
Reactions & Debate I

On Schechtman's Person Life View

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I. INTRODUCTION

In her book *Staying Alive: Personal Identity, Practical Concerns, and the Unity of a Life* (2014), Marya Schechtman responds to the disquieting situation that has resulted from the past few decades of discussions in personal identity theory. These discussions have been marked by a deep, gaping abyss between theoretical and practical accounts of personal identity, an abyss that urgently needs bridging.

The concept of personal identity seems to be presupposed in a vast number of our everyday practices, ranging from the identification of people who are carrying an infectious disease to the identification of the proper targets of blame and responsibility for an act. Scholars interested in particular practices have been attempting to spell out criteria of personal identity that could justify these practices. However, it has turned out that the criteria of justification proposed for particular practices do not converge in a single concept of personal identity – the concept of identity relevant to everyday re-identification of humans, for instance, does not seem to be the same as the concept of identity relevant to the justification of attributions of blame (Shoemaker 2009). It has also turned out that most of these presupposed concepts of identity are not concepts of *numerical* identity. Rather, they rely on a concept of identity that must be merely *metaphorical* (Schechtman 2014, 4) because they do not provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence and persistence of a human being. Instead, they provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for a human being's occupying a certain role or being in a certain stage of his or her existence – the role of a moral agent, the phase of personhood. (see Olson 1997, 67). These criteria of 'identity' do not seem to 'carve nature at its joints'.

Meanwhile, scholars in the theoretical camp have been working on the questions of what basic entities there are, what our nature is and how we persist in time (e.g. van Inwagen 1995; Olson 2007). The problem is that what seems to be the most successful answer to the latter two questions, i.e. that we are human *animals* persisting by virtue of biological continuity (Shoemaker 2009, 83-86), seems to be irrelevant to the justification

of the array of practical concerns, because these usually focus on – and their justification seems to require – the continuity of rather complex mental phenomena (Shoemaker 2007, 319-324), which are typical of certain roles that human animals occupy and certain stages of their existence, but which, nevertheless, human animals need not necessarily possess.

As a result, we are led to a disturbing conclusion – the deeply entrenched practices and attitudes that we have always believed to be appropriate on the basis of their targeting one and the same human being in space and time cannot be grounded in the identity of such a human being. It seems that we hold our attitudes to – and express concerns about – the various roles that this human being contingently occupies, and about the various stages that it contingently enters in his or her life, rather than the human being itself. Thus, for instance, even though it has commonly been believed that both responsibility and self-concern are grounded in personal identity, it turns out that the best metaphysical criterion of identity (biological continuity) may be neither sufficient nor necessary for the justification of either of them, and that the former is grounded in the continuity of volition, while the latter is grounded in psychological continuity (Shoemaker 2010).

Schechtman is rightly unhappy with this fragmentation of human beings into various roles, stages and continuities. We do not experience our friends and acquaintances as fragmented entities with distinct roles that we care about individually or distinct stages that we express attitudes towards. In her view, we experience human beings as *integrated loci of practical interaction* – entities in which the individual roles that we care about are deeply interrelated in one unit such that our concerns are tied to the literal identity of the unit. In her book, she sets out to articulate a concept of personal identity that will satisfy two conditions: (i) it will be a concept of literal (as opposed to merely metaphorical) identity, and (ii) it will provide a criterion grounding all of our various person-related concerns.

It is my aim here to assess whether and to what extent Schechtman has succeeded in her attempt to bridge the abyss. I will proceed in the following way. Firstly, I will outline the parts of Schechtman's Person Life View that are directly relevant to establishing the relation between personal identity and practical concerns. Next, I will assess the status of the theory in Schechtman's own classification and make explicit a series of redefinitions that Schechtman proposes in the course of her argument. Finally, I will assess the ontological and normative commitments of the theory. If successful, my arguments will show that the Person Life View is a valuable contribution to the understanding and unification of person-related practical concerns, but its ontological implications prevent it from addressing the concept of literal identity. I will also question certain normative implications of the theory.

