represents a strategy for maximizing utility, we have a fundamental obligation for maximizing utility. But it is unclear why this is true. I will discuss this issue later in section 3.5.

¹¹³ Ibid, 130.

¹¹⁴ For more discussion about impersonal pain, see Paul Williams, *Altruism and Reality: Studies in the Philosophy of the Bodhicaryavatara* (Curzon Press, 1998); Mark Siderits, "Review: The Reality of Altruism: Reconstructing Śāntideva," *Philosophy East and West* 50, no. 3, (2000): 412–24; Paul Williams, "Response to Mark Siderits' Review," *Philosophy East and West* 50, no. 3, (2000): 424–53; Mark Siderits, "Reply to Paul Williams," *Philosophy East and West* 50, no. 3, (2000): 453–59.

Impartial benevolence and the alleviation of existential suffering are thus the two implications of Buddhist reductionism, following from the rational beliefs about the ultimate nature of personhood (i.e., a psychophysical causal series), the lack of deep separateness between oneself and others, and the purpose of the adoption and construction of conventional personhood (i.e., utility maximization).

3.4 Agency and the Deliberative Standpoint

Although Siderits' Buddhist reductionism involves the separability assumption, as well as takes our practical considerations as depending on metaphysical facts about persons just as Parfit does, Siderits suggests that Buddhist reductionism does not face the problems of which Parfit's reductionism is accused. As identified in section 2.2, Parfit's reductionism faces the following problems: First, it fails to satisfactorily explain why the justification of prudential and normative practices depends on our metaphysical commitments about persons. Second, it discounts the standpoint constitutive of deliberative reasoning when theorizing about the nature of persons. Third, it is preceded by a normative assumption even though it is presented as neutral on normative issues. Finally, its truth entails the impossibility of practical considerations. If Buddhist reductionism can avoid these problems, then this will be a good reason for thinking that prudential and normative practices indeed depend on metaphysical facts about persons, and that the separability assumption is not necessarily an issue. However, I believe that Buddhist reductionism does not avoid these problems. In this section, I focus on the second and the third problems as indicated above. In the next section, I focus on the fourth and the first problems.

The second and third problems are pointed out by Korsgaard. As discussed previously in chapter 2, Korsgaard suggests that Parfit's reductionism discounts the standpoint constitutive of

deliberative reasoning when theorizing about the nature of persons. Because Parfit's reductionism discounts the standpoint of deliberative reasoning, it fails to recognize that a person must be conceived of as an agent, a continuing being that leads a life and has an authorial relationship with its actions and choices. Furthermore, since the standpoint of deliberative reasoning is essential for normative practices, discounting such a standpoint constituted a moral choice. Parfit's reductionism is then preceded by a normative assumption.

According to Siderits, proponents of Buddhist reductionism can address the second problem, the problem of discounting the standpoint of deliberative reasoning as well as disregarding the importance of agency. For Buddhist reductionism, agency is a conceptual construction; furthermore, it is conceptually constructed for the purpose of utility maximization. Thus, unlike Parfit's reductionism, Buddhist reductionism does not deny the importance of agency. Instead, Buddhist reductionism recognizes the pragmatic importance of agency, which is maximizing utility. While Parfit suggests that we view ourselves as agents simply because of "the way in which we talk,"¹¹⁵ Buddhist reductionists would claim that we view ourselves as agents because of the ways in which our ordinary cognition works, as well as the ways in which the conception of agency enhances the executive functions that are effective at local utility maximizing. Since Buddhist reductionism does not deny the importance of agency, but it only denies that agency requires an independent, permanent, long-lasting self, Buddhist reductionism does not discount the standpoint of deliberative reasoning. Since Buddhist reductionism does not discount the standpoint of deliberative reasoning, the standpoint that is constitutive to moral thinking, it is also not preceded by a normative assumption.¹¹⁶ Buddhist reductionism, by treating agency as conventionally

¹¹⁵ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 223.

¹¹⁶ It may be said that not discounting the standpoint of deliberative reasoning itself is also a normative assumption. This may be true. But the point here is that without obviously prioritizing nor discounting the standpoint of deliberative

constructed for the purpose of utility maximization rather than a mere byproduct of our linguistic practices, thus appears to have better resources to respond to Korsgaard's objections, as compared to Parfit's reductionism.

Moreover, Siderits claims, what Buddhist reductionism attempts to show with the incorporation of the theory of two truths is that the impersonalist project of a reductionist theory does not necessarily imply seeing one's life as no more than a succession of experiences; instead, one can entertain an agential, engaged, participant perspective at the conventional level even when one knows that one's existence just consists in impersonal psychophysical phenomena. This is what Siderits calls "ironic engagements."¹¹⁷ That is, we can maintain our agential attitudes even when we know that such attitudes are grounded entirely in impersonal facts. Furthermore, we can maintain our agential attitudes under this circumstance just like we can "cultivate our own happiness out of a desire to make those around us happy by appearing to be happy ourselves."¹¹⁸

However, I believe that Siderits' response to Korsgaard's view is unsatisfactory, for the following reasons. First, it is unclear whether the impersonalist project of a reductionist theory indeed does not necessarily imply seeing one's life as no more than a succession of experiences as Siderits claims. This is the case because it is unclear whether the impersonalist project of a reductionist theory does not take away one's capacity for forming an agential, engaged, participant attitude. While one can cultivate one's happiness out of a desire to make other people happy when one already has the capacity to fake happiness, it is unclear whether one can indeed form an agential, engaged, participant perspective if one's existence just consists in impersonal psychophysical phenomena.

reasoning, the normative assumption that Buddhist reductionism has does not obviously prevent itself from addressing Korsgaard's objection.

¹¹⁷ Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy*, 87.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 87, 124-137.

While Siderits does explain that agency is conventionally constructed for the purpose of utility maximization, and can in this way be taken to suggest that one can indeed form an agential perspective through conventional construction even if one's existence just consists in impersonal psychophysical phenomena, it remains unclear whether the idea of agency as conventionally constructed is non-arbitrarily explained. According to Siderits, agency is conventionally constructed out of a collection of psychophysical elements with maximal causal connectedness coming to identify with some past and future psychophysical elements. Such identification with past and future psychophysical elements allows the executive functions of self-scrutiny, self-control, and self-revision, and thereby can be taken to permit the formation of an agential, engaged, participant perspective. This explanation hinges on the idea that a collection of psychophysical elements with maximal causal connectedness can be delineated in an impersonalist project to explain how agency is conventionally constructed. However, the claim about a collection of psychophysical elements with maximal causal connectedness appears to be arbitrary. We human beings constantly exert causal influences on one another. The words of a speaker may evoke emotions in the audience, creating feedback that changes the thoughts of the speaker. In other words, causal interactions not only exist among the impersonal activities that constitute a single person but also exist between the activities that constitute different persons. There is nothing in principle that makes the intra-personal causal connectedness maximal, and inter-personal causal connectedness less than maximal.

Furthermore, even if it is reasonable to think that intra-personal causal connectedness is always stronger than inter-personal causal connectedness, the reason for thinking this way may have little to do with the impersonalist facts as described in Siderits' Buddhist reductionism. Instead, it may have to do with our pre-theoretic intuitions about persons as informed by our social

practices. That is, we learn to conceptualize certain physical and psychological activities as connecting to one another and together constituting a person in our social practices. It is this conception that affects our attribution of maximal causal connectedness, leading us to believe that intra-personal causal connectedness is always stronger than inter-personal causal connectedness, as opposed to any of our psychophysical facts as described in a reductionist theory.

Siderits is aware of this possibility. He suggests that the attribution of maximal causal connectedness does not presuppose our pre-theoretic intuitions about persons as informed by our social practices, for such attribution can be explained in impersonalist terms, and specifically by what he calls the consequentialist justification as described earlier.¹¹⁹ That is, the psychophysical elements based on which a person is conventionally constructed exhibit maximal causal connectedness because such conventional construction leads to maximal utility.¹²⁰ In other words, while there are also causal connections between different persons, the psychophysical activities that constitute different persons do not together exhibit maximal causal connectedness because they do not lead to maximal utility. By contrast, the psychophysical activities that constitute a single, agential person exhibit maximal causal connectedness because there is maximal utility. This is because the construction of a single agential person based on such a collection of psychophysical activities has the executive functions of self-scrutiny, self-control, and self-revision, and “systems with the capacities of self-scrutiny, self-control and self-revision turn out to be quite effective at local [utility] maximizing.”¹²¹

However, it is questionable whether the consequentialist justification indeed helps to explain maximal causal connectedness in impersonalist terms. Claiming that a collection of

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 47.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

psychophysical elements has maximal causal connectedness because the construction of personhood and agency out of such a collection turns out to be effective at utility maximizing appeals to an additional fact, namely, a fact about utility maximizing, to delineate the psychophysical elements relevant for a person. However, it is unclear whether this fact is a conventional fact or an ultimate fact. If it is a conventional fact, then Siderits' consequentialist justification appeals to a conventional fact to constrain the theorizing of the ultimate facts about a person. And if it is an ultimate fact, then it is unclear why the explanation of such an ultimate fact needs to appeal to the conventional construction of personhood as well as its resulting capacities.¹²² Either way, the consequentialist justification is problematic. To be clear, claiming that Siderits' consequentialist justification is problematic in the above sense does not necessarily involve holding that Siderits is committed to our having epistemic access to degrees of causal connectedness for the purposes of personal identifications. Instead, it only involves claiming that Siderits' view runs into problems in explaining the metaphysical facts relevant for a person. In other words, I believe that Siderits' consequentialist justification does not help to explain maximal causal connectedness in impersonalist terms, metaphysically speaking. But this issue is independent of the matter of whether people need to have epistemic access to the metaphysical fact about causal connectedness in order to engage with conventional practices of agency and moral deliberation. I do not think people need to have epistemic access, and nothing in my above claims implies this view (i.e., the view that people need to have epistemic access).

It follows that it is not a successful attempt for Siderits to use the consequentialist justification

¹²² This point can be spelled out differently in terms of the idea of functional unity. That is, it can also be claimed that the psychophysical elements, based on which conventional personhood is constructed to allow a system with the capacities of self-scrutiny, self-control and self-revision, indeed "belong to each other" to constitute a functionally unified whole in ways that a collection of physical elements that constitute, say, a piece of paper do not. However, the fact about functional unity is a fact additional to the ultimate facts as described in Siderits' Buddhist reductionism, but it is also not entirely a conventional fact. See Carpenter, "Persons Keeping Their Karma Together." For relevant discussions, also see Evan Thompson, *Why I Am Not a Buddhist* (Yale University Press, 2020).

to address the issue of whether the attribution of maximal causal connectedness does not presuppose our pre-theoretic intuitions about persons as informed by our social practices. Siderits' view is thus unsatisfactory in terms of explaining the idea of agency as conventionally constructed, and particularly the delineation of a collection of psychophysical elements with maximal causal connectedness. Given that the idea of agency as conventionally constructed is not satisfactorily explained, Siderits' response to Korsgaard's view, such that the idea of agency as conventionally constructed does not discount the deliberative standpoint of reasoning, is also unsatisfactory.

Here, some may argue that the above objections unfairly assume that Siderits tries to explain how causal streams are individuated as distinct functional unities, but it is not Siderits' goal to explain this. Instead, Siderits only aims to show that phenomena at the conventional level can be explained in terms of the interactions among activities at the ultimate level. I agree that Siderits' goal is not to explain how causal streams are individuated as distinct functional unities. Nevertheless, I believe that for Siderits to successfully show that phenomena at the conventional level can be explained in terms of the interactions among activities at the ultimate level, he also needs to explain how causal streams can be individuated as distinct functional unities. My objections thus do not *assume* that Siderits tries to explain the issue of individuation but instead suggest that the issue of individuation is something Siderits needs to explain, and that his explanations are not satisfactory.

3.5 Meaningful Practical Considerations

The other two problems of reductionism are that the truth of reductionism entails the impossibility of meaningful practical considerations, and that reductionism fails to satisfactorily explain why the justification of prudential and normative practices depends on metaphysical facts about persons

and personal identity. Siderits suggests that Buddhist reductionism does not suffer from these two problems. His suggestions again rest on his consequentialist justification for the construction of personhood. In this section, I further discuss the consequentialist justification to argue that it is problematic to use it to explain our practical considerations, such as our normative practices and self-interested concerns.

As explained previously in chapter 2, Parfit's reductionism is charged with going to the extreme of making meaningful practical considerations impossible. Parfit labels this charge as the extreme claim. He argues against the extreme claim, focusing specifically on the practices of self-interested concerns. He suggests that the extreme claim presupposes non-reductionism and that for this reason, it does not constitute a real threat to reductionism. If one genuinely accepts the truth of reductionism, one will see that concerns for one's personal future can be grounded entirely in psychological continuity and/or connectedness. This claim is what Parfit calls the moderate claim. However, as I also explained in chapter 2, Parfit does not have an argument for the moderate claim. Furthermore, the moderate claim assumes that one will still care about one's present life when one accepts reductionism. But this assumption is problematic, for it is arguable that the concerns about one's future come prior to the concerns about one's present life.

According to Siderits, Buddhist reductionism does not have these problems. It has resources to support the moderate claim, and such support does not involve the assumption described above. According to Siderits' Buddhist reductionism, personhood is constructed for the purpose of utility maximization. Furthermore, a system that is effective at local utility maximizing "can only be constructed out of collections of elements exhibiting maximal causal connectedness."¹²³ Buddhist reductionists can then defend the moderate claim by suggesting that one's concerns about one's

¹²³ Ibid, 66.

personal future can be grounded entirely in psychological (or psychophysical) connectedness, because such psychological connectedness is maximal, and that it is because of such maximal connectedness that conventional personhood can be constructed, based on which self-interested concerns are possible.

Furthermore, this suggestion does not privilege one's concerns about the present.¹²⁴ It does not suggest that one's concerns for one's personal future derive from one's concerns about the present; instead, it suggests that one is concerned about one's personal future because doing so maximizes utility. One's concerns about one's life, whether it is the past, present, or future, are grounded by the consequentialist principle that is involved in the construction of personhood. Buddhist reductionism thus has more resources to support the moderate claim and reject the extreme claim, as compared to Parfit's reductionism.

The consequentialist principle can also be used to explain why the justification of normative practices depends on the metaphysical nature of persons. According to Siderits, personhood is constructed out of a psychophysical series for the purpose of utility maximization. The consequentialist principle involved in the construction of personhood implies that there is "a fundamental obligation" of reducing pain and suffering, regardless of where the pain and suffering occur. Such a fundamental obligation in turn justifies the normative practices of impartial benevolence: Pain and suffering are to be removed regardless of where they occur.¹²⁵ It then appears to follow that Buddhist reductionism better avoids the problem concerning the justification of normative practices, compared to Parfit's reductionism.

The ways in which Buddhist reductionism avoids the two problems so described depend on the use of the consequentialist principle, but the consequentialist principle that Siderits describes

¹²⁴ Ibid, 78.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 102.

is problematic, as described previously. Below, I suggest more problems with the consequentialist principle. According to Siderits, the construction of personhood has the purpose of utility maximization. This claim can be interpreted in the following two different ways. The first interpretation, which involves the stronger version of the claim, is that conventional personhood has a *function*, and this function is utility maximizing. The second interpretation, which involves the weaker version of the claim, is that the construction of personhood is utility maximizing, regardless of whether utility maximization is the function of conventional personhood. This version of the claim is weaker since it allows that conventional personhood merely *happens to* maximize utility.

Siderits does not make a distinction between these two possible interpretations, so it is unclear exactly which interpretation he endorses. While the weaker claim seems more plausible, I believe that Siderits in fact needs the stronger claim. However, the stronger claim is problematic, for reasons I explain later. My discussions below will focus on why Siderits needs the stronger claim as opposed to the weaker claim, and how he does not offer sufficient justification for the stronger claim. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that even the weaker claim can be questioned. For instance, one may think that the construction of personhood only makes certain things go better, but it is nevertheless sub-optimal or sub-maximal. To claim that the construction of personhood is utility maximizing, regardless of whether utility maximization is the function of conventional personhood, one needs further justification, which Siderits does not offer. The understanding of conventional personhood in terms of utility maximization, as some may further point out, involves an overinterpretation of Buddhist sources.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, I will not go into detail about the

¹²⁶ See Bronwyn Finnigan, "Conventionalising Rebirth: Buddhist Agnosticism and the Doctrine of Two Truths," in *Global Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion: From Religious Experience to the Afterlife*, ed. Yujin Nagasawa and Mohammad Saleh Zarepour (Oxford University Press, Forthcoming); Tom Tillemans, *How Do Madhyamikas Think?* (Wisdom Publications, 2016).

potential problems with the weaker claim. Instead, I will grant Siderits' idea that the construction of personhood is utility maximizing for the purpose of argument.

