

Self-Concern Without Anticipation

Radim Bělohrad
Masaryk University, Czech Republic

ABSTRACT. The article focuses on one of the identity-related practical concerns discussed in contemporary debate on personal identity, namely self-concern. The dominant view seems to be that people's concern for their future selves is pre-conditioned by their ability to anticipate the experiences of their future selves and that, as a result, a psychological theory of personal identity is required to justify self-concern. I argue that self-concern in its most general form is not pre-conditioned by the possibility of anticipation. I provide examples showing that people may legitimately be concerned for their future selves even if those selves are unconscious or dead, that is, in states that the people cannot anticipate. I contend that self-concern is not rooted in our desire to have positive experiences, but in our desire to live meaningful lives. Since the value of our lives can be influenced by events that only take place after we cease to exist, I further argue that certain posthumous states of affairs relevant to our lives can also be the legitimate target of an indirect sort of self-concern. Inspired by Marya Schechtman's theories, I develop a form of the narrative theory of personal identity in the sense of characterization and show that narrative continuity can be both a source of meaning in a person's life and a ground for the person's self-concern. It turns out that the sort of identity that justifies non-anticipatory self-concern cannot be numerical identity, because it does not provide the persistence conditions of people.

KEYWORDS. Anticipation, narrative continuity, psychological continuity, self-concern

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the practical concerns that are frequently discussed in personal identity theory is self-concern. It is described as a special kind of concern that each person has with respect to him or herself and which differs from the concern he or she has for others. It is often argued that the legitimacy of self-concern entails personal identity. That is, to use a

first-person example, my self-concern for the being that will be writing this article tomorrow morning is only reasonable if the person will be identical to me. The following methodology is often presupposed in the analysis of self-concern: one first identifies the most plausible theory of personal identity, and then one uses it to determine which instances of self-concern are reasonable. As some have argued, a problem with this methodology is that, if we determine the most plausible theory of personal identity on purely metaphysical grounds, we may end up with an extremely revisionist and seemingly absurd implication for identity-related practical concerns, including self-concern. This is why these philosophers have defended the opposite approach. First, we should analyze the notion of self-concern, that is, characterize its distinctive phenomenology and see under what circumstances people actually express it, and only then seek a theory of identity that can account for its features. Such an approach is taken to lead to the adoption of a psychological theory of personal identity, because, it is argued, self-concern is preconditioned by the possibility of anticipation of experiences, and anticipation requires psychological continuity between the anticipator and the anticipated. In the present contribution I argue that this conclusion is not fully supported by the adopted methodology and that self-concern does not necessarily require the possibility of anticipation. I contend that people are often concerned about the stages of their existence in which they are unconscious and sometimes even about affairs deeply related to their lives that occur only after they have died. I propose an adapted version of the narrative self-constitution theory of personal identity to account for this type of self-concern, which I call non-anticipatory self-concern. I argue that the most suitable candidate relation for grounding non-anticipatory self-concern is narrative continuity. If my arguments are correct, they imply that non-anticipatory self-concern is not grounded by a relation of numerical personal identity, because numerical personal identity is a criterion of the persistence of people while narrative continuity is not, but by a characterization criterion of personal identity, which answers the question

Who am I? As we shall see, however, the adapted version of the narrative theory of personal identity has the advantage of being able to provide a unified account of different kinds of non-anticipatory self-concern.

II. SELF-CONCERN

According to a number of scholars, self-concern is a special kind of concern that a person has towards him or herself and that differs in kind from his or her concern for other people. It is a sort of concern that one would have even if one were otherwise a completely selfish person. One could characterize self-concern by saying that it is a type of concern that is directed only towards the person expressing it. This characterization might perhaps be correct, but it is not particularly informative as it reveals little about the reason why self-concern differs from our other-regarding concerns. Fortunately, scholars who analyze the notion suggest there is more to self-concern than its directedness. There is a phenomenological component to self-concern – self-concern allegedly feels different. A frequently paraphrased example by John Perry makes the difference vivid: “[...] you learn that someone will be run over by a truck tomorrow; you are saddened, feel pity, and think reflectively about the frailty of life; one bit of information is added, that the someone is you, and a whole new set of emotions rise in your breast” (Perry 1976, 67; see also Schechtman 2007, 14-15).