II. AN OUTLINE OF THE PERSON LIFE VIEW (PLV)

Schechtman begins her account with a delineation of what sort of entity her concept of literal identity applies to and what the connection of this entity is to practical concerns. Firstly, she draws a distinction between *literal* attributability of experiences and actions

and their *true* attributability – a distinction with which readers of her *The Constitution of Selves* (2007) will be familiar.¹ Literally attributable characteristics are all of the characteristics of what Schechtman calls a *practical unit*. Truly attributable characteristics, meanwhile, delineate a *moral self*. Being a *moral self* is a contingent property of the practical unit that makes the practical unit the proper target of *particular* practical judgments and reveals its true and fundamental moral nature (Schechtman 2014, 15). The practical unit is connected with practical concerns in the following way: it sets the limits within which certain practical questions *can* be appropriately raised. For example, when a dead man who has been stabbed is discovered, firstly we want to know who killed him, i.e. we are looking for the practical unit to which the act of stabbing is literally attributable. But then we want to know whether and to what extent we should hold the killer culpable – perhaps this was an act of self defence and the act is thus not truly attributable to the killer and is not part of his or her moral self. The identification of the practical unit is then practically relevant, because it is a necessary condition for the proper expression of more particular practical judgments. The PLV Schechtman develops provides the conditions of literal identity for the practical unit.

An explanatory intermezzo may be useful here. In his book *Human Identity and Bioethics* (2005), David DeGrazia attempts to refute the view that biological continuity is irrelevant to our practical concerns by the claim that biological continuity is, in the world as we know it, a necessary condition for psychological continuity, which is *directly* relevant to our practical concerns. In other words, the identification of the relevant human animal is a necessary condition for the identification of the relevant person or moral agent with the relevant psychological capacities that are predominantly the focus of our practical concerns. Schechtman's discussion reveals a similar strategy: the identification of a practical unit is a necessary condition for the appropriateness of raising certain practical questions (such as questions about the legitimate degree of responsibility and self-concern), and thus a necessary condition for being able to give factual answers to those questions, answers that will lead us to the discovery of the moral self within that practical unit. DeGrazia's view has been questioned by David Shoemaker, who claims that in seeking the relation between personal identity and practical concerns we are not looking for *just any* relation that is, in fact, a necessary condition of the legitimate adoption of practical concerns. After all, in the world as we know it, there are many such necessary conditions – the continuity of the immune system may be one example. Rather, we are looking for those relations that will have the explanatory power to show us *why* we are right to blame people for their acts or to feel egoistic concern (Shoemaker forthcoming). We are thus seeking explanatorily relevant relations, and these seem to be exclusively psychological. In the context of this debate, Schechtman's theory may at first sight seem to fall prey to the same objection: identifying the practical unit seems to be an irrelevant necessary condition for the legitimate adoption of certain practical concerns and attitudes. But this is where Schechtman's central claim becomes salient. The practical unit may be explanatorily irrelevant to the legitimate adoption of certain *particular* practical concerns (such as ascribing a relevant degree of blame to a driver who hit a pedestrian while being blinded by the headlights of an oncoming truck), but that does

not mean it is completely practically irrelevant: it is directly relevant to *setting the limits* within which questions about practical concerns can appropriately be raised.²

Besides giving an account of the entity whose identity Schechtman sets out to explore, she also gives an account of the desired relationship between personal identity and practical concerns. She describes three models and their representatives. According to the first model, which is termed *the strong independence model*, practical questions of responsibility, self-concern, etc. can be addressed independently of a metaphysical theory of personal identity. Contemporary examples include Korsgaard's theory of the unity of agency (Korsgaard 1989) and Olson's views on personal ontology (see Olson 1997). *The coincidence model* consists in the claim that the limits of the person must coincide with the limits of particular practical judgments, and is represented by current psychological theories of personal identity and by McMahan's Embodied Mind View (McMahan 2002). And according to the third model – *the dependence model* – a person is an appropriate target of practical questions and concerns and an account of personal identity must individuate such a target. The “[...] account of personal identity is conceptually dependent upon practical considerations because the relation which constitutes identity must by necessity be one which makes a person an intrinsically appropriate unit about which to raise particular practical questions. Practical concerns are dependent on facts about personal identity in the sense that identity must be in place before particular practical judgments can be appropriately made” (Schechtman 2014, 41). This is the model Schechtman defends in the PLV. I will argue below that the dependence model Schechtman develops and the strong independence model are not contradictory positions and that the PLV satisfies the conditions of the strong independence model as represented by Korsgaard.