Siderits needs the stronger claim as opposed to the weaker claim, for the following reasons. Siderits uses the consequentialist principle to address the issue about normative practices as justified by the metaphysical nature of persons, as described previously. In order to claim that we have a fundamental obligation to maximize utility in our normative practices, Siderits needs to claim that the construction of personhood has the function of utility maximizing rather than merely happens to maximize utility. This is the case because if the construction of personhood merely happens to maximize utility, perhaps only when circumstances are right, then it is unclear why we should organize our normative practices accordingly. However, if it is the function of conventional personhood to maximize utility, then there is a stronger reason for thinking that we should also act accordingly, namely, to maximize utility by alleviating pain or suffering regardless of whether it occurs. Here, some may point out that the stronger reason is perhaps still not strong enough. That is, granted that it is the function of conventional personhood to maximize utility, this is still insufficient for thinking that we then have the fundamental obligation to maximize utility. I agree but will not discuss this point until later. Here, I only mean to show that Siderits needs the stronger claim, as opposed to the weaker claim, to make his view somewhat plausible.

Furthermore, Siderits also uses the consequentialist principle to defend the moderate claim, which is the claim that we would still have reasons to care about our personal past and future even when we believe that our existence, ultimately speaking, only consists in psychophysical continuity. In order to suggest that we would still have reasons to care about our personal past and future, Siderits also needs to maintain that the construction of personhood has the function of utility maximizing. Similar reasoning goes for this point. That is, if the construction of personhood,

through which we develop concerns for our personal past and future, merely happens to maximize utility, then it is unclear why we will not stop caring about our personal past or future once we realize that we are only psychophysically continuous with our personal past or future, ultimately speaking, rather than having our diachronic identity grounded in some essence. By contrast, the idea that it is exactly the function of conventional personhood to maximize utility gives us a stronger reason for thinking that we may continue to care about our personal past and future. Again, some may point out, granted that it is the function of conventional personhood to maximize utility, this is still insufficient for thinking that we then have the fundamental obligation to maximize utility. I agree but will not discuss this point until later.

However, Siderits does not offer any justification for the stronger claim, namely, that the construction of personhood has the function of maximizing utility. He also does not consider whether such a function may in fact be ascribed by us, and how this consideration affects the strength of his view. Furthermore, even if it is true that it is the function of conventional personhood to maximize utility, Siderits' view still faces two problems, which I explain below.

The first problem is that the utility being maximized as a result of the construction of personhood, as described by Siderits, is *local utility*, which is associated with the psychophysical causal series based on which a person is constructed.¹²⁷ However, if the purpose of the construction of personhood is about maximizing local utility, and if the purpose of conventional personhood implies that there is a fundamental obligation of utility maximization, then the fundamental obligation should presumably be the obligation of maximizing local utility, rather than overall utility. But Siderits claims that the principle of conventional personhood shows that we have a fundamental obligation to maximize overall utility, which is why he suggests that this

¹²⁷ Ibid, 47.

fundamental obligation justifies impartial benevolence. Without further justifying the move from maximizing local utility to maximizing overall utility, Siderits' view is unsatisfying.

The second problem is, as mentioned previously, granted that it is the function of conventional personhood to maximize utility, this is insufficient for thinking that we thereby have a corresponding obligation to maximize utility, or that we thereby have reasons to maximize utility through caring about our personal past and future. One of the important features of human beings is exactly that we can reflect on our practices, regardless of what functions they are supposed to serve, to decide whether we indeed value such functions. That is, even if it is true that the function of conventional personhood is to maximize utility, we may still decide, upon collective deliberation, that we disvalue utility maximization, and that we want to organize our prudential concerns and normative practices differently, such that they serve a function we better value.

Given all these problems, Siderits' Buddhist reductionism does not succeed in defending the moderate claim to avoid the problem presented in the extreme claim, nor does it properly explain the justification of normative practices. It follows that while Siderits' Buddhist reductionism is presented as a better version of reductionism compared to Parfit's reductionism, it does not entirely avoid the problems of Parfit's reductionism. Furthermore, Siderits' Buddhist reductionism faces its own problem, namely, problematically resorting to the consequentialist principle in explaining conventional personhood and our practical considerations.

Here, a possible objection to my above claims is that Siderits need not endorse the weak consequentialist interpretation of the person convention. That is, Siderits need not hold that conventional personhood has the function of utility maximizing; instead, he can maintain that conventional personhood merely happens to maximize utility. This is because Siderits can argue that it is not the person convention itself that obliges us to maximize utility; instead, maximizing

utility is an assumed value in Siderits' theory, and the obligation of maximizing utility is independent of the person convention. I am willing to concede that this is a plausible interpretation of Siderits' view. However, this interpretation does not help to defend Siderits' view but only creates more problems. For instance, it is unclear why we should accept this assumed value especially when Siderits offers little justification for it. It is also unclear why maximizing utility is obligatory. Siderits' view thus faces a dilemma. Either he accepts the strong interpretation regarding the person convention, or he accepts the weak interpretations, but both lead to problems.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the problems with Siderits' Buddhist reductionism. While Siderits presents his Buddhist reductionism as better than Parfit's reductionism, and even claims that Buddhist reductionism avoids the problems with Parfit's reductionism, I suggested that Siderits' Buddhist reductionism not only does not fully avoid the problems with Parfit's reductionism about agency and the deliberative standpoint, but also faces its own problem, namely, problematically resorting to the consequentialist principle in explaining conventional personhood and our practical considerations.

The problems with Siderits' Buddhist reductionism have the following implication. Recall that at the end of chapter 2, I suggested that the problems faced by Parfit's reductionism cast doubt on the separability assumption, which in turn indicates that one cannot meaningfully take personal identity to be a construct having to do with our conceptual or social practices while at the same time holding the separability assumption. I further pointed out that we are left with two options. The first option is to further explain the idea of personal identity as a construction in relation to our psychological or psychophysical facts, and the second option is to challenge the separability

assumption. Siderits' Buddhist reductionism represents an attempt to further explain the idea of personal identity as a construction in relation to our psychological or psychophysical facts without challenging the separability assumption. Since Siderits' Buddhist reductionism ends up facing its own problems, I suggest that we turn to challenge the separability assumption, which is done in chapter 4.

IV Challenging the Separability Assumption: The Social Construction of Personal Identity

4.1 Overview

In this chapter, I challenge the separability assumption, namely, the assumption that metaphysical facts about personal identity can be defined in separation from our social practices including our practical considerations. Unlike Parfit's reductionism and Siderits' Buddhist reductionism, which takes personal identity as a conceptual construction having to do without our social practices and at the same time maintains that our psychological or psychophysical continuity can be defined without making reference to our social practices, I believe that our psychophysical continuity is also in part socially constructed, in the sense that whether an individual persists as the same person in part depends on whether there are social resources and support available for self-understanding, self-development, and recovery. Furthermore, understanding personal identity as socially constituted this way shows that personal identity is not only to be determined but also to be facilitated through collective effort.

I argue for these points by examining and responding to recent discussions about the social *constitution* of personal identity.¹²⁸ The social constitution of personal identity is the idea that personal identity, understood as the diachronic identity of a person, is constituted by social practices. This idea differs from Parfit's and Siderits' Buddhist-informed theories to suggest that we cannot distinguish between personal identity as a conventional existent and psychophysical continuity as our metaphysical nature that is independent of our social and conventional practices. Instead, personal identity is conventional because our psychophysical continuity is shaped by our

¹²⁸ Braddon-Mitchell and Miller, "How to Be a Conventional Person*"; Lindemann, *Holding and Letting Go: The Social Practice of Personal Identities*; Schechtman, *Staying Alive*.

conventional practices. Nevertheless, social constitution theories about personal identity (henceforth social constitution theories) mostly focus on how personal identity is constituted by our social and conventional practices and rarely discuss how it is also *constructed* through our social and conventional practices, with the notion of social and conventional practices broadly construed to include our attitudes, behaviors, conventions, resources allocation, etc. in relation to persons. However, I suggest that considering how our social practices may sometimes be problematic points to the social *construction* of personal identity in the sense described above.

In arguing that personal identity is better understood as socially constructed rather than merely socially constituted, I understand the difference between social construction and social constitution in the following way: Social constructionism is similar to social constitution theories in accepting the claim that certain phenomena are the ways they are because of the social practices we explicitly or implicitly endorse, but it goes further to claim that our social practices may be problematic, and that we may challenge our social practices to better shape the phenomena for this reason.

In 4.2, I review relevant literature to explain the different senses in which personal identity is socially constituted. In section 4.3, I examine Marya Schechtman's recent Person Life View to explore the criterion for personal identity in a social constitution theory. By discussing the criterion for personal identity in light of recent discussions on dementia advocacy and misdiagnosis of the vegetative state in health sciences and aging studies, I propose my alternative understanding about the social constitution of personal identity in 4.4 and discuss its implication in section 4.5. I then conclude in section 4.6 that personal identity is not only to be determined but also to be facilitated through our collective effort to establish better social practices; furthermore, considering this idea points to the social construction of personal identity.

4.2 The Social Constitution of Personal Identity

The social constitution of personal identity is the idea that personal identity is constituted by social practices. This is the case because psychophysical continuity, which is traditionally taken to constitute the diachronic identity of a person, is inextricably connected to our social practices. In this section, I explain what it means for our psychophysical continuity to be connected to our social practices, and what it implies for discussions about personal identity.

According to social constitution theories, there are three senses in which our psychophysical continuity is connected to our social practices: (1) our psychophysical continuity is developed through social practices, (2) our psychophysical continuity is sustained over time through social practices, (3) our understanding of our psychophysical continuity as relevant to personal identity is generated through social practices.¹²⁹ This is not to claim that all social constitution theories discuss all three. In fact, theories tend to focus more on (1) and (2) on the constructivist aspect. However, I believe that (3) is equally important to the other two, if not more important. Below, I explain the three senses in which our psychophysical activities are connected to our social practices.

Our psychophysical continuity is typically *developed* through social practices. This idea concerns how we come to have a certain psychophysical continuity through growing alongside others with the support of social infrastructures. Take the example of the kind of psychophysical continuity that is supported by our self-narratives. Children typically develop the capacity to tell self-stories in a social environment.¹³⁰ They learn to interpret their physical and psychological

¹²⁹ There are other aspects of us than our psychophysical continuity that are connected to our social practices. For a nice summary on this, see Kimberley Brownlee, *Being Sure of Each Other: An Essay on Social Rights and Freedoms* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 30–32.

¹³⁰ Lindemann, *Holding and Letting Go: The Social Practice of Personal Identities*; Schechtman, *Staying Alive*, 104–5. See also Elaine Reese, “Social Factors in the Development of Autobiographical Memory: The State of the Art,” *Social Development* 11, no. 1 (2002): 124–42.

events under the guidance of their caregivers (e.g., “the desire to snack before dinner is something to be managed rather than to act on”), and to make meaningful connections between their past, present, and future life events (e.g., “snacking now will ruin my appetite for dinner later”). Such interpretations and connections allow them to form appropriate concerns over their personal life, thereby coming to have a form of psychophysical continuity that is important for personal identity.¹³¹

To be clear, this may not necessarily be to claim that one can never form *any* self-interested concerns, or come to have *any* psychophysical continuity, without being immersed in a human social environment. Instead, this may only be to claim that the kind of psychophysical continuity relevant for personal identity is typically “encultured,”¹³² such that it is *informed and enriched* by human social practices. An individual that is not immersed in a human social environment may nevertheless develop some kind of psychophysical continuity. Nevertheless, their psychophysical continuity will differ from the psychophysical continuity of an encultured human being both in its structure and its complexity.

Our psychophysical continuity is also sustained over time through social practices. An example is our memory. It has been suggested that our memory does not exist just within the boundary of our body but also is socially distributed.¹³³ We talk to our partners or friends to remember and reconstruct a shared past, take photos to archive life moments and arrange them in our rooms, or perform family rituals to recapture elements of childhood to find a sense of security and even hope for the future. Talking to partners or friends, taking and arranging photos, and

¹³¹ For more discussions of how social connections are important for children’s development, see S. Matthew Liao, *The Right to Be Loved* (Oxford University Press USA, 2015).

¹³² Schechtman, *Staying Alive*, 114.

¹³³ Richard Heersmink, “The Narrative Self, Distributed Memory, and Evocative Objects,” *Philosophical Studies* 175, no. 8 (2018): 1829–49.

performing family rituals are all instances of our social practices. And it is through engaging with such social practices that we preserve memory and facilitate recall, thereby coming to have a form of psychophysical continuity often considered relevant for our personal identity.

The point that our psychophysical continuity is often sustained through our social practices can be further understood in terms of the recent idea of social niche construction, which concerns how we adapt social environments for our interests rather than merely adapt our interests to social environments. In particular, this idea suggests that our psychophysical activities do not merely occur as passive responses to social stimuli; instead, we modify social environments to actively regulate our psychophysical activities.¹³⁴ The ways in which we preserve memory and facilitate recall through social practices as discussed above can be viewed as ways in which we modify our social environment to facilitate our psychophysical continuity.

In addition, our understanding of our psychophysical continuity as relevant to personal identity is generated through social practices, such that certain psychophysical facts are made salient to us, and considered important for our personal persistence or cessation, as a result of our social practices rather than by some objective, natural standard.¹³⁵ An example is the criterion for death based on brain functioning that was proposed in the mid-twentieth century to replace traditional cardiopulmonary criteria due to the development of medical technology, and then normalized into social practices through legislation.¹³⁶ Nowadays, we commonly take the cessation of brain activities to determine the end of a person's life. However, there is no "objective" reason for thinking that we must prioritize brain functioning in determining death. In fact, there

¹³⁴ Giovanna Colombetti and Joel Krueger, "Scaffoldings of the Affective Mind," *Philosophical Psychology* 28, no. 8 (2015): 1157–76; Joel Krueger and Lucy Osler, "Engineering Affect: Emotion Regulation, the Internet, and the Techno-Social Niche," *Philosophical Topics* 47 (2019): 205–31.

¹³⁵ Cf. Lindemann, *Holding and Letting Go: The Social Practice of Personal Identities*, 12–13.

¹³⁶ David DeGrazia, *Human Identity and Bioethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Muñoz-Corcuera, "Persistence Narrativism and the Determinacy of Personal Identity," 733–34.

remain disagreements over how death should be defined.¹³⁷ This is the case not only because international guidelines for the determination of death are sometimes influenced by political considerations about organ transplantation,¹³⁸ but also because “the transition between being alive to, being dead can be indeterminate” due to not only medical advance but also our limited scientific knowledge.¹³⁹ In this way, commonly accepted physical facts about death are not value-free but instead facts made salient to us as a result of a social practice that is normalized through accepted guidelines and legislation. Had our social practice been different, what is considered facts relevant for one’s survival would have been somewhat different.¹⁴⁰

Given that our psychophysical continuity is inextricably connected to our social practices in the three senses above, such that (1) our psychophysical continuity is developed through social practices, (2) our psychophysical continuity is sustained over time through social practices, (3) our understanding of our psychophysical continuity as relevant to personal identity is generated through social practices, personal identity is inextricable from social practices. In this sense, personal identity is constituted not only by psychophysical continuity but also by social practices. In other words, personal identity is socially constituted.

The idea of personal identity as socially constituted differs from how personal identity is typically construed in philosophy of mind, both in traditional theories, such as neo-Lockean theories and animalism, and Buddhist-informed theories, such as Parfit’s and Siderits’

¹³⁷ Farr Curlin, “Brain Death: New Questions and Fresh Perspectives,” *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 40, no. 5 (2019): 355–58.

¹³⁸ Michael Nair-Collins, “Taking Science Seriously in the Debate on Death and Organ Transplantation,” *Hastings Center Report* 45, no. 6 (2015): 38–48.

¹³⁹ Evan Thompson, “Death: The Ultimate Transformative Experience,” in *Becoming Someone New: Essays on Transformative Experience, Choice, and Change*, ed. Enoch Lambert and John Schwenkler (Oxford University Press, 2020), 273. See also Haider Warraich, *Modern Death: How Medicine Changed the End of Life* (St. Martin’s Press, 2017).

¹⁴⁰ Braddon-Mitchell and Miller, “How to Be a Conventional Person*.” It is worth mentioning that Braddon-Mitchell and Miller do not label their view as constructivist even though I believe their view nicely illustrates the constructivist sense in which our psychophysical continuity are connected to our social practices.

reductionism, as explained previously. Discussions of the metaphysical identity of a person typically concern a person's psychophysical continuity, with little attention to how such psychophysical continuity is shaped by social practices.¹⁴¹ While theorists may be aware that personal identity is connected to our social practices, they appear to believe either that it is possible to define personal identity without making reference to social practices, or that we can at least clearly distinguish our psychophysical continuity from our social practices. Social constitution theories suggest the opposite. As explained previously, they maintain that we cannot properly define personal identity without making reference to social practices, and that our psychophysical continuity cannot be clearly distinguished from our social practices. This is not to claim that any conceptual distinction between them is not possible. Instead, this is only to claim that any distinction between the two is perhaps arbitrary or artificial.