Martin (2008) contends that there is an affective component to self-concern, which consists of self-regarding affective dispositions. He gives two illustrations of such dispositions. The first is *self-regarding affective anticipation* – a person’s disposition to feel the way he or she would normally feel as a consequence of anticipating his or her having specific kinds of experiences in the future. For example, if they anticipated being tortured the next day, they might be terrified, whereas they would probably only feel pity if they knew that someone else was going to be tortured (Martin 2008, 114-115).

It is not just the affective aspect of self-concern that is important here. The *anticipatory* aspect plays a crucial role. The difference between my torture and someone else's torture is believed to lie in the fact that I can *anticipate* my torture, but can only *imagine* someone else's torture. Because I can anticipate my being tortured, I am likely to have a stronger emotional response to the prospect than if I merely imagine what it will be like for someone else.

Martin also argues that self-concern is characterized by *unconditional giving*, which he contrasts with an other-regarding disposition of *expectations of gratitude*. Normally, when we make sacrifices for our future benefit, we do not expect any expression of gratitude from our future selves. However, when we make sacrifices even for those closest to us, the giving is never completely unconditional. At a minimum, we expect these people to have a positive feeling towards us (Martin 2008, 116).

In sum, a person's concern for him or herself is a unique type of concern that differs in quality from his or her concern for others. This quality is shown in the fact that they experience particular emotions and adopt particular attitudes to themselves, such as unconditional giving, that are different from emotions and attitudes they have towards others, and they are able to anticipate their future experiences – something they cannot do with others' experiences. Of these characteristics of self-concern, anticipation will be my primary interest, for it is this feature that plays a key role in arguments about the justification of self-concern.¹

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION OF SELF-CONCERN

The predominant analysis of self-concern in contemporary literature is by means of a psychological theory of personal identity. To see why psychological theories are favoured, it will be instructive to look at some methodological issues underlying the debates in personal identity. For this

purpose I will examine an argument in David Shoemaker's comprehensive paper on methodology in the debate on personal identity and practical concerns (Shoemaker 2007).

Shoemaker identifies several methodological assumptions in the debate. According to one of these assumptions, "[...] whatever turns out to be the correct theory of personal identity will fix our practices and concerns accordingly" (2007, 319). The practices and concerns referred to are the identity-related practices and concerns of anticipation, self-concern, responsibility, and compensation, *inter alia*.

Shoemaker identifies a problem with this assumption: if our practical concerns are fixed by a theory of personal identity, what we need to do first is to determine the best theory of personal identity, and then apply it to the practical concerns to decide which of their instances are rational and which are not. The problem is that it may turn out that the best theory of identity will lead to quite absurd consequences when applied to the said concerns.

Suppose, for instance, that we conclude on purely metaphysical grounds that the best theory of personal identity is one according to which one's identity consists in bodily continuity. The argument could be rendered as follows:

- i. If my identity consists in the continuity of the body, then I exist as long as my body exists.
- ii. If I exist as long as my body exists, and if my identity determines the rationality of the identity-related concerns and attitudes, it must be rational for me and others to express these concerns and hold these attitudes towards me as long as my body exists.

Thus (for instance):

- i. It must be rational for me to anticipate my future experiences as long as my body exists.
- ii. It must be rational for me to be concerned about my future self as long as my body exists.

But:

- iii. It would not be rational for me and others to have these concerns and attitudes as long as my body exists.

Shoemaker states that:

- i. Although I share a body with a human vegetable, it does not make sense for me to anticipate his or her experiences, given that the individual will fail to have any experiences at all.
- ii. It does not make sense for me to have that relevant special sort of concern for my bodily continuer, that is, someone whose body will be spatiotemporally continuous with my body, solely in virtue of his being that continuer (Shoemaker 2007, 322)

Shoemaker concludes that bodily theories fail to provide a practically relevant criterion of identity, because we expect such a criterion to provide us with a *sufficient condition* for the legitimacy of our practical concerns, and bodily theories fail to do so. The concerns seem to target the mental properties and continuities in our lives, and even though biological properties are necessary for having such mental properties, they are not sufficient.