Schechtman also addresses the question of what practical considerations should be relevant in our search for the criterion of personal identity. She parts with the tradition going back to Locke, according to whom only strong forensic capacities such as responsibility and agency are relevant. Inspired by Hilde Lindemann's account, Schechtman offers a much wider understanding of capacities and characteristics that are important in our personal interactions: people are not only rational creatures and agents, but also our parents, partners, children and friends, beings we clothe and name, beings we care for, dance and go to the movies with. Crucially, they do not even have to be conscious in order for us to recognise them as people and maintain a network of person-specific relationships with them (2014, 77). This is why Schechtman abandons the Lockean idea that 'person' is a 'forensic' term and instead sees people as much broader 'practical' units.

However, this vast array of practical interactions characteristic of people leads to the worry that one may not be able to find a formulation of the criterion of personal identity that defines an appropriate target for all of them. We might think that the reason why we like to play tennis with someone is very different from the reason why we are willing to lend them a substantial amount of money and different still from the reason why we are willing to visit them in hospital and talk to them when they are in a coma. It seems that these concerns attach to different constitutive relations of people's lives. This *problem of multiplicity* may lead us to give up on the effort to find a single

unifying criterion of identity and concentrate instead on the particular elementary relations that ground individual concerns.³ At the same time, however, we know that people are not fractured into skilled selves, sentient selves, living selves and trustworthy selves and we treat people as inherently unified. But what is the relation that unifies all of these selves into single units of practical significance that we interact with?

Schechtman addresses the problem of multiplicity in several steps. In preparation, she analyses McMahan's Embodied Mind View with its innovative theoretical criterion of time-relative interests, and revisits her own earlier theory of personal identity – the narrative account. It will not affect the arguments presented here if we skip the details of McMahan's theory and focus directly on the narrative account, which provides a model for an analysis of the diachronic unity of people. The narrative theory is a holistic view of people's lives – people are seen as diachronic entities whose present experiences are shaped by the remembered past and anticipated future. And it is this interconnection of the present with the past and the future, and not the possession of some elaborate intrinsic qualities, that makes people the proper targets of forensic as well as more basic concerns (Schechtman 2014, 102).

Schechtman has, however, reconsidered her views on certain aspects of the narrative theory defended in *The Constitution of Selves*. Her previous concept of narrative would not allow the stages of infancy and adulthood with dementia to be part of a person's narrative, as infants and adults with dementia do not have the capacities to actively develop this narrative. In other words, they are not narrators. One of the key elements of her new theory is that narrative is not a subjective construct, but an intersubjective one. Narrative emerges from an interaction between a person and other people in his or her surroundings. These others may recognise or reject the person's self-conception and may actively shape it. The inclusion of others in the process of narrative construction enables the recognition of non-narrators as persons. Infants and demented adults may be *granted* a position in 'person-space' by people around them who develop their narratives for them (2014, 105). A more thorough examination of the unity of a person's life is provided in Schechtman's in-depth exposition of her Person Life View.

According to the PLV, people are individuated by the characteristic lives they lead – person lives. A typical person life is the life of an enculturated human and consists of three related aspects. Firstly, the intrinsic biological and mental development that includes early stages with simple mental capacities characteristic of infants, middle stages with full-blown forensic capacities typical of healthy adults and the diminished capacities of those unlucky enough to suffer from dementia or Alzheimer's in later stages. Secondly, a typical continuity of interpersonal interactions that runs parallel to the continuity of capacities, including all the interactions occurring within the family, educational institutions, communities and among friends. Finally, the social and cultural infrastructure of personhood – a set of practices and institutions that enable the successful development of both the intrinsic capacities and the specific interactions between people, such as ethical and legal norms, educational institutions, social security, etc. This infrastructure defines a 'person-space' and determines who is granted a position in this person-space.

These three interconnected layers, then, define a person life, and a person life in turn defines a person, i.e. a practical unit that sets limits within which it is reasonable to express our person-related practical concerns. Since a person life is made up of practical interconnections and occupying a position in person-space means being the locus of such practical interconnections, the PLV provides a theory of personal identity that is inherently connected to practical concerns, thus bridging the abyss between practical concerns and personal identity.

Since Schechtman's view is that people are individuated by characteristic lives, she needs to explain the ontology of life. She adopts Winston Chiong's cluster conception of biological life, and develops a cluster model of person life. According to this model, a person life involves a set of mutually interrelated bio-psycho-socio-cultural aspects, none of which are individually sufficient or necessary for its continuation. Other theories, on the contrary, have attempted to find a single relation whose continuation secures personal identity and survival. For Schechtman, a form of survival without the whole range of relations is degenerate.