The disagreement between social constitution theories and traditional theories sometimes goes deeper into the issue of what is considered the *metaphysical nature* of a person. According to traditional theories, the metaphysical nature of persons primarily has to do with psychophysical facts. This is because psychophysical facts are considered more fundamental than social practices in traditional theories,¹⁴² and even taken to lend explanatory or justificatory forces for our social practices.¹⁴³ By contrast, social constitution theories of personal identity challenge the scope of the metaphysical nature of a person as understood in traditional theories. According to social constitution theories, since our psychophysical continuity cannot be appropriately understood without making reference to our social practices, our psychophysical continuity is no more

¹⁴¹ Shoemaker, "Persons and Their Pasts"; Shoemaker and Swinburne, *Personal Identity*; David Lewis, *Philosophical Papers: Volume I* (Oxford University Press, 1980); Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*; Olson, *The Human Animal*; Olson, *What Are We? A Study in Personal Ontology*; Baker, "What Am I?"

¹⁴² For example see Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*; Olson, *What Are We? A Study in Personal Ontology*.

¹⁴³ For example see Derek Parfit, "Comments," *Ethics* 96, no. 4 (1986): 832–72; Shoemaker, "Personal Identity and Practical Concerns."

fundamental than our social practices, and cannot lend explanatory or justificatory forces for our social practices. Furthermore, the scope of a person's metaphysical nature should not be limited to psychophysical facts, but instead needs to be expanded to include relevant social facts.¹⁴⁴ It is because a person's metaphysical nature consists in social practices that personal identity is socially constituted, for the identity of a person has to do with the preservation of a person's metaphysical nature.

Nevertheless, two questions remain in need of further clarification. First, granted that our psychophysical activities are connected to our social practices in the three senses described previously, it is still unclear what it means to expand the scope of the metaphysical nature of persons. What is the metaphysical nature of a person, exactly, when its scope is expanded to include social facts? Secondly, granted that personal identity is socially constituted in part because of an expansive scope of the metaphysical nature of persons, it is still unclear what this implies for the determination of personal identity. What is the criterion for personal identity, exactly, and to what extent should such a criterion be informed by our current social practices? I explore these questions in the next section. It is worth mentioning that discussions of these questions sometimes focus on science-fiction-like thought experiments.¹⁴⁵ But in this chapter I focus on real life examples, such as dementia and persistent vegetative states, not because thought experiments are not useful, but because I believe focusing on real life examples helps to better explore the role of our social practices in our diachronic lives.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Schechtman, *Staying Alive*.

¹⁴⁵ Braddon-Mitchell and Miller, "How to Be a Conventional Person*"; Michael Tze-Sung Longenecker, "Community-Made Selves," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 2021, 1–12.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Kathleen V. Wilkes, *Real People: Personal Identity Without Thought Experiments* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

4.3 Person Life View

In this section, I discuss Schechtman's Person Life View (PLV)¹⁴⁷ to further explore the two questions described at the end of the previous section. Schechtman's PLV is one of the recent theories in philosophy of mind that argue for the social constitution of personal identity. Furthermore, her argument for the social constitution of personal identity is based on an argument for an expansive scope of the metaphysical nature of persons. I explain Schechtman's PLV in what follows.

Schechtman's PLV can be roughly divided into two parts. The first part concerns the nature of a person, in which she argues that being a person is about having a "person life," where a person life is an integrated whole of physical, psychological, and social activities. The second part concerns the diachronic identity of a person, in which she argues that whether an individual persists as one and the same person depends on whether there remains an integrated whole of physical, psychological, and social activities. I unpack these below.

According to Schechtman, the existence of a person primarily consists in what she calls a person life, which is "the characteristic kind of life lived by a person."¹⁴⁸ In this view, what it means to be a person has less to do with the physical or psychological activities of an individual, but more to do with how an individual's physical or psychological activities are integrated with social forces to constitute a characteristic life. The characteristic kind of life lived by a person, according to Schechtman, involves what she calls person-specific activities, which are activities persons typically engaged with; furthermore, such activities are supported by relevant social infrastructures that can be taken to define a "person-space."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Schechtman, *Staying Alive*.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 111.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 114.

In Schechtman's view, person-specific activities include "[s]inging duets, dancing a tango, picnicking in the park, playing tag, racing to the deep end, watching the big game together, telling ghost stories by the campfire, and sharing popcorn at the movies."¹⁵⁰ Non-human animals, such as lizards and racoons, do not typically engage with such activities. Admittedly, it is more and more common for human beings to include pet animals in some of those activities: we tend to see people picnicking in the park with their pet dogs, and even singing duets with their pet parrots. This may raise the question of whether some of the activities described above are indeed person-specific, or whether non-human animals are persons, but Schechtman believes that this question can be addressed if we see how person-specific activities are supported by what she calls the social infrastructure of personhood.

According to Schechtman, the social infrastructure of personhood is the set of practices that "provides the backdrop within which the kinds of activities that make up the form of life of personhood become possible."¹⁵¹ It may include the organization of a family and the social practices surrounding family relationships. More importantly, it involves the attitudes we typically and habitually take towards other human beings, such as seeing them as *someone* rather than *something*.¹⁵² In this way, part of the reason why the activities described previously are person-specific is that we engage with such activities with beings that we typically and habitually see as persons.¹⁵³

Taken together, the social infrastructure we collectively establish carves out a person-space,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 77.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 113.

¹⁵² Ibid, 113.

¹⁵³ Here, some may wonder, if someone is unlucky enough to lack person-specific activities or relations with others, are they then not persons? I believe that in Schechtman's view, even when a human being is unlucky enough to lack person-specific activities or relations with others, such a human being would still be typically and habituated viewed as a person in our social practices; for instance, such a human being would still be taken to deserve dignity, rights, and social welfare in our society, to some extent.

which defines certain activities as person-specific. Through participating in person-specific activities and occupying a role in the network of social relationships in the person-space, an individual develops and maintains their psychophysical activities to lead a person life and thereby exists as persons. The person life that is led by the individual is then an integrated whole of physical, psychological, and social activities.¹⁵⁴

According to Schechtman, the integrated whole of physical, psychological, and social activities is the most fundamental nature of a person.¹⁵⁵ When we encounter other humans in the person-space, we experience them as integrated wholes and cannot help but do so.¹⁵⁶ Of course, this is not to claim that we can never see others merely as biological organisms or psychological subjects. Rather, this is to claim that “human organisms” or “psychological subjects” are merely “a particular perspective we take on ourselves and our lives,” one that attends to our purely biological functions or psychological processes, with the willful ignorance of how such biological functions or psychological processes are embedded in a complex, dynamic social network.¹⁵⁷ Take animalism as an example. Proponents of animalism commonly claim that our identity has to do with our biological continuity, and that it has little to do with our social practices. However, Schechtman believes that this view of animalism is “always only partial” because “*in vivo* our biological functions are connected in intricate and intimate ways with our psychological and social lives and cannot be cleanly separated from them if we want to fully understand even our

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 166–167.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 185.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 184–185.

¹⁵⁷ This point expresses a direct opposition to animalism and neo-Lockean theories, in which persons are primarily viewed as human organisms or psychological subjects. For a similar point, see Jay L. Garfield, *Losing Ourselves: Learning to Live without a Self* (Princeton University Press, 2022), 140–41. But while Garfield also believes that the understanding of persons requires attention to the complex interactions among our physical, psychological, and social activities, he does not believe that the integrated whole of physical-psycho-social activities is thereby our *most fundamental nature*, in contrast to what Schechtman suggests.

biology.”¹⁵⁸

Given that the most fundamental nature of a person is an integrated whole of psychophysical and social activities, personal identity has to do the continuation of such an integrated whole: whether an individual persists as one and the same person depends on whether there remains a continuous, integrated whole of psychophysical and social activities. The question is then what the criterion is for determining whether a cluster of psychophysical and social activities remain a continuous, integrated whole.

Schechtman does not seem to provide a clear criterion for this matter. This is perhaps because in her view, there is no single criterion for personal identity. As Schechtman claims, the idea that personal identity has to do with the continuity of an integrated whole implies that none of the individual activity involved in the integrated whole is sufficient or necessary for the continuation of a person’s life. Instead, an individual remains one and the same person over time insofar as there are “enough of the typical functions” in the integrated whole, allowing a continuous, identifiable locus of interaction in person-space.¹⁵⁹ But exactly what counts as enough of the typical functions that allow a continuous, identifiable locus of interactions depends on various factors and may only be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Nevertheless, Schechtman is clear the issue of “what counts as enough of the typical functions that allow a continuous, identifiable locus of interactions” has to do with our social practices. This point can be seen in her discussion about dementia and persistent vegetative states (PVS). According to Schechtman, an individual in a PVS or with dementia, even in their severe stage, still persists as the same person; this is because they continue to occupy a role in the person-space, with their life story unfolding through the narration of others. As Schechtman describes,

¹⁵⁸ Schechtman, *Staying Alive*, 184.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 167.

“Someone in a persistent vegetative state (PVS) is typically dressed in clothes, lies in a bed with sheets, and is referred to by name. They are the recipients of person-specific attentions even if they cannot actively reciprocate. Loved ones may come to visit regularly and decorate the room, mark anniversaries, talk to the vegetative individual and play her favorite music; she may be covered by health insurance and receive disability checks. All of these are part of a form of life that is distinctive of persons, even if the individual in a PVS is included in that life in a purely passive way.”¹⁶⁰

This is similar for an individual with dementia, even when their family and friends refuse to visit them:

“Friends who refuse to visit a dementia patient because they cannot stand to see the once-brilliant mind reduced to that are recognizing the continuation of his narrative just as surely as those who visit regularly, and we can find this kind of socially-generated continuation of narrative even in cases where it might at first seem absent. When someone looks at the Alzheimer’s patient and claims “Father is gone; that’s not him,” she does not, as we have said, truly see a brand new being, but rather the sad continuation of a once vigorous life—otherwise it would not be painful in just the way it is. Even in the case of someone with dementia who is warehoused in a state institution or found dying of hypothermia homeless and alone on the street we are inclined to muse that this was “someone’s baby boy” and wonder how he came to this.”¹⁶¹

Given how individuals in PVS or with dementia continue to occupy social roles in the person-space, with their life stories unfolding through the narration of others, there are “enough of the typical functions” in their integrated wholes that allow continuous, identifiable loci of

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 77.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 105.

interaction. Moreover, there are “enough of the typical functions” in part because we perceive their circumstances as continuous with how their lives used to be in our social practices. In this way, personal identity is socially constituted in the sense that whether an individual persists as the same person in part consists in how they are perceived and treated in our social practices. Here, it is worth mentioning that while Schechtman believes that individuals in a PVS or with severe dementia persist as the same persons as they used to be, they only have personal identity in a *minimal* sense. This shows that personal identity is not an all-or-nothing matter but instead come in continuous degrees. However, Schechtman does not specify the standard measurement of these degrees. While discussion of this point is important, it is outside the scope of this dissertation.

Schechtman’s PLV helps to address the two questions identified in the previous section, namely, the questions of (1) exactly what the metaphysical nature of persons is when the scope of the metaphysical nature of persons is expanded to include social facts, and (2) exactly what the criterion for personal identity is given that personal identity is socially constituted, and to what extent such a criterion should be informed by our current social practices. Particularly, it addresses the first question by suggesting that our metaphysical nature is an integrated whole of psychophysical and social processes, and that “human organisms” or “psychological subjects” are merely abstractions from those wholes. Furthermore, it addresses the second question by claiming that an individual remains the same person insofar as there is enough of the typical functioning in the integrated whole that allows a continuous, identifiable locus of interaction in the person-space. There is no single criterion for determining this matter, and the determination of this matter in part has to do with our social practices, namely, whether we continue to see an individual as a person whose circumstance is continuous with the life they used to live.

This answer—namely, that the determination of personal identity in part has to do with our

social practices, such that whether an individual persists as the same person in part depends on how we perceive and interact with the individual in our social practices—does not seem very satisfying. This is the case because, as one may wonder, whether our social practices may be problematic sometimes, which I explain further in the next section. If our social practices may be problematic, then it is questionable to determine personal identity on the basis of social practices. At the very least, some discussion on when and how our social practices may be problematic is important, but there seems little discussion on this in Schechtman's PLV. But without relevant discussion on this matter, the answer to the second question is unsatisfying in PLV. In other words, granted that the metaphysical nature of a person is an integrated whole of psychophysical and social activities, and granted that personal identity is in part constituted by social practices, further clarification is still needed regarding whether our social practices may be problematic. Furthermore, if our social practices may be problematic, how should we interact with current social practices to determine personal identity, and what does this imply for the idea of personal identity as socially constituted? I discuss these issues in the following two sections.

4.4 Personal Identity and Social Support

In this section, I draw upon recent discussions of stigma against dementia and misdiagnosis of the vegetative state to explain how social practices can sometimes be problematic. Specifically, social practices can be problematic in the sense that they can prevent individuals from meaningfully persisting as the same persons through depriving them of social resources and support important for self-understanding, self-development, or recovery. This suggestion points to a particular understanding of how personal identity is constituted by social practices. That is, personal identity is constituted by social practices, such that whether an individual persists as the same person in part depends, constitutively, on whether there are relevant social resources and support available

for self-understanding, self-development, or recovery.

Before delving into discussions about dementia advocacy and misdiagnosis of the vegetative states, it is important to know that the idea of problematic social practices is a common worry about social constitution theories of personal identity. This worry is usually cashed out in terms of the claim that our social practices are arbitrary, or the claim that our attempt to ascribe personal identity in our social practices can sometimes misfire. These two claims are explained below.

The first claim about arbitrary practices suggests that our social practices can be problematic because there may not be a reasonable basis for how we typically perceive and treat individuals in our society. This claim is typically considered and rejected by social constitution theorists, including Schechtman herself. Social constitution theorists admit that some of our social practices may be arbitrary; however, they emphasize that a lot of our social practices are not arbitrary, and our social practices surrounding personal identity are like this. It is worth mentioning that different social constitution theorists take the idea of non-arbitrary practices to mean slightly different things. Schechtman takes it to mean that our social practices regarding personal identity are “responses to facts about the world,”¹⁶² while other social constitution theories take it to mean that social practices regarding personal identity are just like our conventions about nations and death, which are results of social negotiation that reflect our interests and concerns and have real implications for our lives.¹⁶³ It is not always clear whether these two ideas are compatible, but this issue is not my primary interest here.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Schechtman, *Staying Alive*, 121.

¹⁶³ Braddon-Mitchell and Miller, “How to Be a Conventional Person*”; Muñoz-Corcuera, “Persistence Narrativism and the Determinacy of Personal Identity.”

¹⁶⁴ It is unclear whether they are compatible because it is not always clear what Schechtman means by “facts about the world.” She sometimes makes an analogy between facts about persons and facts about apples, suggesting that both persons and apples are not substances but rather objects of everyday life in Lynn Baker’s sense. But facts about apples are presumably less subject to social negotiation as compared to facts about nations. Furthermore, reasons for social negotiations in these two cases would also be very different. See Schechtman, *Staying Alive*, 195.

The second claim about how social practices can be problematic suggests that our attempt to ascribe personal identity in our social practices can sometimes “misfire.”¹⁶⁵ That is, granted that we typically see individuals under particular circumstances as persons, and that we typically treat their circumstances as continuous with the lives they used to live, such perception and treatment may be misplaced. For instance, when discussing personal identity in the PVS, Hilde Lindemann suggests that individuals in a PVS *should not* be considered to persist as the same persons, even though she does not deny that such individuals may continue to be included in person-specific activities and accorded to the person-space in ways that Schechtman describes. According to Lindemann, having meaningful mental activities is a necessary condition for personal identity, given that individuals in a PVS no longer have such mental activities, any attempt to ascribe personal identity to them misfires.¹⁶⁶ They should be considered not having enough of the typical functions in the integrated whole that allows a continuous, identifiable locus of interactions, in Schechtman’s terms.

The above two senses in which social practices are problematic, as discussed in the social constitution literature, are not my focus in this section. I agree with social constitution theorists that most of our social practices surrounding personal identity are not arbitrary. Furthermore, I remain open to the possibility that our attempt to ascribe personal identity in our social practices can sometimes misfire. However, I believe there is another sense in which social practices can be problematic that is worthy of attention. That is, social practices can unwittingly deprive individuals of social resources and support important for self-understanding, self-development, or recovery, and thereby prevent individuals from meaningfully persisting as the same persons. I explain this point below with two examples, the misdiagnosis of the vegetative state and the stigma against

¹⁶⁵ Lindemann, *Holding and Letting Go: The Social Practice of Personal Identities*, 17.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

dementia.