This argument forces us to abandon the assumption that the practical concerns are justified by whatever criterion of identity is found to be correct. Similar arguments could be provided to refute the relevance of other theories, such as the soul theory or the biological theory. Some theories clearly seem to be such that their acceptance and application to identity-related concerns would make some instances of these concerns absurd.

Shoemaker sees two promising and related ways out of this impasse. First, we can stipulate that any adequate theory of personal identity must be able to account for the practical concerns. This will eliminate all non-psychological theories from the list of available candidates. Second, we can agree that the bodily theory or the soul theory may be candidates for the best metaphysical account of our numerical identity, but deny that our concerns are fixed by a theory of numerical identity after all, and seek a

different unity relation – e.g. *agential unity* – which will have the necessary psychological components enabling it to account for our concerns.

We can combine the two suggestions into the following claim: regardless of whether the unity relation that can account for the practical concerns *also* turns out to be the relation of numerical personal identity, it must have a psychological component to it.

It is worth emphasizing again what the methodological lesson of these arguments is. We started with an assumption that we can argue for conclusions about the rationality of our practical concerns on the basis of a metaphysical theory of personal identity. Call this the *metaphysics first* approach. We finished with a claim that the choice of the relevant metaphysical theory is constrained by our intuitions about the reasonableness of particular instances of these concerns. That is, we are now arguing for the legitimacy of certain metaphysical theories on the basis of premises concerning the character of our practical concerns. Call this new perspective the *practice first* approach. Following this methodology, we first analyze our attitudes about the reasonableness of one's concern for one's future, and only then seek a unity/identity theory that can explain why this concern can be reasonable.

Let me now return to the main line of my argument. On the basis of such a methodology, several philosophers have concluded that self-concern must be grounded in a psychological unity relation. We have seen that self-concern is a special type of concern that, in addition to a special set of emotions, is characterized by the fact that it presupposes anticipation. The following is a generally accepted claim about self-concern: *I can have self-concern only for those future persons whose experiences I can now anticipate.*

According to this picture, self-concern is really a concern about the quality of the experiences one will have, and a concern that these be as good as possible. In a particularly revealing passage, Shoemaker suggests why self-concern only targets one's future experiences: “[M]y special egoistic concern for the welfare of certain future selves is premised on their having the capacity for welfare in the first place, something brainless

fetuses, human vegetables, and featureless Cartesian egos, in and of themselves, do not seem to have” (2007, 323). This passage suggests that in self-concern people are concerned about their welfare and that welfare seems to consist in having good experiences. If one cannot have any experiences, one cannot have welfare, and thus it would be irrational for one to care about those stages of one’s life in which one does not have experiences. So self-concern is an attitude had by an experiencer and targeting an experiencer – that is, the same experiencer in the future. But then the theory that simultaneously explains what makes those experiencers the same and when self-concern is rational must have something to do with their psychologies.

This account seems to show that the justification of self-concern requires a suitably defined psychological relation. The details of the relation may differ with the individual theories. One idea is that the required relation is psychological continuity defined as the holding of overlapping chains of *strong* connectedness (Parfit 1984, 206). Another idea is to loosen the notion of continuity to include chains of connectedness of *any degree*, as suggested by McMahan (2002, 54).² But the general idea seems to be this: one’s concern for the quality of future experiences is legitimate only if the experiences can be reasonably expected to be part of a chain of psychological relations issuing from one’s present self. Further, the fact that only some of the total of all experiences that will be experienced in the future of the world are such that they are psychologically related to one’s current experiences explains the special value that is reflected in one’s self-concern as opposed to one’s other-regarding concerns.

III. A SPECIFICATION OF RATIONALITY

I have introduced the notion of self-concern and described some methodological reasons that have led philosophers to favour a psychological analysis of the concept. Now I would like to mention a preliminary objection that will clarify the requirement of the *rationality* of self-concern.