Such a view, like any other view, has to deal with the standard puzzle cases. From the perspective of the PLV, the most important question to answer with respect to the assessment of these puzzles is whether a single locus of practical concerns survives the described procedure. This does happen, according to Schechtman, in the case of a brain transplant in which the original body dies (*The Simple Brain Transplant Case*), because the locus of practical concerns naturally shifts to the new body (2014, 151-154). However, things are much more complicated in the cases of a brain transplant in which the original body survives (*The Surviving Animal Transfer Case*) and of fission. Both cases are difficult to solve according to the cluster theory of person lives and Schechtman believes that these cases ultimately boil down to an empirical question of how the social infrastructure and interpersonal interactions would develop. She also acknowledges a certain level of conventionalism resulting from the bizarre character of the imagined scenarios (2014, 154-166).

Schechtman likewise defends the PLV from animalist objections. She takes her theory to be a theory of literal identity, i.e. a theory that defines conditions for the existence and persistence of people. But people on this theory are not mere animals, biological entities – they are defined by three levels of characteristics, and biological properties are only part of the complex characterization of people. As a result, the theory faces what Olson calls *a coincidence problem*, according to which wherever there is a human person, there is also a human animal that has the same characteristics, and we ought to wonder which we are (Olson 1997). Schechtman argues that it is possible to deny an assumption that leads to the coincidence problem, namely that people are substances. This would seem to prevent Schechtman from accepting that the PLV in fact provides conditions of our *literal* identity, which it purports to do, but Schechtman argues that literal questions need not be questions about the numerical identity conditions for substances. Even if we accepted that people are not substances, we would have to admit that statements about people are in an ordinary sense true or false, and their truth value is determined by matters of fact, not mere convention. In other words, even if people

are not substances metaphysically speaking, there are still literal questions about their identity at the ordinary, everyday, practical level (2014, 179). For other reasons, Schechtman ultimately adopts *metaphysical nihilism* – the theory that there are no substances at all and that all ordinary objects are, metaphysically speaking, just arrangements of particles. This fact, however, does not prevent us from asking meaningful and literal questions about them – the answers to which are determined by ordinary matters of fact.

Schechtman thus completes her account in which the literal identity of people is inherently connected to our practical concerns. It is literal identity, because in the realm of the everyday world it defines people and their persistence on the basis of matters of fact, as opposed to mere convention. It is practically relevant, because people are defined by person lives, which in turn are considered to be *loci* of practical interactions. The abyss between personal identity and practical concerns has been bridged.

I am very sympathetic to Schechtman's effort to harmonise the metaphysics of personal identity and the practical aspects of the concept of identity. I believe that Schechtman brings a number of original ideas into the debate – *inter alia*, the extension of the range of practical concerns related to identity, the employment of the cluster concept perspective, the recognition of the role of others in the narrative identity and life of a person, the distinction between the practical unit and the moral self, and the switch of focus from the metaphysical to the ordinary level of description. But it seems to me that in the course of the argument, one is gradually confronted with the costs of meeting the challenge. Reconnecting the concept of personal identity with the concept of practical concerns requires a substantial reshaping of the whole problem and the redefining of some established concepts.

III. MORAL SELVES AND PRACTICAL UNITS

First of all, as we have seen in the distinction between the moral self and the practical unit, according to the PLV personal identity is not construed as a criterion (i.e. a set of necessary and sufficient conditions) of the legitimacy of expression of *particular* ethical attitudes and concerns, such as responsibility, compensation and self-concern – it is not employed to define the moral self. It merely provides a necessary condition in this respect: without being the same person, i.e. the same practical unit as the agent, the question of my responsibility for an act, compensation for a past burden or concern for a future self could not even arise; I could not be the same moral self. Instead, what the PLV does provide is a criterion of identity for the *entity to which the concepts might reasonably apply*, i.e. for the practical unit. So the first step in the remodelling of the debate is the shift of focus from the identity of the moral self to the identity of the practical unit.

But this means that according to the PLV, the question that philosophers have usually been interested in – the question of the criterion (i.e. the necessary *and sufficient* conditions) for the identity of the moral self is put aside. To be sure, we can speak about the *identity of the moral self*, but it will only be identity in a *metaphorical* sense of the term,

i.e. one in which we do not specify the existence and persistence conditions of a human being, but merely a role that a human being can assume.