The first example is misdiagnosis of the vegetative state (VS). In the recent guideline on Disorders of Consciousness from the American Academy of Neurology,¹⁶⁷ the term “*permanent* vegetative state,” which is sometimes used equivocally with the term “persistent vegetative state” and commonly appears in both philosophical and medical literature, is suggested to be replaced with “*chronic* vegetative state (CVS).” This is because the term “*permanent* vegetative state” indicates irreversibility, while recent findings reveal that the vegetative state can be misdiagnosed, and that recovery from a prolonged vegetative state is rare but possible.

While remaining controversial, studies of misdiagnosis regarding Disorders of Consciousness suggest that up to 40% of the people taken to be in the vegetative state are misdiagnosed.¹⁶⁸ The misdiagnosis has implications for patients’ prognosis and recovery. For instance, individuals diagnosed with VS may not receive rehabilitation care early enough or at all; this could prevent them from regaining psychophysical or social functions. By contrast, patients admitted to inpatient rehabilitation early enough may show significant functional improvement. In a recent study on rehabilitation outcomes of individuals with disorder of consciousness including VS, out of 396 patients admitted to inpatient rehabilitation, 68% recovered consciousness, and among 66 patients who survived more than 2 years after discharge, 21% recovered functional independence.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Joseph T. Giacino et al., “Practice Guideline Update Recommendations Summary: Disorders of Consciousness: Report of the Guideline Development, Dissemination, and Implementation Subcommittee of the American Academy of Neurology; The American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine; And the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research,” *Neurology* 91, no. 10 (2018): 450–60.

¹⁶⁸ Caroline Schnakers et al., “Diagnostic Accuracy of the Vegetative and Minimally Conscious State: Clinical Consensus Versus Standardized Neurobehavioral Assessment,” *BMC Neurology* 9, no. 1 (2009): 35; K. Andrews et al., “Misdiagnosis of the Vegetative State: Retrospective Study in a Rehabilitation Unit,” *British Medical Journal* 313, no. 7048 (1996): 13–16.

¹⁶⁹ Risa Nakase-Richardson et al., “Longitudinal Outcome of Patients with Disordered Consciousness in the NIDRR TBI Model Systems Programs,” *Journal of Neurotrauma* 29, no. 1 (2012): 59–65. See also Andrew Peterson, Sean Aas, and David Wasserman, “What Justifies the Allocation of Health Care Resources to Patients with Disorders of Consciousness?,” *AJOB Neuroscience* 12, no. 2–3 (2021): 129.

Our medical practices regarding VS, without proper recognition of the possibility of misdiagnosis, or without funding resources allocated to improve diagnostic accuracy and recovery, can unwittingly deprive individuals of the care they need for regaining psychophysical or social functioning to persist as the same persons in a meaningful sense, or even result in end-of-life decision making. For this reason, novel healthcare resources have been recently suggested to improve not only diagnostic and prognostic accuracy but also recovery with regard to a PVS or CVS. It is also suggested that “precautionary personhood” should be granted to individuals in a PVS or CVS to caution against mistreatment.¹⁷⁰

The second example has to do with stigma against dementia. Recent discussions of dementia and dementia advocacy suggest that stigma surrounding dementia, in which dementia is viewed as a deficit,¹⁷¹ a “living death,”¹⁷² or an “empty shell,”¹⁷³ is common in our society. However, people with moderate and severe dementia often are still capable of understanding and finding meanings in social situations, as well as feelings of self-worth.¹⁷⁴ If these strengths are not properly appreciated by people around them, then their self-worth will be unwittingly assaulted, and their rights wrongly deprived.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, they may end up acting in a way that conforms

¹⁷⁰ The idea of precautionary personhood points to a different direction when discussing the personal identity in a PVS or CVS. That is, instead of focusing on whether an individual in a PVS or CVS *does* persist as the same persons, as what philosophers like Schechtman and Lindemann do, we should better focus on how to ensure proper treatment to *potentially* enable the individual to persist as the same person. See Matthew Braddock, “Precautionary Personhood: We Should Treat Patients with Disorders of Consciousness as Persons,” *AJOB Neuroscience* 12, no. 2–3 (2021): 162–64; Matthew Braddock, “Should We Treat Vegetative and Minimally Conscious Patients as Persons?,” *Neuroethics* 10, no. 2 (2017): 267–80.

¹⁷¹ Linda Birt et al., “Shifting Dementia Discourses from Deficit to Active Citizenship,” *Sociology of Health & Illness* 39, no. 2 (2017): 199–211.

¹⁷² Susan M. Behuniak, “The Living Dead? The Construction of People With Alzheimer’s Disease as Zombies,” *Ageing and Society* 31, no. 1 (2011): 70–92.

¹⁷³ Martina Zimmermann, “Alzheimer’s Disease Metaphors as Mirror and Lens to the Stigma of Dementia,” *Literature and Medicine* 35, no. 1 (2017): 71–97.

¹⁷⁴ Steven R. Sabat, “Dementia Beyond Pathology: What People Diagnosed Can Teach Us About Our Shared Humanity,” *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 16, no. 2 (2019): 163–72.

¹⁷⁵ Sabat, “Dementia Beyond Pathology: What People Diagnosed Can Teach Us About Our Shared Humanity,” 169.

to the negative stereotypes of dementia as a result of self-stigmatization,¹⁷⁶ which have important implications for personal identity, as explained below.

According to psychologist Steven Sabat, individuals with dementia are often treated with a reductive attitude,¹⁷⁷ in which they are viewed primarily in terms of their pathology rather than some integrated wholes of functioning. When discussing individuals Alzheimer's disease (AD), which is a type of dementia, Sabat describes:

[O]ne of my former students, working during the summer as an Emergency Medicine Technician, was about to administer a standard mental status test to a man diagnosed with AD whom he and his partner were taking to the hospital from the nursing home in which the man lived. My former student's partner, driving the ambulance, said, 'Don't bother with that; he has Alzheimer's and won't know anything anyway.' It should be noted that this was spoken in a loud voice that was clear enough for the man with AD to hear [...] My former student, however, had learned some important lessons about people with AD and so he proceeded to test the man using some supportive, facilitative, techniques he learned in our class. To the utter astonishment of the driver, the man with AD was shown to be alert and oriented for time, place, and person [...].¹⁷⁸

The reductive attitude, along with the negative stereotypes on dementia in our social discourses as mentioned previously, can lead to self-stigmatization in individuals living with dementia. Such self-stigmatization can contribute to the loss of self-esteem and sense of agency,

¹⁷⁶ This point can be further understood in terms of Ian Hacking's looping effect. See Ian Hacking, "Making Up People," *London Review of Books*, 2006; Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹⁷⁷ It is worth mentioning that such a reductive attitude is not necessarily associated with reductionism about persons or personal identity. One can maintain that the metaphysical existence of a person only consists in some psychophysical facts without also viewing a person only in terms of their pathology.

¹⁷⁸ Steven R. Sabat, "Dementia Beyond Pathology: What People Diagnosed Can Teach Us About Our Shared Humanity," *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 16, no. 2 (2019): 163–72.

thereby preventing individuals with dementia from any serious consideration of dementia as a “manageable disability” that is compatible with living a meaningful life,¹⁷⁹ or from developing the potential to engage with active citizenship to advocate for themselves.¹⁸⁰ In this way, stigma surrounding dementia can unwittingly deprive individuals with dementia of social resources and support relevant for self-understanding and self-development, such as the understanding of oneself as having a manageable disability rather than a deficit, and the pursuit of personal growth to live a meaningful life, thereby preventing one from persisting as an continuous, integrated whole in a non-minimal sense. Such social support and resources are exactly what dementia advocates aim to offer. As an advocate who lives with dementia describes in a recent study, “When you get diagnosed, often times you lose some self-confidence... [I do this] to give people with the diagnosis and also the caregivers that feeling that you can live well with dementia—that life doesn't end when you have a diagnosis... Don't automatically think you cannot do it.”¹⁸¹

The above discussions about misdiagnosis of VS and stigma against dementia, taken together, indicate a particular way in which social practices can be problematic, a way that is different from the two discussed towards the beginning of this section. That is, social practices can be problematic, not because there is arbitrariness or possibility of misfire, but because individuals can be deprived of opportunities for self-understanding, self-development, or recovery. Furthermore, being deprived of such opportunities can prevent individuals from persisting as the same persons in a meaningful or non-minimal sense, such as through regaining consciousness and functional independence, or seeing oneself as having enough of the typical functions in the integrated whole

¹⁷⁹ Renée L. Beard, Jenny Knauss, and Don Moyer, “Managing Disability and Enjoying Life: How We Reframe Dementia Through Personal Narratives,” *Journal of Aging Studies* 23, no. 4 (2009): 227.

¹⁸⁰ Birt et al., “Shifting Dementia Discourses from Deficit to Active Citizenship”; Ruth Bartlett, “Citizenship in Action: The Lived Experiences of Citizens with Dementia Who Campaign for Social Change,” *Disability & Society* 29, no. 8 (2014): 1291–1304.

¹⁸¹ Kishore Seetharaman and Habib Chaudhury, “‘I Am Making a Difference’: Understanding Advocacy as a Citizenship Practice among Persons Living with Dementia,” *Journal of Aging Studies* 52, no. 100831 (2020): 1–7.

that permits a continuous, identifiable locus of interaction in person-space.

Such an understanding about how social practices can be problematic further suggests an alternative idea about how personal identity is constituted by social practices. That is, personal identity is constituted by social practices, such that whether an individual persists as the same person in part depends, constitutively, on whether there are relevant social resources and support important for self-understanding, self-development, or recovery. This understanding has an important implication in relation to Schechtman's view. According to Schechtman, personal identity is socially constituted because personal identity in part depends on how an individual is perceived or treated in our social practices. According to my alternative idea, the reason why this is the case is that how an individual is perceived or treated in our social practices has implications for their self-understanding, self-development, or recovery in relation to personal identity. The alternative view about the social constitution of personal identity, then, shows that personal identity is something that can be facilitated through the resources and support we provide in our social practices, rather than merely a fact to be determined in light of our social practices. I further explain this point in the next section.

But before explaining this point, it is important to clarify two things. The first thing has to do with the similarity and difference between the social constructionist view and reductionism. As some may argue, it seems that the social constructionist view maintains a distinction between two levels of explanation, namely, the level of social practices of personal identification (which include our self-description and self-understanding) and the level of metaphysical persistence; there is thus some similarity between the social constructionist view and reductionism since reductionists also maintain such a distinction. It is true that in my social constructionist view, the social practices of personal identification and metaphysical persistence can be conceptually distinguished from one

another. However, having such a conceptual distinction does not imply that there is a distinction between two levels of explanation (i.e., the level of social practices and the level of metaphysical persistence), which is a distinction commonly maintained by reductionists. Given that our psychophysical continuity is inextricably connected to our psychophysical continuity in ways explained previously, explanations at the level of metaphysical persistence cannot help but make reference to social practices. For this reason, there is no clear distinction between the two levels of explanation. The social constructionist view is in fact different from reductionism in this regard.

The second thing has to do with the kind of personal identity that may be promoted or hindered by social practices. As some may object, it seems that social practices only promote or hinder our practices of personal identification, having to do with our self-understanding, rather than our metaphysical persistence. If this is true, then the claim that metaphysical theorizing of personal identity cannot be done without reference to social practices is not supported. But again, given that social practices can affect our psychophysical continuity in ways described previously, there is no reason to think that when social practices promote or hinder personal identification, it does not also shape our psychophysical continuity.

4.5 The Social Construction of Personal Identity

As explained previously, the alternative idea about personal identity as socially constituted—namely, whether an individual persists as the same person in part depends on whether there are social resources and support available for self-understanding, self-development, or recovery—shows that personal identity can be facilitated rather than merely determined. This point shows that personal identity is better understood as socially *constructed* rather than merely socially *constituted*. This is because, while social construction can be understood as a special form of social

constitution, the idea of social construction helps to foreground the need to take a critical stance towards our social practices to better facilitate or construct personal identity. I explain all these points in what follows.

As explained previously, when discussing how our reductive, biomedical attitudes can hurt individuals living with dementia, Sabat suggests that people with moderate and severe dementia are still capable of understanding and finding meanings in social situations, as well as feelings of self-worth. If these strengths are not properly appreciated by people around them, namely, people deemed healthy, then their self-worth and personhood will be unwittingly assaulted, and their rights wrongly deprived.¹⁸² Furthermore, they may end up acting in a way that confirms to the reductive conception of dementia,¹⁸³ leading to what Ian Hacking calls “the looping effect,” which I explain below.¹⁸⁴

According to Hacking, the looping effect describes “an important feature of human kinds such that they have effects on the people classified, but also the classified people can take matters into their own hands.”¹⁸⁵ That is to say, how we conceive of others has implications for not only how they see themselves but also how they behave, such that they may see themselves or behave in ways that affirm our conceptions or preconceptions. Furthermore, such implications are mediated through the resources and support provided to individuals regarding self-understanding and self-development. Take addiction for example. Research suggests that negative stereotypes surrounding addiction can affect the self-conceptions in individuals who use drugs through the process of self-stigmatization, in which individuals internalize negative public attitudes about them. Such self-stigmatization can result in even more drug consumption. As Matthews, Dwyer, and

¹⁸² Sabat, “Dementia Beyond Pathology: What People Diagnosed Can Teach Us About Our Shared Humanity,” 169.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 169–170.

¹⁸⁴ Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 58–59. See also Hacking, “Making Up People.”

Snoek describe,

The process of self-stigmatization is pronounced in addiction [...]. It comes about via internalization of the negative stereotype, a resultant loss of self-esteem, and acting out of the negative public image. This public image excludes affected individuals from public engagement by seeing them as, for example, unreliable or untrustworthy. Affected individuals will then exclude themselves from public life, for example, by failing to apply for work or by removing themselves from public sight; or they will cease to see themselves as responsible citizens; or they will begin to see themselves as legitimate objects of the treatment meted out to them. Above all, they will be motivated to continue to consume in order to forget, set aside, or reduce the negative feelings arising from their shame.¹⁸⁶

The idea of the looping effect is important for thinking about social construction, for it shows that social facts about human beings can be facilitated by us through how we conceive or interact with one another, with regard to psychiatric disorders,¹⁸⁷ gender and race,¹⁸⁸ disability,¹⁸⁹ and arguably also personal identity. Previous discussions about dementia reveal this point. That is, we can facilitate personal identity in dementia through better conceiving of what it means to have dementia, as well as better understanding the resources and support needed by individuals living with dementia, especially in terms of self-development and self-understanding. Furthermore, we can fail to facilitate personal identity through unwittingly depriving individuals of resources and support relevant for developing and maintaining their psychophysical or social functioning.

¹⁸⁶ Steve Matthews, Robyn Dwyer, and Anke Snoek, "Stigma and Self-Stigma in Addiction," *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 14, no. 2 (2017): 178.

¹⁸⁷ Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?*; Hacking, "Making Up People."

¹⁸⁸ For example, see Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁸⁹ For example, see Ásta Sveinsdóttir, "Social Construction," *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 12 (2015): 884–92; Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir, "The Social Construction of Human Kinds," *Hypatia* 28, no. 4 (2013): 716–32.

The idea that we can facilitate personal identity in this way suggests that personal identity is better understood as socially constructed rather than merely socially constituted. That is, while personal identity is constituted by our social practices, such social practices are also shaped by us. We can accept current social practices without reflecting on how some of them may be problematic, unwittingly depriving individuals of resources and support relevant for self-understanding and self-development, and thereby failing to facilitate personal identity in part. We can also take a critical stance towards current social practices in our society. Such a critical stance may involve an examination of our social discourses, such as whether the discourses prevent individuals from developing or sustaining their integrated functioning through self-stigmatization. It may also involve careful reflection on our collective attitudes towards members of particular social groups in our society, such as whether such attitudes become reductive and even prevent or delay appropriate medical procedures.

Here, it is important not to confuse the claim that we can facilitate personal identity with the claim that someone can easily make an individual a continuing person (or not a continuing person) simply by adopting a particular stance to treat it as a continuing person (or not a continuing person). In particular, the claim about facilitating personal identity suggests that how we collectively perceive or treat individuals under particular circumstances has implications for the social resources and support we establish for such individuals in our society, and such social resources and support affect the extent to which the individuals persist as the same persons. In this way, someone *cannot* easily make an individual a continuing person (or not) simply by adopting a particular stance to treat them as such, especially without relevant social practices in place, and especially without having an influence on an individual's psychophysical or social activities.