The objection starts with the above-stated claim that bodily theories fail to provide a sufficient condition for the rationality of self-concern. Let us accept for the sake of argument that mere bodily continuity with someone in the future is not sufficient for me to be concerned for him or her the way I am concerned for myself. It may be argued, though, that it is not clear that psychological continuity provides us with sufficient reasons for this concern. Suppose that I am twenty and I can reasonably expect to live a long life. In that case, seventy years from now, there will be someone whose experiences will be continuous with my experiences. But the person may be psychologically radically different from me now: I like wild parties and hard rock, he might like quiet evenings over a glass of wine and Tchaikovsky's symphonies; I am a left-wing liberal, he may be a right-wing conservative; I am an ecological activist, he may be a snobbish materialist. In the face of such deep differences in the psychological profile of the two selves, why should mere psychological continuity between me and the future self establish a reason for me to care about him the way I care about myself now? At the moment I can hardly identify with any of the values he will have and the fact that his values will have naturally grown from mine over the seventy years seems to give me little reason to do so.

This problem has been formulated by Shoemaker (2009, 83). He addresses it by means of a distinction that was earlier developed by Martin for slightly different purposes (2008, 15-20). Martin argues that the theory justifying self-concern should not be normatively imperialistic, that is, prescribe the scope of self-concern that is *rationally required*. He believes that the question of which instances of self-concern are rationally required often cannot be answered. Instead, he argues, we should try to see what instances of self-concern are *rationally permissible*. Shoemaker applies this distinction to the above objection and states that while the presence of psychological continuity does not make my anticipation of and concern for the experiences of my ninety-year-old self *rationally required*, it is sufficient for them to be *rationally permissible*.

Note that this argument leaves open the question of what other relations make self-concern rationally permissible. But Shoemaker seems to suggest that bodily continuity will still fail to justify the rationality of self-concern even if ‘rationality’ is understood in this weaker sense, for, the argument goes, it cannot be solely in virtue of some future individual’s being bodily continuous with me that it is rationally permissible for me to have the special type of concern that I have for myself (Shoemaker 2009, 82-83). Thus, it seems that self-concern in the absence of my future self’s being psychologically related to me must be rationally *impermissible*.

It seems to me that if what is at stake is the rational *permissibility* of self-concern, this last claim is untenable. I contend that there are clear instances of permissible self-concern that cannot be accounted for by the possibility of anticipation and by psychological continuity. In what follows, I will argue that the notions of anticipation and self-concern need to be teased apart.

IV. NON-ANTICIPATORY SELF-CONCERN

My starting point will be the appalling story of the Toronto anaesthetologist George Doodnaught, who was found guilty of “[...] molesting 21 female patients during surgery [...] The women reported that Doodnaught kissed them, touched them inappropriately or committed other sexual acts while they were under conscious sedation [...]”³ In this case, the victims were conscious, but unable to protest. If the doctor had told them about his intentions prior to the operation, surely they would have had reasons for self-concern. The question is whether the reasons would have been based on the fact that the victims would be able to anticipate what was going to happen to them. To see that anticipation is, in fact, not always necessary to explain self-concern, consider a hypothetical adjustment of the story: instead of merely sedating the women, the doctor puts them under general anaesthesia, making them completely unconscious of the events to come. Suppose, further, that his sexual acts were such that

they would leave no evidence on the women's bodies, so the women could not suffer any trauma after the operation. I am sure that if the doctor were to tell the women of his intentions prior to the operation, they would be rightly horrified. And they would think it a cruel joke if the doctor were to tell them: "But don't worry. You won't experience anything under anaesthesia and I will not leave any traces."

If this example is convincing, it shows that we have legitimate reasons for self-concern even if we are prevented from anticipating future experiences. As I have indicated, I will call this kind of self-concern *non-anticipatory self-concern*. The psychological continuity theory of self-concern, which is based on the premise that anticipation is necessary for self-concern, is unable to account for this type of self-concern, because the stream of experiences that, according to this theory, grounds our self-concern will not contain any terrifying experiences that could give us reasons to care. But we would care nonetheless.