We can draw the following conclusion: if the PLV is correct, one cannot find a plausible connection between personal identity and practical concerns unless one gives up the idea that the concept of literal personal identity concerns the moral self. We can only achieve our goal if we broaden the concept of literal identity to apply to what Schechtman calls ‘the practical unit’. I believe this move is a legitimate one. But we have yet to see whether the concept of personal identity construed as the identity of the practical unit is plausible.

IV. PERSONAL IDENTITY, LITERAL IDENTITY AND DEPENDENCE

Schechtman argues that, unlike its rivals, the PLV provides a dependence model of the relation between personal identity and practical concerns. I believe it can be demonstrated that this claim is true only because Schechtman redefines the concept of literal identity (2014, 179-180) and thus the relata in the relation – she redefines the concept of literal identity to mean a non-numerical type of identity and then shifts the focus from the relation between metaphysics and practice to the relation between the world of ordinary objects and practice.

Let me be more specific. It may be argued that, in spite of Schechtman’s arguments, the PLV *is* in fact an instance of the strong independence model *as it is understood by its proponents*. According to the strong independence model, *metaphysical* questions of *numerical* personal identity are independent of ‘identity-related’ practical concerns. When Schechtman describes the model, she gives two examples. Firstly, Korsgaard’s theory, according to which we can answer the relevant practical questions without recourse to the metaphysical questions of identity. Secondly, Olson’s theory, according to which we can answer the metaphysical questions of personal identity without considering the relevant practical questions. Each theory emphasises a different direction of the same independence relation.

It seems to me, however, that if the meanings of the key terms in the debate are retained, the PLV is an instance of Korsgaard’s version of strong independence. Korsgaard argues that people can be viewed from a practical point of view as well as a theoretical one. When we take the former view, we cannot but consider people as unified entities. This is not because there is a fundamental metaphysical entity that a person is identical with, but because people who want to live their lives are bound to make decisions, have long-term plans and identify with the future occupants of their bodies, so to speak (Korsgaard 1989, 109-115). Thus, practical decisions and interactions, not metaphysical speculations, are what define people as units. Whether they are also unified at the metaphysical level is largely irrelevant.

Schechtman seems to subscribe to a similar view. This can be clearly seen in her endorsement of metaphysical nihilism: it may be true that at the metaphysical level people do not really exist (are not substances, but mere arrangements of particles); in

the ordinary world, however, we interact with them, ask meaningful questions about them and give answers that are true or false on the basis of ordinary facts – in the ordinary world they are *objects* in the literal meaning of the term. Schechtman says that these objects are connected to our interests and practices because they reflect the way in which we carve up the world based on features that are especially salient to us (2014, 180). This shows that people are practically significant units in this view, even if they may not be metaphysically significant units. What their nature is at the metaphysical level is largely irrelevant for their identities in the practical sphere of the ordinary world.

The two views are thus structurally similar and only differ in the range of practical concerns they cover. While Korsgaard focuses on people's forensic activities and interactions and argues that these necessarily define rational and moral agents, Schechtman includes a much wider range of practices, and argues that these delineate a unit comprising both forensic and more basic characteristics – a person. According to the PLV, Korsgaard's answer to the question of personal identity would be seen as incomplete (2014, 185). Nevertheless, the two answers share the same structure.

In spite of the fact that Schechtman claims that the PLV offers a dependence model, the dependence in question is not a relation between practical concerns and a metaphysical theory. Korsgaard and Olson both address the question of how our practical concerns are related to the notion of *numerical* personal identity defined by a metaphysical theory, and they both agree that these concepts are not related. And this is something that Schechtman agrees with – according to the PLV, practical concerns are related to the literal notion of personal identity at the level of ordinary objects, but this concept of *literal* identity is different from the concept of *numerical* identity defined at the level of metaphysics. So the PLV is not in opposition to Olson's or Korsgaard's views of the relation between metaphysics and practice; it only speaks about a different relation – the relation between our practices and entities that are defined by those practices. But if that is the case, then it is no wonder that the PLV offers what could be called a dependence model at the level of the ordinary world. If persons are entities defined by practices in the first place, the fact that our practices and the identities of persons are deeply interconnected seems to me to be a trivial consequence rather than an informative finding. The non-trivial question – whether our practical concerns track a metaphysical entity – receives a negative answer according to the PLV: there are no metaphysical entities, so there is nothing for our practical concerns to track.