My social constructionist view differs from Schechtman's PLV in two important ways. First,

Schechtman believes that judgment about personal identity is not a matter of arbitrary choice but a response to facts,¹⁹⁰ whereas my social constructionist view maintains that judgment about personal identity is in a sense a matter of choice, having to do with how we are to contribute to facts about person-specific activities and social infrastructure. Nevertheless, such a choice is not an arbitrary one, since it is based on our values about human flourishing, as well as the fact that certain activities and infrastructure are more conducive to this goal than others. For example, the engagement with dementia advocacy is a choice. It has to do with how we are to contribute to facts about person-specific activities and social infrastructure, such as through countering the stigma and misunderstanding surrounding dementia. Furthermore, such a choice is not arbitrary. It is based on the fact that such stigma and misunderstanding are counterproductive to the well-being of individuals living with dementia, as well as our value about individual well-being.

Secondly, my social constructionist view shows that our most fundamental nature as integrated wholes is in a sense a perspective as well. As explained previously, Schechtman suggests that we are most fundamentally integrated wholes rather than some biological organisms or psychological subjects, because “biological organisms” or “psychological subjects” is only “a particular perspective we take on ourselves and our lives,” one that attends to our purely biological functions or psychological processes, with the willful ignorance of how such biological functions or psychological processes are embedded in a complex, dynamic social network.¹⁹¹ What Schechtman does not seem to recognize, however, is that the perception of a human being as an integrated whole is itself a particular perspective we take on ourselves and our lives, which we acquire by being embedded in certain social and cultural infrastructure, and may actively shape to better reflect our values.

¹⁹⁰ Schechtman, *Staying Alive*, 155.

¹⁹¹ Schechtman, *Staying Alive*, 184–185.

In sum, my social constructionist view about personal identity, built upon the discussion of how our social practices may be problematic, addresses the issue of how we should interact with current social practices to determine personal identity, which arises from the discussion of Schechtman's PLV as described previously in 4.3. Specifically, it suggests that we need to take a critical stance towards current social practices to consider whether they unwittingly deprive individuals of resources and support relevant for self-understanding, self-development, or recovery, and thereby prevent individuals from meaningfully persisting as the same persons, understood as continuous integrated wholes. Furthermore, personal identity is not only to be determined but also to be facilitated, namely, through the social resources and support we collectively develop in our social practices. In this way, my alternative view not only explores an issue underdiscussed in Schechtman's PLV, namely, the issue of how we should interact with current social practices to determine personal identity if our social practices may be problematic, but also differs from Schechtman's PLV in some important respects.

A possible concern here is whether it still makes sense to claim that personal identity, in Schechtman's sense of an integrated whole, should still be described as *constituted* by social practices. According to this concern, it seems appropriate to describe personal identity, in Schechtman's sense of an integrated whole, as *dependent* on our social resources and support, or as constructed out of them in virtue of such a dependence relation; however, it does not follow that personal identity in this sense is then *constituted* by social resources and support. I disagree, for the following reasons. As explained previously, personal identity in the sense of an integrated whole has to do with having enough of the typical functions in such an integrated whole. Such typical functions include physical, psychological, and social functions that support one another. Given that the integrated functional whole is itself constituted by social activities or functions, it

is reasonable to think that personal identity in the sense of an integrated functional whole is also constituted by social resources and support, rather than merely dependent on them. Furthermore, as explained previously, our psychophysical activities that are involved in such an integrated whole are connected to our social practices, such that our psychophysical continuity is sustained over time through social practices, and that our understanding of our psychophysical continuity as relevant to personal identity is generated through social practices, it is reasonable to think that personal identity in the sense of an integrated whole is constituted by our social resources and support.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the social constitution view of personal identity and explored how we may better understand the social constitution of personal identity. Building upon Schechtman's PLV, in which personal identity is understood in terms of having a continuous person life with enough of the typical functioning in an integrated whole that allows an identifiable locus of interactions over time, I discussed (1) how personal identity may be hindered by social practices, (2) what an alternative understanding of personal identity as socially constituted may be, and (3) how we should interact with current social practices in relation to personal identity. In particular, I suggested that social practices can hinder personal identity through unwittingly depriving individuals of resources and support important self-understanding, self-development, or recovery. Furthermore, given that social practices can hinder personal identity this way, personal identity is socially constituted in the sense that whether an individual persists as the same person in part depends on whether there are relevant social resources and support. Finally, we should take a critical stance towards current social practices to consider how we may better facilitate personal

identity through collective effort, rather than simply rely on current social practices to determine personal identity. Thinking of personal identity in these ways points to the social construction of personal identity.

V Self-Narrative, Affective Identification, and Personal Well-Being

5.1 Overview

In this chapter, I discuss an implication of understanding personal identity as socially constructed. I suggest that understanding personal identity as socially constructed allows us to examine how we may better construct self-narratives to constitute our personal identity in relation to personal well-being; it also urges us to consider how the work to better construct self-narratives requires collective effort, such as the effort to change relevant social infrastructure. I explain this point by considering how self-narratives can get in the way of our personal well-being when affective identification leads to inflexible self-images, illustrated with the example of imposter syndrome. I propose that a flexible self-image indicates healthy self-narratives, namely, self-narratives with constructive affective identification; furthermore, relevant social infrastructure needs to be in place to allow individuals to foster such healthy self-narratives.

It is worth mentioning that the personal well-being here is broadly construed. A self-narrative is considered to impede personal well-being if it prevents us from acquiring or maintaining things that we consider valuable, such as mental health, meaningful relationships, and self-growth. There is an additional question of whether such things are objectively valuable, namely, whether they are valuable regardless of an individual's taking pleasure in them or desiring them. I follow objective list theories to hold that such things are objectively valuable.¹⁹² Nevertheless, the examples discussed in this chapter do not involve scenarios where individuals fail to maintain mental health, meaningful relationships, or self-worth while experiencing absolutely no pain or frustration of desires. For this reason, it is possible to make the discussions in this chapter compatible with other

¹⁹² One possible understanding of such objectively valuable goods is in terms of Ronald Dworkin's critical interests, which are the interests that a person believes themselves and others *should* want to have since such interests constitute a good life. See Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion: An Argument About Abortion and Euthanasia* (Vintage, 1993), 201–2.

personal well-being theories, namely, hedonism and desire-based theories.

In 5.2, I explain the narrative view and lay out some important features of self-narratives. In 5.3, I pose the question about self-narratives and personal well-being by examining a famous debate between Marya Schechtman and Galen Strawson. In 5.4, I explain how self-narratives may impede personal well-being through affective identification with the creation of inflexible self-images. In section 5.5, I suggest that while affective identification can lead to inflexible self-images, affective identification is also important in supporting agency. After discussing how the balance between the benefits and harms of affective identification, and relating the discussions back to the debate between Schechtman and Strawson in section 5.6, I conclude that a healthy self-narrative with constructive affective identification is one that involves a flexible self-image, and that the fostering of such flexible self-image requires relevant social infrastructure in place.

5.2. The Narrative View

The narrative view suggests that we constitute ourselves as persons by constructing self-narratives, such as narratives about life trajectories and career plans.¹⁹³ This view is compatible with the idea of personal identity as socially constructed, since narrative construction can be a way in which personal identity is socially constructed. In the narrative view, we are both the narrators and actors of our self-narratives. As the narrators of our self-narratives, we interpret life events, find meanings in personal interactions, and attribute to ourselves various characters and propensities. As the actors in our self-narratives, we act in accordance with our interpretation and attribution, and we typically find projects and commitments that suit our self-perceived characters and abilities. In

¹⁹³ Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*; Schechtman, *Staying Alive*; Lindemann, *Holding and Letting Go: The Social Practice of Personal Identities*; J. David Velleman, *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

other words, we “live out” the self-narratives we tell.¹⁹⁴ In this section, I explain the narrative view and lay out some important features of self-narratives to set the ground for discussions about self-narratives and personal well-being.

According to the narrative view, self-narratives support the sense of personal identity. Such a sense of identity comes from the connection among personal past, present, and future through the attribution of meaning. Through the construction of self-narratives, individuals find reasons for the occurrence of a life event and interpret its implication. For instance, a graduate student may justify their participation in a teaching program during a busy term by putting together a self-narrative in which the character has a long-time passion for teaching, as well as by interpreting the participation in the program as helping with the passion. The sense of personal identity can also come from the identification of personal projects and commitments, given that both personal projects and commitments take time. Seeing oneself as having the commitment to improve teaching skills, for instance, implies that one will invest time in it, such as by working with mentors to reflect on one’s practices in the past and conduct improvement plans in the future.

Both the attribution of meaning and the identification of projects and commitments involve the sense of oneself as a persisting being, one with relevant past experiences and future steps to take to carry out projects or fulfill commitments. But the sense of persistence is typically understood as a matter of practical, rather than metaphysical, identity. It is understood as practical identity because narrative identity is about how we practically conceive of ourselves, but the issue of how we practically conceive of ourselves, after all, is arguably not the same as the issue of what we are metaphysically.¹⁹⁵ While it is questionable whether the practical and the metaphysical

¹⁹⁴ Velleman, *Self to Self*, 215.

¹⁹⁵ Lynne Rudder Baker, “Making Sense of Ourselves: Self-Narratives and Personal Identity,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 15, no. 1 (2016): 7–15; Jeanine Weekes Schroer and Robert Schroer, “Getting the Story Right: A Reductionist Narrative Account of Personal Identity,” *Philosophical Studies* 171, no. 3 (2014): 445–69.

issues can indeed be clearly separated, in this chapter I will not go into this question. I will restrict myself to the realm of practical identity, even though I believe practical identity is not separate from metaphysical identity.¹⁹⁶ However, the defense of this claim goes beyond the scope of the discussions, and the discussions in the chapter do not rely on the truth of this claim.

The practical identity of a person as supported by self-narratives is inextricably related to the agency of a person. The meanings an individual attributes to life events often shape the ways in which they interact with the world. Furthermore, the projects and commitments described in self-narratives are often action-guiding. These points are clear in the example of the graduate student described above. By interpreting the participation in a teaching program as having tangible career benefits, rather than merely as adding another line to their CV, the student will participate more actively in the program. Additionally, by articulating the commitment in teaching, the student would be motivated to take relevant steps to fulfill the commitment or find ways to demonstrate the commitment throughout the teaching program.

While self-narratives support practical identity and agency, it is not clear whether the sense of identity and agency as supported by self-narratives is always good for an individual. An individual's self-narrative can involve a negative self-image that prevents the individual from acquiring self-confidence and self-esteem, which will be further discussed later in this chapter. Such a negative self-image can reinforce itself by casting shadows on individual life events that can otherwise be viewed in a positive light. It can also contribute to self-destructive behaviors. While there have been some discussions in the literature regarding how self-narratives contribute to self-destructive behaviors,¹⁹⁷ further exploration is still needed regarding the relation between

¹⁹⁶ See Schechtman, *Staying Alive*.

¹⁹⁷ For example, see Doug McConnell, "Narrative Self-Constitution and Recovery From Addiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2016): 307–22.

self-narratives and personal well-being.

Before moving on to explore the relation, I want to highlight some features of self-narratives to better frame the focus of the discussions. The first feature concerns the nature of self-narratives. The narrative view does not require an individual to have a single, life-long, unified self-story. Instead, an individual can have overlapping short stories as long as there is no perceived contradiction. For instance, an individual can have narratives about how they have built their career, how they developed a fear of dogs as a child, and how their love for nature shapes their retirement plan. The various narratives can be held together without having all of them fit into a single, life-long story with an overarching theme, especially if there are no immediate contradictions among those narratives.¹⁹⁸ Thus, the self-narratives under question here are not necessarily life-long, unified self-stories but can be some of the overlapping short stories.

The second feature of self-narratives is that self-narratives are socially informed. They are socially informed not only in the sense that an individual's self-story is commonly shaped by the social narratives collectively told in society, but also in that the status of personhood may be maintained through the narratives told by others when an individual is incapable of constructing their own stories. For example, an individual's self-story is shaped by social narratives when the individual, in understanding themselves as a member of a particular social group, internalizes the image of the particular social group as depicted in social narratives.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, an individual remains a person through the narrative construction of their loved ones even when the individual comes to have dementia and loses their narrative capacity.²⁰⁰ Thus, by claiming that self-

¹⁹⁸ Velleman, *Self to Self*, 222. See also Schroer and Schroer, "Getting the Story Right: A Reductionist Narrative Account of Personal Identity."

¹⁹⁹ Hilde Lindemann, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Cornell University Press, 2001).

²⁰⁰ Schechtman, *Staying Alive*. See also Lindemann, *Holding and Letting Go: The Social Practice of Personal Identities*.

narratives may prevent personal well-being, I do not mean to suggest that it is necessarily the individual's fault in constructing such self-narratives; instead, the fault can very much lie in problematic social discourses and practices.

Finally, self-narratives can be implicit. The narrative view does not require individuals to constantly articulate self-narratives in an explicit, conscious manner. Instead, the narrative view only claims that individuals need to articulate their self-narratives when invited to engage in self-reflection, such as being pressed to explain emotional reactions. In this way, the self-narratives of interest go beyond the conscious self-stories to the implicit self-conception and self-image that shape individuals' perception and behaviors.

In sum, self-narratives as described in the narrative view support an individual's practical identity and agency. Such self-narratives need not constitute a single, life-long, unified self-story with an overarching theme. Furthermore, self-narratives are socially informed and sometimes implicit.

5.3 Self-Narratives and Personal Well-Being

Given that self-narratives support practical identity and agency, and that practical identity and agency are typically considered crucial for a rich and meaningful life, the narrative view appears to implicitly suggest that self-narratives are crucial for personal well-being. This suggestion is under debate in the exchange between Galen Strawson and Marya Schechtman. In this section, I examine the exchange between Strawson and Schechtman to explore the relation between self-narratives and personal well-being.

The debate between Strawson and Schechtman is primarily a debate about whether the

narrative view is accurate descriptively and normatively.²⁰¹ In other words, it is about whether we *in fact* constitute ourselves as persisting persons through self-narratives, and whether we *ought to* constitute ourselves as persisting persons through self-narratives. While the debate is primarily about the descriptive and normative accuracy of the narrative view, the debate involves implicit disagreement on whether a distinction between healthy and unhealthy self-narratives can be made. The disagreement does not receive much attention in the more recent literature, but it deserves close examination and further engagement. In what follow, I unpack the implicit disagreement between Schechtman and Strawson to bring out questions about self-narratives and personal well-being for further investigation.

According to Strawson, the narrative view is problematic regardless of whether it is a descriptive view or a normative view. He believes that the descriptive version of the narrative view is wrong because it is not the case that everyone in fact sees their life as constituted by self-narratives. Strawson himself, for one, does not see his life as constituted by self-narratives. Furthermore, he claims that the normative version of the narrative view is overly strong because it is authoritarian to claim that everyone ought to see their lives as constituted by self-narratives.

Strawson then offers what he calls the episodic view as an alternative to the narrative view. According to Strawson, the episodic view is the view that an individual sees their life as episodic in nature, in the sense that “one does not figure oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future.”²⁰² In other words, having an episodic life involves seeing oneself as short-lived rather than persisting. Furthermore, one does not see one’s life as constituted by self-narratives with a quest for a unifying theme.

²⁰¹ Galen Strawson, “Against Narrativity” 17, no. 4 (2004): 428–52; Marya Schechtman, “Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival: A Refinement and Defense of the Narrative View,” in *Narrative and Understanding Persons*, ed. Daniel D. Hutto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 155–78.

²⁰² Strawson, “Against Narrativity,” 430.

The idea of an episodic life seems counterintuitive. For example, just how can individuals have rich and meaningful lives when they see their lives as episodic? A lot of important things in life such as personal projects and commitments take time. Furthermore, we learn from past mistakes to plan for the future, and we use future goals to guide current decisions. It then seems that we need to be able to see ourselves as persisting in order to have rich and meaningful lives.