It may be objected that the woman prior to surgery is still psychologically continuous with the unconscious woman and this makes her self-concern justified even if the latter does not experience the harm that gives rise to the concern and the former cannot anticipate it. However, I do not think that this rebuttal is available to the defender of the psychological continuity theory. To see why, we need to look more closely at why the proponent of the psychological theory believes that bodily or biological continuity cannot justify self-concern even in cases where they are clearly present. We will see that the same reasons that are adduced to discredit the bodily or biological criteria can be turned against the psychological continuity criterion in this case.

The pre-surgery and the unconscious woman will clearly be bodily and biologically continuous. However, the proponent of the psychological criterion will reject these continuities as irrelevant. Why? Because self-concern, it is claimed, is ultimately a concern about the quality of future experiences. But it is not just any experiences; it is those that *will have grown from the experiences of the person expressing self-concern – those that are related*

to her current experiences, hopes, fears and desires. But these relations are purely psychological (Shoemaker forthcoming, 4-5)⁴. And so self-concern must be grounded in some sort of psychological continuity between two experiencers and even if these experiencers occur in a single bodily or biologically continuous being, these physical continuities are irrelevant, because they do not provide a fruitful explanation of why it is that a person is justified in her concern for her future self.

But notice that with respect to the scenario we are now considering, mere psychological continuity between the woman prior to the surgery and the unconscious woman likewise does not provide a fruitful explanation of why the former should be concerned about the fate of the latter. For the crucial experiences that should motivate self-concern in this case will not be continuous with any experiences of the woman prior to the surgery for a very simple reason. There will not be any – the woman will not experience any harm. The fact that there are *some other* mental states encoded in her brain while she is unconscious, which *will* be continuous with her pre-surgery experiences, does not seem much more relevant for self-concern than the fact that the two will be bodily or biologically continuous.

I conclude that if the proponent of the psychological continuity criterion of self-concern wished to claim that, in the scenario we are considering, psychological continuity is sufficient for self-concern in spite of the absence of anticipation, she would have difficulty explaining what makes psychological continuity in this particular case more relevant for self-concern than bodily or biological continuities, which are undoubtedly also present. As a result, I believe that this example of non-anticipatory self-concern poses a serious problem for the psychological continuity theory.

We can find other instances of non-anticipatory self-concern. Some are reflected in the practice of advance directives – expressions of will that people sometimes sign when they can reasonably expect that they are going to enter a state of incompetence. These may include advanced

stages of serious diseases, such as dementia or Alzheimer's, which dramatically reduce psychological continuity, as well as states of temporary or permanent unconsciousness. Sometimes an advance directive will even specify whether, once brain death is confirmed, the medical staff can harvest one's organs and tissues for transplantation. This is an interesting example. For many people it is a very serious matter whether their organs will be used or not and the fact that many countries make a commitment to respecting the provisions specified in advance directives shows that these concerns are taken seriously. Similar concerns apply to our preferences as to whether we should be buried or cremated and where our remains are to be placed. Many people, for instance, are deeply concerned that they be buried in their home town, in the family plot, close to their spouse and relatives, even though they will not be around to see if these preferences are ever satisfied. And the fact that we are willing to take pains to satisfy them indicates that they are not considered irrational.

This is why I would qualify Shoemaker's claim that my special egoistic concern for the welfare of certain future selves is premised on their having the capacity for welfare in the first place, something human vegetables do not possess. Even if a human vegetable (or a corpse, for that matter) cannot have conscious experiences and cannot perceive any harm, it does not mean that what is being done to him or her in no way influences the value of the life of the person he or she used to be and that it would be irrational for the person to try to arrange, antecedently, that he or she be treated according to his or her preferences.

I agree with Shoemaker that it would not make sense for me to *anticipate* my experiences in a persistent vegetative state or when I am dead, but I disagree that I could not have a special type of concern for myself in a persistent vegetative or posthumous state. The above examples show that anticipation cannot be a necessary condition for the rational permissibility of self-concern, and that the two types of concern must be grounded in different relations.