Let me summarise the basic moves that the PLV makes:

- (i) The PLV redefines what practical questions a personal identity theory should answer – not questions about particular concerns, but ones about when such concerns legitimately arise in the first place.
- (ii) The PLV correspondingly redefines the objects of our practical concerns – these objects are not moral selves, but much broader practical units.
- (iii) The PLV redefines the notion of literal identity: literal identity on the PLV is not numerical identity defined by the right metaphysical theory, but a sort of identity defined by our practical concerns and interactions in the ordinary world. Moreover,

on the PLV, to say that we have provided the conditions for the literal identity of a person does not mean that we have provided the necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of a substance. It means that we have answered questions about the person (who is not a substance) by appeal to facts as opposed to conventions.

- (iv) The PLV correspondingly redefines the notion of dependence – our practical concerns do not depend on numerical identity, but on ordinary literal identity.

This reformulation of the problem is thus proposed as a means of bridging the abyss between personal identity and practical concerns as traditionally conceived. In what follows I would like to express concerns about whether the solution offered by the PLV has plausible consequences.

V. THE END POINTS PROBLEM

Schechtman's earlier theory of personal identity, the Narrative Self-Constitution Theory, has been criticised for its inherent vagueness and for its inability to specify clearly when a person begins and ceases to exist (Shoemaker 2009, 96-98). It seems that this problem carries over to the PLV. Schechtman admits that her preferred theory of biological life – Chiong's homeostatic property cluster theory – is not precise enough to give us guidance on important practical questions, such as when it is permissible to harvest organs for transplantation (2014, 145). It seems that the concept of person life Schechtman develops on the model of Chiong's concept does not fare much better in this respect.

To see why, let us recall the main determinants in person lives and how they determine the beginning and end of a person's existence. As we have seen, person lives are defined by three interconnected factors – individual capacities, typical activities and interactions, and social infrastructure. Schechtman explicitly says that human infants are automatically accorded a place in person-space. They are immediately caught up in the kind of interactions and activities typical of persons at the beginning of their existence (2014, 118). The ontological status of foetuses is less clear, however. Lindemann refuses to grant foetuses the status of persons, because they do not meet the requirement of *visible human-ness* necessary for mutual recognition characteristic of person lives. But Schechtman does not adopt this condition in the PLV and accepts that foetuses are persons. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, in her previous theory Schechtman stated that the identity of persons is determined by the narratives they create about themselves. She retains certain aspects of that view in the PLV, but with one important qualification: a person does not have to have the capacity to produce a narrative in order for his or her narrative to exist and constitute his or her identity. According to the PLV, others can narrate a person's life for them “from the outside” and produce a kind of “socially-generated continuation of narrative even in cases where it might at first seem absent” (2014, 105). I take it that according to the PLV, the narrative aspect is produced in all three of the determinants of a person life, so when one determinant is absent (such as the capacity

for reflective consciousness enabling a foetus to form a narrative) the narrative can still be developed and maintained by other people by means of the remaining determinants (interactions and infrastructure). Secondly, even independently of the concept of narrative, Schechtman believes that our current social and cultural infrastructure reveals that foetuses *are* persons. Anticipating an objection from the practice of abortion, she claims that the fact that abortion exists does not show that we do not regard foetuses as persons: “To the contrary, the fact that practices concerning the wilful termination of pregnancy are usually the subject of a particular and strict kind of codification in most societies suggests that they are seen as persons” (2014, 128; note 16).

But neither of these two reasons seems to settle the issue. The fact that other people can narrate a person’s life in the absence of his or her own narrative capacities does not show that this happens with all foetuses. There are families in which a new baby is eagerly expected and wholeheartedly welcome. It is reasonable to suppose that in such families the child’s narrative begins to be woven at a very early stage of the biological development of the foetus. For other families or mothers, pregnancy is for various reasons not a welcome event and any sort of attachment to the developing foetus is absent. In some such cases, no narrative according personhood to the foetus is conceived and the pregnancy quickly ends with an abortion.