To address this possible criticism, Strawson suggests that having an episodic life does not mean complete ignorance of one's past, nor does it mean disregarding one's future entirely. Instead, it only means that an individual has no sense of their current self as being there in the past or continuing to be there in the future. In Strawson's view, an individual can be perfectly aware of how their current situation is shaped by their past mistakes, or what future consequences would follow from one's current decisions, without feeling that their current self is the same as their past or future selves. An episodic life, then, can be equally, if not more, rich and meaningful as compared to a narrative life. Furthermore, a narrative life can sometimes be problematic by involving a sense of self-importance or significance that is not necessarily good for an individual.²⁰³

In response to Strawson, Schechtman suggests that an episodic life in fact presupposes a narrative life. That is, seeing oneself as episodic in nature already presupposes seeing oneself as having self-narratives. An episodic life is thus not an alternative to a narrative life. Instead, it is only a particular form of a narrative life. As Schechtman claims,

Strawson acknowledges quite a strong relation among the temporal parts of his human life taken as a whole. He recognizes that he* [i.e., his current self] has a special relation

²⁰³ As Strawson suggests, the kind self-telling involved in self-narratives is either motivated by a sense of one's own importance or significance, which is questionable, or "wrapped up in forms of religious belief that are—like almost all religious belief—really all about self," which has a risk of narcissism. He also claims that self-narratives are almost always wrong. See *ibid.*, 436–437.

to other parts of the life of Galen Strawson, that these are of special emotional significance, and that he has certain responsibilities with respect to them. All that he lacks is an identification of those other parts of Strawson's life as him*. The relations within his human existence, however, contain much of what is involved in having a self-narrative of the sort I have been describing.²⁰⁴

In other words, an episodic life is just a narrative life without identification, especially affective or emotional identification, with one's past or future.

The kind of identification Schechtman is particularly concerned with here is affective identification. Affective identification is contrasted with cognitive awareness.²⁰⁵ Cognitive awareness is about the understanding of the connections among one's past, present, and future, such as the awareness of one's poor grade as a result of failing to study hard before the exam. By contrast, affective identification is about affectively taking the past experiences and future consequences as one's own, such as understanding a past mistake as representing a personal flaw and thereby feeling ashamed of it. According to Schechtman, Strawson's episodic life is in fact a narrative life with mere cognitive awareness but no affective identification. What Strawson's view shows, then, is that there can be a narrative life with mere cognitive awareness but no affective identification, rather than that there is an alternative to a narrative life.²⁰⁶ In this way, Strawson's criticism against the narrative view should be better framed as a call for a distinction between the

²⁰⁴ Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival," 168.

²⁰⁵ Strawson, "Against Narrativity," 167.

²⁰⁶ A possible objection from Strawson to this interpretation of his view is that a life with mere cognitive awareness cannot be counted as a narrative life at all since narratives understood in terms of cognitive awareness become trivial. The response to this possible objection is that narratives understood in terms of cognitive awareness become trivial only when cognitive awareness involves nothing more than "thinking ahead and doing things in the right order," but cognitive awareness involves more than that. For the triviality objection see Strawson, "Against Narrativity," 439. For responses to the triviality objection see Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival," 160–61; Schroer and Schroer, "Getting the Story Right: A Reductionist Narrative Account of Personal Identity," 455–57.

two kinds of self-narratives, one with affection identification and the other with mere cognitive awareness.

Strawson's view, understood in terms of the distinction between the two kinds of narratives, suggests that a narrative life with mere cognitive awareness is equally or even more conducive to personal well-being, compared to a narrative life involving affective identification. By contrast, while Schechtman acknowledges that affective identification can sometimes be detrimental, she believes that a life with affective identification in general is richer and more meaningful than a life with mere cognitive awareness. As she claims, "lives that encourage affective and emotional identification with the past and future instead of resting with mere cognitive awareness of what one did and projections of what one might do are often made richer and smoother through this effort."²⁰⁷ The disagreement between Strawson and Schechtman can then be understood in what follows: For Strawson, a healthy self-narrative involves mere cognitive awareness but no affective identification. As for Schechtman, a healthy self-narrative involves both cognitive awareness and affective identification.

The exchange between Strawson and Schechtman raises three interesting questions. The first question is: What is it that can make affective identification bad for an individual? Since Schechtman and Strawson both suggest that affective identification can be bad—they merely disagree on whether affective identification can also be good and whether the advantages outweigh the disadvantages—it is important to further discuss what makes affective identification bad, so that potential strategies may be developed for engaging with affective identification in a productive way. This question is discussed in 5.4.

The second question is: In what way may affective identification be important for a

²⁰⁷ Strawson, "Against Narrativity," 177.

meaningful life? An important point in Schechtman's view is that affective identification allows individuals to re-evolve emotions and interests that no longer occur spontaneously but still have important implications for decisions and personal relationships.²⁰⁸ However, further clarification and development are needed regarding this point, as Schechtman herself also admits.²⁰⁹ Addressing the question "how affective identification may be important for a meaningful life" helps clarify and develop the point described above, which is done in 5.5.

The third question is whether some middle ground can be found between Strawson's and Schechtman's views. If it can be better clarified what makes affective identification bad for individuals, and how affective identification may be important for a meaningful life, then we can potentially better define a healthy self-narrative, namely, one that allows affective identification without having it getting in the way of personal well-being. This question is discussed in 5.6.

5.4 Self-Narrative, Affective Identification, and Personal Well-Being

In this section, I discuss the question of what it is that can make affective identification bad for individuals. I argue that affective identification is bad for individuals when it creates certain self-images or self-conceptions that are inflexible. This point will be illustrated through the examples of the imposter phenomenon and rationalization.

Before delving further into the discussion, it is worth mentioning that inflexibility is not the only condition under which self-images or self-conceptions may impede personal well-being. Another condition is accuracy. However, the condition of inflexibility is more relevant to affective identification, and it can be argued that inaccuracy is often the result of inflexibility. For this reason, I will mainly focus on the condition of inflexibility, but will also discuss the condition of

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 176.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 178.

inaccuracy, especially how inaccuracy is often the result of inflexibility.

As explained previously, affective identification involves an individual's taking relevant past and future parts of their life as their own, such as understanding a past mistake as representing a personal flaw. The identification is affective because the act of taking relevant past and future experiences and actions as one's own usually has emotional implications. By treating a past mistake as representing a personal flaw, an individual is likely to feel not only embarrassment or guilt but also shame.²¹⁰ The identification is affective also because the act of taking relevant past and future experiences as one's own is usually accompanied by what Schechtman calls inward empathy, which is the ability to relate one's current self to the situation of one's past or future self to remember or simulate relevant emotions.²¹¹ Such affective connections with one's past and future are fostered through narrative construction, sometimes with the help of evocative objects, objects with which we associate specific personal experiences or expectation, such as the photos we took during birthday celebrations or the champagne one bought in expectancy of a personal accomplishment.²¹²

Such affective connections with our past and future can sometimes create particular self-images or self-conceptions. For example, by taking a past mistake as one's own, and by continuing to remember the shame from having made the mistake, one may conceive of oneself as a terrible person who is unworthy of respect and love. Or, by indulging oneself in past accomplishments, one may think of oneself as a high achiever who can never fail. I believe that affective identification impedes personal well-being when the self-images or self-conceptions created

²¹⁰ Shame differs from guilt and embarrassment in that shame involves a perception of personal deficit, whereas guilt and embarrassment do not. See Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

²¹¹ Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival," 171. See also Marya Schechtman, "Empathic Access: The Missing Ingredient in Personal Identity," *Philosophical Explorations* 4, no. 2 (2001): 95–111.

²¹² Heersmink, "The Narrative Self, Distributed Memory, and Evocative Objects." See also Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival," 176–77.

become inflexible or static. To be clear, this does not mean that affective identification as such impedes personal well-being. Instead, this only means that affective identification plays a significant role in interacting with cognitive and social factors to foster inflexible or static self-images, thereby preventing personal well-being. I illustrate the significant role of affective identification below through the example of the imposter phenomenon, in which individuals have negative self-images, and rationalization, in which individuals possess positive self-images.

The imposter phenomenon, also known as imposter syndrome, is the phenomenon that individuals see themselves as incompetent despite external validation, and as a result persistently fear to be exposed as imposters of their roles. Such a phenomenon can be associated with social anxiety, as a result of the lack of a sense of belonging, as well as stress and depression, as a result of the obsession with minor mistakes and the internal urge to continue to work harder. Recent discussions of the imposter phenomenon in philosophy have focused on the involvement of self-deception²¹³ and irrationality²¹⁴ in the imposter phenomenon, as well as the normative concerns about the use of the concept of imposter syndrome itself.²¹⁵ My discussion here differs from the recent discussions to suggest that the imposter phenomenon shows that affective identification prevents personal well-being when it creates inflexible self-conceptions or self-images.

Consider a graduate student, Pat, who comes from a low-income family and constantly finds themselves lacking the social experiences and knowledge that most of their peers have in the graduate program. While other people do not seem to care, Pat always feels like they do not fit into the program, and that they need to work harder to prove their worth. As a result, Pat works

²¹³ Stephen Gadsby, "Imposter Syndrome and Self-Deception," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 2021, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1080/00048402.2021.1874445>.

²¹⁴ Shanna Slank, "Rethinking the Imposter Phenomenon," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 22, no. 1 (2019): 205–18.

²¹⁵ Katherine Hawley, "I—What Is Impostor Syndrome?," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 93, no. 1 (2019): 203–26; Sarah K Paul, "II—What Should 'Impostor Syndrome' Be?," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 93, no. 1 (2019): 227–45.

extremely hard and receives outstanding grades, several awards, and abundant praise from faculty members and other graduate students in the program. But despite all the accomplishments and praise, Pat still feels like they are not good enough. In fact, Pat considers themselves less intelligent than their peers and has tremendous anxiety over being exposed as an imposter one day. Pat believes that their achievements are mostly due to luck rather than ability, and that others' compliments come mostly out of sympathy or attempts of affirmative action rather than sincere acknowledgment. Pat is constantly stressed over some minor mistakes they made and takes the mistakes as evidence for their inadequacy.²¹⁶

In this example, the individual, Pat, identifies with their family background and comes to see themselves as inferior to their peers. While other people do not seem to care about Pat's family background, nor Pat's lack of certain social experiences and knowledge, Pat takes these as part of who they are, as something that separates themselves from their peers, and thereby feels anxious over the need to work harder. By identifying themselves with their family background, Pat creates a particular self-image in their self-narrative, namely, an image of themselves as less intelligent, as someone who has somehow found their way due to luck but whose inadequacy can be exposed at any moment, and thereby experiences tremendous anxiety.

It is clear from the example that the affective identification constructed through the individual's self-narrative contributes to prevent their personal well-being. Pat suffers from mental health problems as a result of their negative self-image, and is likely to have problems building meaningful professional relationships with others, not to mention having a sense of belonging in the program. However, the crucial reason why the affective identification contributes to prevent

²¹⁶ The example is modified from Gadsby's example of a PhD student. See Gadsby, "Imposter Syndrome and Self-Deception," 1.

personal well-being goes beyond merely having a negative self-image—it also has to do with the fact that the negative self-image described in the above example is static or inflexible.

The negative self-image described above is static or inflexible in the sense that it is resistant to modification in light of counterevidence. While Pat is surrounded by abundant counterevidence suggesting that Pat is in fact a competent person, Pat mostly ignores or discredits the evidence and instead focuses on what affirms their existing self-image. A self-image is then inflexible also in that it is self-reinforcing. It directs one's attention away from the things that can be presented as counterevidence and distorts one's interpretations of them, such as by making one believe that the compliments from others come only out of sympathy rather than sincere acknowledgment.²¹⁷

Such features of inflexible self-images are the crucial reasons why affective identification contributes to prevent personal well-being—those features prevent individuals from properly assessing relevant evidence in relation to their self-images. Those features also hinder individuals from satisfying their practical needs, such as the need to find belonging in a community or the need to flourish in a graduate program. Finally, identifying with a particular family background itself, while it may lead to some anxiety and stress, does not necessarily lead to a full-blown imposter phenomenon. An individual can modify their self-image in light of external validation; they can even see their particular background as giving them perspectives and strengths that other people do not have.

But affective identification does not impede personal well-being only when it involves a negative self-image. It can also prevent personal well-being when it involves a positive self-image. Rationalization is an example. Rationalization occurs when someone seeks and produces

²¹⁷ Another example of how inflexible self-images are self-reinforcing has to do with self-stigmatization such as in mental illness and addiction. For example, see Patrick W. Corrigan and Deepa Rao, "On the Self-Stigma of Mental Illness: Stages, Disclosure, and Strategies for Change," *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry. Revue Canadienne de Psychiatrie* 57, no. 8 (2012): 464–69; Matthews, Dwyer, and Snoek, "Stigma and Self-Stigma in Addiction."

justifications for things they already believe or strongly prefer, such as a political ideology or a positive self-image.²¹⁸ While rationalization may have its values, rationalization sometimes blinds a person from seeing their shortcomings or being open to different perspectives:

Consider the case of a scientist who refuses to adjust the course of her research program despite the urging of her peers who [worry that] it is fundamentally unsound. Since it is more pleasant to inhabit the fantasy world where she is a misunderstood genius than the real world where she is an ordinary thinker with a lot of work ahead of her, she may rationalize her intransigence by concocting a story about the inability of her peers to comprehend her profoundly original ideas.”²¹⁹

The scientist described in the above example has a self-narrative with a positive self-image, depicting herself as a researcher unmatched among her peers and not understood by them. Her self-image is also inflexible in that it is resistant to modification in light of counterevidence, namely, the concerns about her research program from her peers; it is also self-reinforcing by discrediting her peers as unable to appreciate her exceedingly original idea.

The positive self-image prevents the personal well-being of the above scientist because it not only stops her from properly evaluating her research program to address the potential problems at the early stage of her research, but also makes her unable to build meaningful relationships with her peers to learn from their experiences and expertise. Such a self-image is self-destructive, for it undermines the individual’s goal of developing a successful research program and obstructs her personal growth to actually become an outstanding scientist.

²¹⁸ Eric Schwitzgebel and Jonathan Ellis, “Rationalization in Moral and Philosophical Thought,” in *Moral Inferences, Current Issues in Thinking and Reasoning* (New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 170–90.

²¹⁹ Jason D’Cruz, “Rationalization and Self-Sabotage,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 43 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0140525x19002231>.

Nevertheless, some may point out that inflexibility is not the only problem here. Inaccuracy is another factor to consider. The reason why the scientist's self-image is self-destructive has to do with the fact that her self-image is not only inflexible but also inaccurate, in the sense that her self-image does not correspond with reality, namely, that she is not a genius but merely an ordinary thinker. While I agree that inaccuracy is an important reason why the scientist's self-image is self-destructive, I think inaccuracy is often a result of inflexibility. If her self-image were more flexible, the scientist would be able to modify her self-image in light of the feedback from her peers, thereby making her self-image correspond better with reality. She would then be able to see that she is not as much of a genius as she might think, and that her research program is fundamentally flawed. But since her self-image is inflexible, her self-image cannot be adapted to accommodate feedback as well as others' perspectives, thereby losing touch with reality.

In sum, when affective identification leads to inflexible self-images or self-conceptions, it becomes bad for individuals by preventing their personal well-being, regardless of the self-images or self-conceptions being positive or negative. In the case of the imposter phenomenon, the negative self-images prevent individuals from seeing their self-worth, whereas in the case of rationalization, the positive self-images prevent individuals from engaging in productive self-scrutiny. Furthermore, part of the reason why affective identification associated with inflexible self-images prevents individuals' personal well-being is that it also makes the self-images inaccurate.

The significant role of affective identification in influencing our personal well-being has to do with the tendency of affective identification to shape our cognitive dispositions, such as by biasing our perspectives towards particular kinds of information and styles of reasoning.²²⁰ Such

²²⁰ Our affect, such as emotion, has been suggested to influence our judgement and decision-making. It has also been suggested that our social identification influences the information we accept as valid. Given that both our affect and

a tendency can be reinforced by social factors, such as how members of particular social groups tend to be perceived or treated in a society.²²¹ Further exploration on how affective identification interacts with cognitive and social factors to foster inflexible self-images would deepen our understanding about the significant role of affective identification, but this is nevertheless not something I can do full justice to in this chapter.

5.5 The Importance of Affective Identification

While affective identification can contribute to inflexible self-images, affective identification is not always harmful. In this section, I suggest that affective identification plays an important role in supporting our agency. To have agency without the disadvantages following from affective identification, then, is to ensure that the self-images created through affective identification are flexible, and thereby accurate.

An important role affective identification plays in supporting agency is that affective identification helps to re-evoke certain emotions and interests that do not occur spontaneously anymore but still have important implications for one's decisions and personal relationships.²²² As Schechtman describes, “We look at photographs, go to reunions, take second honeymoons, maintain holiday traditions, listen to oldies stations, re-read our favorite novels, and in various other ways stock up on the madeleines and tea that aid in recovering lost time [...] there is value

our identification have a role in shaping our cognitive dispositions, it is reasonable to think that affective identification would also influence cognitive dispositions. For relevant discussions, see Jennifer S. Lerner et al., “Emotion and Decision Making,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 66, no. 1 (2015): 799–823; Joseph P. Forgas, ed., *Emotion and Social Judgments* (London: Garland Science, 2020); Dan M. Kahan, “Misconceptions, Misinformation, and the Logic of Identity-Protective Cognition,” SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 2017).