As for the other reason, in many countries abortion on demand is legal and routinely performed. It is regulated by strict rules only after a certain stage of the development of the foetus. For instance, in some countries abortion on demand is legal prior to the twelfth week of foetal development and if pregnancy is a threat to the mother’s life, it can be legally performed up to the twenty-fourth week. It seems to me that these practices do not force us to accept the interpretation Schechtman offers. One *may* say that the existence of strict abortion rules suggests we do regard foetuses as persons. But one may alternatively say that the fact that in many societies these rules are only applicable from a certain stage of foetal development shows that prior to that age foetuses are not considered to be persons. A reasonable interpretation is that there is no unanimous interpretation of the practices and, as a result, there is a certain grey area in which the ontological status of foetuses is underdetermined. One could also point out that in the absence of certain person-specific capacities the mere fact that there is a strict codification of the practices concerning the termination of a life does not by itself establish personhood. In many countries there are strict rules now about how farm animals may be killed that are built into society’s farming infrastructure. I take it that this fact by itself would not earn the animals a place in person-space. Thus, if one cannot appeal to person-specific capacities and relationships, which may be missing in foetuses, the claim that our infrastructure is cautious about killing them is, in my opinion, insufficient to establish that foetus lives are person lives.

But the end points problem seems to be more serious at the end of human life. It is instructive how Schechtman responds to Lindemann’s attitude to people in a Persistent Vegetative State (PVS). Lindemann refuses to grant non-sentient people the status of persons. Schechtman, on the contrary, thinks that humans in a PVS are part of a rich nexus of relations, even though they cannot actively participate in them.

“Someone in a persistent vegetative state is typically dressed in clothes, lies in a bed with sheets, and is referred to by name [...] Loved ones may come to visit regularly and decorate the room, mark anniversaries, talk to the vegetative individual and play her favourite 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” (2014, 77). What grants humans in a PVS the status of persons according to the PLV is the fact that two of the three defining determinants are still to some extent present – even if the human possesses very few person-specific capacities (limited to basic biological functions), they are still part of the network of relationships and the social infrastructure.

But it seems to me that if that is all that is sufficient for the claim that a PVS is a stage in a person life and humans in a PVS are persons, we are bound to say that biological death does not mark the end of a person life. First of all, relationships do not die away the second your loved one breathes his or her last. On the contrary, what happens to one’s body after one dies is usually taken very seriously. There are culturally established norms of what counts as proper treatment after one dies and relatives are usually deeply concerned that these norms be followed. They do not treat the dead body on the bed merely as a body: it is *mother*, who now needs to be washed, dressed, put in a carefully chosen coffin and buried in a proper and dignified manner. It is quite common that people have preferences and desires about what should be done and how they should be treated once they die, and we feel deeply obliged to fulfil these posthumous desires. And we have institutions such as lawyers and funeral homes to assist us. But the funeral does not mark the end of our relationships with the deceased person either. We regularly visit their grave, some people speak to the deceased person at the grave and tell him or her the family news and we attempt to respect the narrative that the person created and maintained during their life (“You know mum wouldn’t have liked to see you drop out of university”). All of this can be summarised in the terminology of the PLV: the position in person-space one occupied during one’s life does not disappear once one dies. The impression one makes in person-space during one’s life stays there for some time and influences the nexus of relationships and institutions that make up person-space until the impression gradually dissolves. One does not have to be a living person in order to have a place in person-space.

I believe that no clear and sharp line can be drawn according to the PLV between the relationships we have with people in a PVS and with people who have died. Of course, the relationships with our relatives in a PVS may be somewhat richer, but the difference does not seem to be a difference in kind. It would seem more plausible to suggest that a difference in kind occurs once the body is buried or cremated, i.e. once it disappears from our sight forever. But even then the position in person-space does not disappear or become occupied by another human being. If the phrase ‘she will stay in our hearts’ means anything, I believe it means that we recognise the normative force of a position in person-space that was once occupied.

I do not think that the end points problem completely refutes the Person Life View. In fact, I find the PLV in the extended version I sketch above a useful tool for

analysing the concepts of posthumous preferences, posthumous harm and generally the reasonableness of the attitudes of close friends and family to a person who has passed away. However, accepting the PLV in this form requires abandoning the ontological implications of the view and the ambitious project for which the PLV has been designed. No one would accept that persons are entities (be it at the metaphysical or ordinary-world level) that can survive their death, burial or cremation and that stop existing gradually as their position in person-space slowly disappears as their close friends and family forget them. But if it is true that the PLV cannot draw a clear line between the persistent vegetative and post-mortem stages of human existence, it means once again that ontology (or rather its equivalent at the ordinary-world level – see above) and practical concerns come apart. Our concerns about our own lives and about the lives of our loved ones are a matter of degree and can outlast the entities that we and others most fundamentally are. The PLV, in my opinion, succeeds in unifying our person-related concerns into a single locus, and thus succeeds in answering the problem of multiplicity. It does not, however, succeed in showing convincingly that the identity of the locus of practical concerns is the literal identity of a person.