²²¹ For example, it is arguable that the imposter phenomenon has to do with the systematic biases against members of particular social groups. For relevant discussions, see Ruchika Tulshyan and Jodi-Ann Burey, “Stop Telling Women They Have Imposter Syndrome,” *Harvard Business Review*, 2021.

²²² Schechtman, “Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival,” 176.

in seeking to maintain affective connection to as much of our (person) lives as we can.”²²³ I suggest that the value in fostering affective connections to the past to recover lost emotions and interests has to do with informing current decisions and relationships in light of past experiences. Below are two examples.

The first example concerns how building affective connections to the past helps to foster sympathy for others. Consider a parent who vividly remembers, and can still identify with, their younger self as an avid partier.²²⁴ Being able to have an affective connection to their younger life allows them to have sympathy for their teenage kid, who is making some of the unwise choices the parent once made. Such affective identification allows the parent to better relate to their kid, which informs their parenting decisions. However, this does not mean that parents who have little affective connection with their younger life, or who were not themselves partiers when they were younger, *must* lack sympathy for their teenage kids who happen to be partiers. It also does not mean that sympathetic understanding cannot come from other routes. Instead, it only means that in the case of the parent who used to be a partier and has relevant affective identification, their sympathetic understanding would be grounded in their *first-person experience* of being a partier. Such first-person experience allows them to have better epistemic access to what their kid is going through, since there may be something about the experience of being a partier that someone would not fully understand unless they have undergone the experience themselves.

The second example concerns how building affective connections helps individuals regain the characters they once had to deal with current challenges. Consider a person who comes from a disadvantaged family who has succeeded in their career after years of hard work. After living a comfortable life for too long, the person gradually loses the resilience and adaptability that they

²²³ Ibid, 176–177

²²⁴ This example comes from Schechtman, “Empathic Access,” 101–2.

once had. With a sudden business shutdown due to unforeseen challenges, the person is facing a crisis that they are unsure if they can survive. By reliving and reconnecting with their past struggles, the person may be reminded of how they have survived similar challenges in the past, as well as the resilience and adaptability they once demonstrated, thereby gaining confidence for rebuilding their business. Identifying with the past, as well as taking the past resilience as their own, informs their decision and action with regard to whether and how to deal with a current challenge.

The two examples above show that affective identification plays an important role in supporting agency. By helping one foster sympathetic understanding or regaining important characters, affective identification has important implications for one's decisions and actions regarding how to interact with others or whether to confront a current crisis. In this way, affective identification, with the potential self-images created, is not always harmful but can sometimes be conducive to personal well-being.

Nevertheless, I expect two possible objections. The first objection is as follows: While it may be true that affective connections can sometimes be beneficial, the affective connections in the above examples can also lead to the kind of inflexible self-images described in the previous section. For instance, the individual who comes to see themselves as resilient may become overly optimistic about their abilities and the prospect of their business. When the attempt to rebuild business fails, they refuse to come to terms with the failure and insist on retrying over and over again, leading to more financial debts and more damage to their personal relationships. It is also possible that after years of conformable living, the individual is in fact not that resilient or adaptive anymore. It may even be the case that the individual never demonstrated resilience or adaptability in their past, and that such characters are only a projection of what they want to think of themselves. The self-image created in the process of the construction of self-narratives about the past can then

end up becoming a delusion or fantasy that blinds the individual from recognizing the limitations of their current self, thereby preventing them from learning to come to terms with failures.

I agree that affective connections in the above examples can *potentially* lead to inflexible self-images and thereby prevent rather than promote personal well-being. Furthermore, the inflexible self-images prevent personal well-being because they become inaccurate. However, claiming that affective identification can *potentially* lead to inflexible self-images is not the same as claiming that they will *necessarily* lead to inflexible self-images. Instead, I believe that the self-images created through affective identification can be flexible under certain conditions. To enjoy the benefits from fostering affective connections to the personal past without suffering from the harms of having inflexible self-images is then to ensure that the self-images created through affective identification are *flexible*. Furthermore, to ensure that self-images are flexible is also to ensure that self-images are accurate.

The second objection concerns whether the businessperson would have been better off if they had retained a static image of themselves as resilient. According to this objection, perhaps what promotes personal well-being is not a flexible self-image, but a particular kind of static self-image, such as the static image of oneself as resilient. However, as explained above, a static image of oneself as resilient can lead to various problems, including unrealistic optimism. A static self-image also tends to become inaccurate, because it makes an individual unable to update their self-image in light of feedback and counterevidence, such as the indication that they are perhaps not as resilient as they thought. For these reasons, a flexible self-image, rather than a particular kind of static self-image, is what constitutes a healthy self-narrative and promotes personal well-being.

5.6 Healthy Self-Narratives

In this section, I explain what it means to have a flexible self-image and how the flexibility of a self-image ensures the accuracy of a self-image. I then suggest that a flexible self-image is what constitutes a healthy self-narrative, namely, one that preserves the benefits of affective identification while avoiding its problems.

Self-images are flexible when they are subject to modification in light of counterevidence. Unlike inflexible self-images, which direct one's attention away from the things that can be presented as counterevidence and distort one's interpretations of them, flexible self-images allow one to remain open to reflection and scrutiny. To have a flexible self-image is then to be aware that the self-images we construct through narratives are subject to errors given our limitations and biases, and that we need to actively engage in self-scrutiny to modify our self-images when needed. To put it differently, a self-image is flexible under the conditions that the individual is aware of the fallibility of their self-narrative and can deconstruct their self-narratives when their self-narrative no longer serves them well.

Such conditions in turn ensure the accuracy of a self-image. In being aware of the fallibility of their self-narrative, an individual understands that their self-image may not reflect facts about themselves and that their interpretation of others' feedback may be distorted due to the self-reinforcing nature of self-narratives. Such understandings allow an individual to remain critical about how they conceive of themselves, and actively seek feedback to update their self-image or self-conception. Furthermore, in being able to deconstruct their self-narrative when needed, an individual analyzes how they come to have a particular self-image, or why they feel attached to a particular self-image, when their self-image no longer serves them well. Such analysis allows an individual to step outside themselves to explore and embrace other possibilities.

The flexibility of a self-image ensures a healthy self-narrative, namely, a narrative that preserves the benefits of affective identification but avoids the problems of affective identification. In the businessperson example, if the individual is flexible with their image of themselves as resilient, they will not become overly optimistic about their abilities to survive the current crisis. As long as they are also aware of the fallibility of their constructed self-image, the constructed self-image will not become a delusion or fantasy that blinds them from recognizing the limitations of their current self. Instead, the individual will be able to revise their self-image by accepting that they are perhaps not that resilient or adaptive anymore. Or, they will be able to reinterpret the meanings of resilience and adaptivity, by realizing that resilience and adaptivity are not always about finding success but sometimes about learning to come to terms with personal limitations and failures.

Similar points can be made about the examples of the imposter syndrome and rationalization. In the example of the imposter syndrome, having a flexible self-image would allow the graduate student to see that they have been overly fixated at the minor mistakes they made but the reality is that they are capable in many ways. Having a flexible self-image would also allow them to reflect on the reasons why they consider their achievements a result of luck rather than ability, and others' compliments a result of affirmative action rather than sincere acknowledgment, thereby learning to value their work in their own terms. As for the example of rationalization, having a flexible self-image would allow the scientist to let go of the need to be a genius, thereby having a better opportunity to actually achieve excellence through collaborating with others to improve the research program.

Going back to the disagreement between Strawson and Schechtman, I believe that having a flexible self-image strikes a middle ground between Strawson's and Schechtman's views about

affective identification. Strawson's view is correct in suggesting that affective identification can be problematic. As suggested in section 4, the problem is that affective identification can lead to an inflexible self-image, a self-image that is at least partly unreliable in light of the evidence and therefore tends to become inaccurate, thereby preventing self-improvement and self-growth. However, Schechtman is also right that affective identification is important for a rich and meaningful life. As suggested in section 5, affective identification is important because it supports agency by informing current decisions and relationships in light of past experiences. To have affective identification that supports agency while avoiding the problems of unrevisability and inaccuracy, then, is to have a flexible self-image, namely, one that allows us to be aware of our fallibility as well as appropriate deconstruction.

My discussions addressed all the three questions arising from the exchange between Strawson and Schechtman. I addressed the first question "What is it that can make affective identification bad for an individual?" by suggesting that the tendency to create an inflexible self-image makes affective identification bad for an individual. Furthermore, I addressed the second question "In what way is affective identification important for a meaningful life?" by suggesting that affective identification supports agency by informing current decisions and relationships in light of past experiences. Finally, I answered the third question "Is there a middle ground between Strawson's and Schechtman's views" by arguing that a flexible self-image provides such a middle ground since it allows affective identification without having it getting in the way of personal well-being.

The final point about the middle ground can be further developed by reference to the discussion on *cognitive awareness* versus affective identification in section 3. While Schechtman believes that lives with affective identification other than mere cognitive awareness are richer and smoother, Strawson appears to believe that lives with mere cognitive awareness are equally rich

and can even be richer than lives involving affective identification. Strawson's emphasis on cognitive awareness, from the perspective of the argument developed here, raises the question of how cognitive awareness interacts with affective identification, and the question of how such interaction potentially helps with the development and maintenance of a flexible and accurate self-image. Further research regarding these questions will deepen our understanding about the middle ground described above, but this is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Better understanding of the middle ground calls for a hybrid view, in which the significance of affective identification needs to be understood in relation to cognitive and social factors. Such a hybrid view does not seek to explain self-images and their associated phenomena merely through the discussions of affective identification, but it points to further research directions regarding how affective identification may bias our perspectives towards particular information and styles of reasoning, how such biases are often strengthened through social discourses and interactions, and how we may better construct or reconstruct affective identification to foster healthy self-narratives.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed an implication of understanding personal identity as socially constructed. I suggest that understanding personal identity as socially constructed allows us to examine how we may better construct self-narratives to constitute our personal identity in relation to personal well-being; it also urges us to consider how the work to better construct self-narratives requires collective effort, such as the effort to change relevant social infrastructure. I explain this point by considering an important debate between Schechtman and Strawson to pose three questions about narrative, affective identification, and personal well-being. I addressed the three questions by suggesting that, first, affective identification impedes personal well-being when it

leads to inflexible self-images or self-conceptions. Furthermore, affective identification is important for personal well-being because it supports agency by informing current decisions and relationships in light of past experiences. Finally, the possession of flexible self-images indicates healthy self-narratives, namely, self-narratives with constructive affective identification.

VI Conclusion

6.1 Putting Things Together

In this dissertation, I explored the following question: Can metaphysical facts about personal identity be defined without making reference to our social practices? Traditional theories of personal identity in philosophy of mind, such as neo-Lockean theories and animalism, tend to assume an affirmative answer to this question. They typically assume that metaphysical facts about personal identity can be defined without making reference to our social practices. I suggested otherwise. I argued that metaphysical facts about personal identity *cannot* be defined without making reference to our social practices; this is because personal identity is socially constructed in the following sense: whether we meaningfully persist as the same persons through psychophysical continuity depends constitutively, at least in part, on whether there are social resources and support relevant for self-understanding and self-development.

I developed my argument through the following steps. First, I examined Buddhist-informed theories of personal identity in analytic philosophy of mind, which suggest that personal identity is a conceptual construction. However, while Buddhist-informed theories suggest that personal identity is a conceptual construction, they follow traditional theories of personal identity in philosophy of mind to assume that metaphysical facts about personal identity can be defined without making reference to our social practices. I called this assumption *the separability assumption*. I wanted to draw inspiration from Buddhist-informed theories to explore how personal identity is a conceptual construction, but I am skeptical of the separability assumption. I then closely examined Parfit's and Siderits' Buddhist-informed theories to evaluate the separability assumption.

In chapter 2, I discussed Parfit's reductionism, which is one of the most prominent Buddhist-

informed theories of personal identity in analytic philosophy of mind. In Parfit's view, personal identity is a conceptual construction as a result of our linguistic practices. The diachronic existence of a person, metaphysically speaking, can be reduced to some psychological connectedness and/or continuity. In other words, there is only psychological connectedness and/or continuity, but no personal identity, at the metaphysical level. Parfit takes this point to imply that personal identity does not matter, even at the conceptual or practical level. This inference is supported by his idea that metaphysical facts about personal identity are more fundamental than our conceptual and practical activities, such that metaphysical facts about personal identity lend justificatory forces to our conceptual and practical activities. In other words, the fact that there is no psychological activity at the metaphysical level supporting the conception of personal identity shows that we should not continue to employ the concept of personal identity in our social practices, according to Parfit.

I suggested that Parfit's reasoning involves the separability assumption, namely, the assumption that metaphysical facts about personal identity can be defined without making reference to our social practices. Given that he believes metaphysical facts about personal identity lend justificatory forces to our conceptual and practical activities, as indicated above, his view requires metaphysical facts about personal identity to be defined independently of our conceptual and practical activities, for it is only when metaphysical facts are defined this way that they can lend justificatory forces to conceptual and practical activities.

However, Parfit's reductionism faces several challenges. As critics point out, it (1) fails to satisfactorily explain why the justification of our conceptual and practical activities depends on the metaphysical nature of persons, (2) discounts the standpoint that is constitutive of our conceptual and practical activities, (3) is preceded by a normative assumption even though it is

presented as neutral to normative issues, and (4) entails the impossibility of meaningful practices, including prudential and normative practices. I suggested that such challenges show either that there needs to be a better explanation of the conceptual construction of personal identity, or that the separability assumption is problematic. I explored whether there is a better explanation of the conceptual construction of personal identity in chapter 3, but concluded that we should reject the separability assumption, which is done in chapter 4.

In chapter 3, I discussed Siderits' Buddhist reductionism to consider whether the conceptual construction of personal identity may be better explained to address the challenges faced by Parfit's reductionism. Compared to Parfit's reductionism, Siderits' Buddhist reductionism explicitly draws on conceptual resources from Buddhist philosophy to argue for reductionism about personal identity. In particular, Siderits utilizes the theory of two truths in Abhidharma Buddhism, namely, the distinction between the conventional truth and the ultimate truth, to claim that personal identity is a conventional construction, but that the existence of a person consists solely in some impersonal psychophysical causal series, which is what ultimately exists. It is worth noting that Siderits' utilization of the theory of two truths involves his own creative interpretation and rational reconstruction of the Abhidharma in contemporary philosophical terms. As a result, his Buddhist reductionism goes beyond the things that are said in the Abhidharma tradition. For instance, Siderits claims that personhood and personal identity are conventionally constructed based on psychophysical causal series for the purpose of utility maximization: A collection of psychophysical elements comes to identify with some past and future psychophysical elements through the adoption of conventional personhood because doing so has the following advantage: the adoption and construction of personhood and personal identity allow the executive functions of self-scrutiny, self-control, and self-revision, which turn out to be effective at local utility

maximizing, understood in terms of reducing pain occurring in or around the psychophysical causal series. Furthermore, Siderits suggests, because the construction of personhood and personal identity helps to maximize utility, we have a fundamental obligation to maximize utility.

In suggesting that personal identity is conventionally constructed based on impersonal psychophysical causal series for the purpose of utility maximization, Siderits maintains that Buddhist reductionism provides a better explanation of the conceptual construction of personal identity, such that it helps to address the challenges faced by Parfit's reductionism. However, I argued that Siderits' Buddhist reductionism not only does not fully address those challenges but also faces its own problem. The problem is as follows. Siderits' Buddhist reductionism resorts to a consequentialist principle to explain conventional personhood and personal identity, as well as their related practices. However, the consequentialist principle is not sufficiently defended for the following two reasons: First, it is at least equally possible that the construction of conventional personhood and personal identity merely *happens to* maximize local utility rather than has the *purpose* of maximizing local utility. Secondly, even if the construction of conventional personhood and personal identity indeed has the purpose of maximizing utility, this does not imply that there is a corresponding obligation.

The issues with Siderits' Buddhist reductionism, overall, suggest that a better explanation of the construction of personal identity is not sufficient for addressing the challenges faced by Parfit's reductionism. Instead, we need to further examine how personal identity is theorized, and particularly whether metaphysical facts about personal identity can be defined without making reference to social practices, namely, we need to examine the separability assumption. This is the case not only because Siderits' Buddhist reductionism also involves the separability assumption, but also because the problems with Siderits' Buddhist reductionism have to do with the separability

assumption it involves. The problem with the consequentialist justification, for instance, is exactly the problem of not being able to sufficiently explain the construction of personhood and personal identity based on psychophysical causal series when the psychophysical causal series is defined independently of our social practices. For this reason, I suggested that we turn to challenge the separability assumption.

In chapter 4, I challenged the separability assumption to argue that metaphysical facts about personal identity *cannot* be defined without making reference to social practices, and I did so by considering recent discussions about the social constitution of personal identity. Social constitution theories about personal identity suggest that personal identity is constituted by social practices because our psychophysical continuity is intimately connected to our social practices in the following three senses: (1) our psychophysical continuity is developed through social practices, (2) our psychophysical continuity is sustained over time through social practices, (3) the psychophysical continuity that we understand to be relevant for personal identity is made salient through our social practices.

While I agreed that our psychophysical continuity is intimately connected to our social practices in these three senses, I had issues with how this point tends to be discussed in the literature. Particularly, discussions about this point in the social constitution literature often focus on how social practices *support* the development, sustenance, and understanding of the psychophysical continuity that is relevant for our personal identity. However, it is rarely discussed how some of our social practices may *hinder* the development, sustenance, and understanding of the psychophysical continuity relevant for personal identity. I illustrated this point by discussing Schechtman's Personal Life View (PLV), which is a recent social constitution theory that explicitly discusses the conditions for personal identity.

According to Schechtman's PLV, being a person is about having a person life, which has to do with having an integrated whole of physical, psychological, and social activities. Furthermore, such an integrated whole is the most fundamental nature of a person. On this view, personal identity has to do with the continuity of an integrated whole, rather than merely some psychophysical activities. This view then suggests that none of the individual activities involved in the integrated whole are sufficient or necessary for the continuation of a person's life. Instead, an individual remains one and the same person over time insofar as there are enough of the typical functions in the integrated whole, allowing a continuous, identifiable locus of interactions in the person-space. However, discussions about enough of the typical functions in Schechtman's PLV often focus on how individuals under certain circumstances, such as dementia and persistent vegetative states (PVS), are in fact treated as having enough of the typical functions in some of our social practices. But there is little discussion about the problematic social practices surrounding dementia and PVS, and particularly how such problematic practices show that individuals in PVS or with dementia may not be treated as having enough of the typical functions in a meaningful sense, and how such treatment prevents individuals from developing, maintaining, or recovering their psychophysical functions to live a continuing person life in a rich sense.

I discussed such problematic practices through the following two examples: the misdiagnosis of PVS and the stigma surrounding dementia. While the misdiagnosis of PVS can prevent individuals from receiving sufficient medical treatments to recover their psychophysical functioning, the stigma surrounding dementia can take away individuals' self-confidence and self-worth and thereby prevent them from seeing themselves as continuous with their personal past. These suggest that whether an individual persists as the same person through having psychophysical continuity depends constitutively, at least in part, on whether there are social

support and resources available for self-understanding, self-development, or recovery. Such social support and resources include medical funding allocated for better diagnosis and treatment of PVS, and social discourses surrounding what it means to have dementia.

Considering how social practices can be problematic, namely, how they may hinder the development, sustenance, and understanding of the psychophysical continuity relevant for personal identity, suggests a particular way in which our psychophysical continuity is connected to our social practices. That is, psychophysical continuity is intimately connected to our social practices also in the sense that (4) psychophysical continuity can be supported or hindered by our social practices. Seeing this point suggests that we need to take a critical stance towards our social practices to examine how they support or hinder our psychophysical continuity and thereby affect our personal identity. Consideration of problematic social practices, as well as the need to take a critical stance, further suggests that personal identity is better understood as not only socially constituted but also at least in part socially *constructed*, for the following reasons. Social constructionism is similar to social constitution theories in accepting the claim that certain phenomena are the ways they are because of the social practices we explicitly or implicitly endorse, but it goes further to claim that our social practices may be problematic, and that we may challenge our social practices to better shape the phenomena for this reason. Furthermore, the consideration as described above echoes the idea of the looping effect as emphasized in social constructionism. That is, how we conceive of individuals in social practices leads to the social support and resources we provide, which affect individuals' self-understanding and self-development, such that individuals may end up understanding themselves and acting in ways that conform to our preconceptions.

In rejecting the separability assumption, my social constructionist view of personal identity

differs from Parfit's and Siderits' Buddhist-informed theories in the following manner: Parfit's and Siderits' Buddhist-informed theories suggest that personal identity is conceptually constructed based on psychophysical continuity, which is the fundamental or ultimate nature of a person. By contrast, the social constructionist view suggests that facts about psychophysical continuity are no more fundamental than facts about personal identity, as well as its related social practices. This is because our psychophysical continuity is shaped by our conception of personal identity and its related social practices. With this suggestion, the social constructionist view maintains that facts about our psychophysical continuity cannot be used to justify or explain social practices surrounding personal identity, contrary to what Parfit and Siderits suggest. Furthermore, it further suggests that the problems faced by Parfit's and Siderits' views, as described in previous chapters, all have to do with their failing to consider how our psychophysical continuity is shaped by our social practices.

My social constructionist view further differs from social constitution theories of personal identity. While social constitution theories emphasize how personal identity is constituted by our social practices, my social constructionist view goes further to argue that personal identity is constituted by our social practices as we shape them, such that personal identity can be supported or hindered depending on the resources we provide in our society.

In chapter 5, I suggested that my social constructionist view has an important implication. That is, it allows us to examine how we may better construct self-narratives to constitute our personal identity in relation to personal well-being; it also urges us to consider how the work to better construct self-narratives requires collective effort, such as the effort to change relevant existing social infrastructure. I explained this point by considering how self-narratives can promote or hinder our personal well-being. I argued that self-narratives can hinder our personal well-being

when affective identification leads to inflexible self-images, regardless of the self-images or self-conceptions being positive or negative, and I developed this argument by considering the imposter phenomenon and rationalization. In the case of the imposter phenomenon, negative self-images prevent individuals from seeing their self-worth, whereas in the case of rationalization, positive self-images prevent individuals from engaging in productive self-scrutiny. The significant role of affective identification in influencing our personal well-being has to do with the tendency of affective identification to shape our cognitive dispositions, such as by biasing our perspectives towards particular kinds of information and styles of reasoning. Such a tendency can be reinforced by social factors, such as how members of particular social groups tend to be perceived or treated in a society.

Given such tendencies, it is important to consider how we may better foster our affective identification in relation to cognitive dispositions and social infrastructure to foster a healthy self-narrative, namely, one that promotes personal well-being. I suggested that a healthy self-narrative involves affective identification that leads to flexible self-images. Such flexibility allows us to be aware that the self-images we construct through narratives are subject to errors given our limitations and biases, and that we need to actively engage in self-scrutiny to modify our self-images when needed.

Nevertheless, in claiming that inflexible self-images hinder personal well-being, I do not mean to define personal well-being in terms of certain metaphysical facts. As explained previously in section 5, a self-narrative is considered to impede personal well-being if it prevents us from acquiring or maintaining things that we consider valuable, such as mental health, meaningful relationships, and self-growth. These are not metaphysical facts, nor the metaphysical nature of a person (such as the integrated whole in Schechtman's sense); they are simply the features of a

person *that we value*. In this way, the justificatory force for revising self-images or narratives does not come from metaphysical facts, contrary to what is suggested in reductionism, but instead from the realization that inflexible self-images or narratives prevent the things we consider valuable in our lives. The point that there are things in our lives that we generally consider valuable is nevertheless a point that deserves future discussions.

6.2 Future Research Directions

The discussions in this dissertation point to three future research directions, which I explain below.

6.2.1 How does social infrastructure shape cognitive dispositions and affective identification?

The first research direction concerns how our social infrastructure shapes our cognitive dispositions (such as memory and attention) and affective identification. As explained towards the end of the last section, as well as in chapter 5, how we emotionally identify with our personal past and future through narrative construction, and how much flexibility we have in our self-narratives, are influenced by social infrastructure and cognitive dispositions. This is because, as mentioned previously, affective identification tends to shape our cognitive dispositions, such as by biasing our perspectives towards particular kinds of information and styles of reasoning. Such cognitive dispositions may also reinforce our affective identification to create a feedback loop.

The point that social infrastructure may influence our cognitive dispositions and affective identification has been somewhat discussed in the feminist literature. For instance, Lindemann suggests that master narratives, which are social narratives that serve as “summaries of socially shared understandings,” can inflict damages on an individual’s identity, understood as “the

interaction of a person's self-conception with how others conceive her."²²⁵ Such damages include the deprivation of opportunities, which involves the prevention of individuals from fulfilling certain social roles, and more importantly infiltrated consciousness (or sometimes called internalized oppression), which is the internalization of a negative view or stereotype that others have of certain individuals.²²⁶ Furthermore, such damages on individuals' identities can lead to individual behaviors that affirm or reinforce the master narratives.

The idea of infiltrated consciousness speaks to how social infrastructure may influence our cognitive dispositions and affective identification, namely, through internalizing negative stereotypes. However, exactly how the internalization is associated with changes in cognitive dispositions and affective identification is something that is undertheorized. It is also unclear how the change in cognitive dispositions may be associated with the change in affective identification. Further research on infiltrated consciousness in cognitive-affective terms would help to shed light on the dynamic interactions between affective identification, cognitive dispositions, and social infrastructure that constitutes persons as integrated wholes. It would also illuminate ways to support individuals who struggle with issues surrounding infiltrated consciousness with attempts to cultivate healthier self-narratives.

Digital technologies are another example of social infrastructure that influences our cognitive and affective landscapes. Digital technologies, such as social media, contact tracing apps, and video conferencing software, have drastically transformed our lives, including how we interact with others and how we receive information. Depending on how they are designed, digital

²²⁵ Lindemann, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, 6. For more discussions on infiltrated consciousness, see Sonya Charles, "How Should Feminist Autonomy Theorists Respond to the Problem of Internalized Oppression?," *Social Theory and Practice* 36, no. 3 (2010): 409–28; Nabina Liebow, "Internalized Oppression and Its Varied Moral Harms: Self-Perceptions of Reduced Agency and Criminality," *Hypatia* 31, no. 4 (2016): 713–29.

²²⁶ *Ibid*, 21.

technologies also have a great impact on our cognition and affective identification. For instance, recent studies suggest that the use of social media is associated with a higher rate of distraction and a lower level of self-control due to the favoring of attention breadth rather than depth.²²⁷ In other words, social media changes our cognitive dispositions, such that we tend to have our attention divided across different media sources due to massive information and microtargeting, and as a result are less likely to have sustained concentration and deep reflection.²²⁸ Furthermore, people use social media, sometimes obsessively and excessively, to enhance self-image and self-esteem, such as through posting carefully curated content to get more followers and likes.²²⁹ In this way, social media can shape our affective identification through getting us emotionally attached to particular self-images or unrealistic body standards.²³⁰ Nevertheless, the impact of digital technologies on our mind is not always bad. Some digital products are designed to help individuals achieve their goals (as opposed to distracting them), cultivate reflective capacities, build better habits,²³¹ and even contemplate their mortality.²³² Further research is then needed to better understand and assess the impact of digital technologies on our cognition and affect. Such understanding and assessment may also be done with consideration of the idea about infiltrated consciousness as explained above.

²²⁷ Lin Lin, “Breadth-Biased versus Focused Cognitive Control in Media Multitasking Behaviors,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106, no. 37 (2009): 15521–22; Juan Pablo Bermúdez, “Social Media and Self-Control: The Vices and Virtues of Attention,” in *Social Media and Your Brain: Web-Based Communication Is Changing How We Think and Express Ourselves*, ed. C. G. Prado (Praeger, 2017), 57–74.

²²⁸ Joseph Firth et al., “The ‘Online Brain’: How the Internet May Be Changing Our Cognition,” *World Psychiatry* 18, no. 2 (2019): 119–29.

²²⁹ Majid Altuwairiqi, Nan Jiang, and Raian Ali, “Problematic Attachment to Social Media: Five Behavioural Archetypes,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, no. 12 (2019): 2136, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16122136>.

²³⁰ Jasmine Fardouly et al., “Social Comparisons on Social Media: The Impact of Facebook on Young Women’s Body Image Concerns and Mood,” *Body Image* 13 (2015): 38–45.

²³¹ Laura Specker Sullivan and Peter Reiner, “Digital Wellness and Persuasive Technologies,” *Philosophy & Technology* 34, no. 3 (2021): 413–24.

²³² Bianca Bosker, “The App That Reminds You You’re Going to Die,” *The Atlantic*, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/01/when-death-pings/546587/>.

6.2.2 *How do the changes in our cognitive dispositions and affective identification affect our personal identity and personal well-being?*

The second research direction concerns how the changes in cognitive dispositions and affective identification, as indicated in the previous section, affect personal identity and personal well-being. Given that a person is an integrated whole of physical, psychological, and social activities, it seems reasonable to think that the changes indicated above may influence the continuity of such an integrated whole. The questions are then how and under what conditions.

To address the “how” question, it is important to consider the possibility that personal identity is not an all-or-nothing matter but instead comes in different degrees. This possibility has been suggested by several theorists, either explicitly or implicitly,²³³ and is worth further exploration. One way of understanding this possibility is that the degree to which individuals persist as the same persons has to do with the extent to which the individuals reflectively interpret their life events in light of their personal past, present, or future. In other words, the degrees of personal identity have to do with one’s self-understanding and self-interpretation. For instance, an individual who sees their current behavior as a way to relive their personal past so as to find strength to move forward would likely have a stronger diachronic identity compared to an individual who renounces their personal past, or an individual who believes that their life ends with a diagnosis, and thereby ceases to maintain personal relationships or participate in community activities.

Such self-understanding and self-interpretation are important for our personal identity, because they have implications not only for the self-narratives that shape our behaviors, but also

²³³ For example, see David Braddon-Mitchell and Kristie Miller, “Surviving, to Some Degree,” *Philosophical Studies* 177, no. 12 (2020): 3805–31; Lindemann, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*.

for our physical or psychological activities, as indicated in chapter 4. The changes in our cognitive dispositions and affective identification that have to do with our self-understanding and self-interpretation, then, would perhaps be more likely to affect our personal identity. Further research on this point would help to address the “under what conditions” question as mentioned above, namely, the question of under what conditions the changes in our cognitive dispositions and affective identification influence personal identity.

Furthermore, the influence on personal identity may have implications for personal well-being. As explained in chapter 5, the self-narratives we construct, which support our personal identity and agency, can either promote or hinder our personal well-being. Additionally, whether our self-narratives promote or hinder our personal well-being depends on whether the self-images in our self-narratives are flexible. This view implies that any cognitive or affective change that facilitates the flexibility of self-images will help to promote personal well-being; by contrast, any cognitive or affective change that aggravates the inflexibility of self-images will hinder personal well-being. Additional work is needed to illustrate the cognitive or affective change that facilitates the flexibility of self-images, and the cognitive or affective change that aggravates the inflexibility of self-images.

The idea of the inflexibility of self-images can also be further explored in light of the idea of attachment. Attachment to our self-images generally leads to the inflexibility of self-images, and in Buddhist philosophy, such attachment is considered bad for its tendency to generate suffering.²³⁴ While discussions in analytic philosophy, and especially in moral philosophy, tend to share the idea that attachment is not good for us (with their common emphasis on impartiality and disinterestedness), recent discussions on attachment suggest that attachment may be important for

²³⁴ For example, see Emily McRae, “Equanimity and the Moral Virtue of Open-Mindedness,” 2016, 97–108.

loving relationships.²³⁵ A potential research project is then to better analyze the idea of attachment in relation to inflexible self-images to better understand its effect on personal well-being.

6.2.3 How may we better facilitate personal identity to promote personal well-being?

The third research direction concerns how we may better facilitate personal identity to promote personal well-being. Examples of research questions include: What kind of social infrastructure should we build, in order to foster healthy self-narratives with constructive affective identification? What resources and support should we provide for the purposes of self-understanding and self-development, in order for individuals to persist as the same persons in a rich sense, or for them to not persist as the same persons if they wish? How may we better cultivate our cognitive and affective dispositions for these ends?

With a better understanding of the previous two questions—namely, how social infrastructure shapes cognitive dispositions and affective identification, and how changes in our cognitive dispositions and affective identification affect our personal identity and personal well-being—we can better pursue this research direction by considering what kind of social infrastructure, and what resources and support provided in our society, help to facilitate the cognitive and affective activities relevant to personal identity that are conducive to personal well-being.

Nevertheless, this is not to claim that we can always know what social infrastructure helps to facilitate personal identity in ways that promote personal well-being. This is also not to claim that we can always predict how the change of social practices will affect our cognitive and affective activities, and thereby alternate the ways we persist as integrated wholes. However, the fact that we cannot fully predict the change in social infrastructure (such as the development of digital

²³⁵ Monique Lisa Wonderly, “On Being Attached,” *Philosophical Studies* 173, no. 1 (2016): 223–42; Monique Wonderly, “Love and Attachment,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2017): 235–50.

technology) should not imply that it is futile to theorize its possible impact on us. Digital technology is a good example. In fact, such kind of theorization is important for considering how we may participate in the change to shape its direction.

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