VI. NORMATIVE IMPLICATIONS

As we have seen, the PLV does not focus primarily on providing a criterion for answering particular normative questions such as ‘is he culpable of breaking that vase?’ or ‘how much should I be concerned about that future pain?’ Rather, the PLV is designed to answer more general questions about when such particular questions can legitimately be raised at all (2014, 41, for instance). That is to say, it aims to answer questions such as ‘is he (as opposed to someone else) responsible for breaking the vase at all?’ or ‘should I be concerned about future pain at all?’

However, the nature of the PLV does not seem to give us much guidance as to how some such questions could be answered. Two aspects contribute to this. As we have seen, the PLV is a property cluster theory according to which a person life consists of deeply interconnected characteristics, none of which are individually sufficient or necessary for its continuation. As a result, the implications of Chiong’s theory, on which the PLV is modelled, also apply to the PLV: “There are different ways of dying and they involve different kinds of specific last moments” (Schechtman 2014, 146). Secondly, a very important aspect in the continuation of a person life is the existence of person-specific interactions and sociocultural infrastructure that enable the status of a person to be granted to a being that is not an active agent in these interactions. This means that in some cases, the question of whether we are dealing with a person or whether a person has ceased to exist will be a matter of people’s attitudes towards the being in question (even though these attitudes are not always conventional, as Schechtman argues).

These two conditions, however, suggest that the normative questions the PLV is meant to answer will sometimes depend on other people’s attitudes, which in some cases seems quite implausible. It becomes most vivid in the *Surviving Animal Transfer Case*, of

which Schechtman says: “The challenge stems from the fact that it is much more difficult to predict in this case than it was in the simple transfer case just how the products of this kind of operation would be treated or perceived and whether they would be able to pick up the thread of the original person’s life” (2014, 155). Suppose that, pre-operation, the patient is wondering whether he or she should fear any future post-operation complications and suffering. The problem is not that the answer to this question is difficult, because we are not able to picture whether brain transplants in the future will really move *everything* that is of concern to the pre-operation person to the new body – whether he or she will be able to walk and feel the new body, whether his or her memory will be intact, etc. The problem is that whether the person wakes up in the new body at all is to a large extent a matter of the opinion of others. The question ‘should I fear that pain?’ is then answered ‘well, it all depends what people will think of the being in the new body. If they come to see the new being as you, then your fear now is legitimate, because the pain will be yours’. This seems quite implausible, because it seems to me that the question of the rationality of an agent’s concern should be determined by the intrinsic qualities of the concern and the agent, not by the future attitudes of a third party. The general principle ‘an act is rational/moral if it will be regarded as such’ does not give us very good guidance on normative issues. But it seems to me that the PLV must rely on a principle of this kind.

VII. CONCLUSION

The aim of this contribution has been to critically assess a new theory of the relation between personal identity and practical concerns – the Person Life View. I have argued that the PLV is a well-motivated theory, addressing an acute problem in the debate. In the PLV, Schechtman defends the existence of an entity, a person, whose identity grounds all of our person-related practical concerns. The identity of a person consists in a characteristic life, which is defined by interrelated intrinsic capacities, activities and relations and a sociocultural infrastructure. I have argued that the PLV is an instance of the strong independence model. I have also argued that the property cluster concept of a person life that Schechtman defends raises a serious problem with respect to the end points of a person life. This problem results in some implausible ontological implications and is ultimately a threat to Schechtman’s goal of connecting practical concerns with literal identity. I have also argued that the PLV is unable to provide satisfactory answers to some of the normative questions about an agent’s actions because it is ultimately bound to ground the answers to the questions in the future opinions of other agents.⁴

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NOTES

1. According to Schechtman's original view, roughly speaking, literally attributable characteristics are those that occur in the history of one's body. Truly attributable characteristic are those with which one identifies and which one incorporates into one's narrative.
2. This move, however, also shows us a way to defend DeGrazia's view. This is important, because if the metaphysical implications of the PLV are found to be intractable (as I believe they are), we will still have the tools to identify the practical unit with the human animal. I believe this to be a plausible strategy, but I cannot develop it in the present context.
3. Such an approach has been defended in Shoemaker (2007).
4. I would like to thank the Czech Science Foundation (GAČR) for supporting my research by grant no. 13-00624P.