I would like to argue, however, that self-concern extends even further. An even closer look at what people actually care about with respect to themselves will reveal that people are often concerned about events that are deeply relevant to their lives, but which only take place once they no longer exist. I believe that such forms of concern can be rationally permissible. I contend that the attitude of self-concern in its most general form is not motivated by the desire to have pleasurable experiences, but by the desire to have a good and meaningful life. As many philosophers have observed, however, the value of one's life is not exhausted by the quality of experiences that one has. The value of one's life may be affected by events that one is not aware of or, sometimes, that only occur after one ceases to exist.

Some examples will help us to see the form that this sort of self-concern takes. During his lifetime, Vincent van Gogh only sold one painting. The recognition of the art world that he sought only came after his death. Today he is one of the best-selling painters of all time, with whole museums devoted to his work. I contend that the posthumous recognition he received made his life better and more meaningful. Had his genius not been recognized, he would have been one of history's many forgotten artists and his endeavour would have been in vain. Today, he is an artistic celebrity and an inspiration for generations of artists, which makes his efforts and achievements comparatively much more valuable. Van Gogh's story is just one example of a general pattern of self-concern. Painters want their paintings to be sold just as authors wish for their books to be read. Entrepreneurs strive for their brands to expand and sometimes have their offspring swear that they will continue to develop them. These are just some instances of a general form of self-concern that people have – a concern to leave a mark on the world, a mark that remains even after they no longer exist. And in all of these cases there is a sense in which, if they succeed, if their desires are satisfied, if affairs turn out to be in tune with what they lived for, their lives gain meaning and value, irrespective of whether they are

around to experience this. I contend that it is this perceived value, which is a source of non-anticipatory self-concern.

Note that the concerns embodied in the above cases may easily have all the defining characteristics of self-concern except for anticipation. First, they are not concerns for *others*, although they may be accompanied by a concern for others. An author may wish his books to be read after he dies because others may be inspired by them, but also simply because they are *his* work and he does not want his lifelong work to have been in vain. Even a person who is otherwise completely egoistic might have such a concern. Second, such concern may be accompanied by distinctive emotions. Consider a version of Perry's story. You have devoted your life to film-making; film-making is your life passion. You have produced several cult movies and shaped the movie industry in your career. On your death-bed, you learn that soon a new political regime is going to take over and confiscate and destroy someone's lifetime work. You are saddened and think about the frailty of truth and justice; one bit of information is then added, namely that the 'someone' is you, and a whole new set of emotions rise in your breast. I find this story quite credible: I can easily imagine the outrage caused by the fact that one's whole life will be ruined by a single decision – outrage that can hardly be alleviated by the fact that one will not be around to witness the tragedy.

So the cases of self-concern I have described differ from the cases usually described in the literature by virtue of the fact that one cannot anticipate the experiences that motivate one's self-concern. But to insist that this makes the cases fall outside the scope of the concept of self-concern would just beg the question. We have adopted the proposed methodology according to which we proceed from an analysis of self-concern to an identification of the grounding relation, and we have seen that this is what people actually care about with respect to themselves.

But someone might object at this point that I am stretching the notion of self-concern a bit too far. Surely it does not make sense to speak of a special kind of concern for myself in cases in which, quite

undisputedly, there will be no one either psychologically or physically continuous with me? Surely self-concern must target someone, otherwise it is completely irrational?

It is true that my concern that my books be read or my company continue to prosper differs in one important respect from my concern for myself in PVS or during brain death. In these cases there is a human being who is the intended object of the concern. We may argue about whether it is the *proper* object of my self-concern, but at least my self-concern is directed at an object. But in the cases we are considering now the object is no longer present. Rather, the concern is directed at certain events happening or certain states of affairs occurring, because these are seen as relevant to the value of the life the human being lived. The former kind of self-concern is *direct*, while the latter is *indirect*.

However, this distinction does not mean that these kinds of self-concern are not both real and do not call for an explanation. There seem to be several strategies that one might use to go about this. One way is to abandon the claim that self-concern is justified by some sort of psychological continuity and allow that biological or bodily continuity is in some cases sufficient for the rational permissibility of self-concern. This strategy would help us explain the direct form of non-anticipatory self-concern at the cost of sacrificing the rational permissibility of the indirect form. Painters, authors and entrepreneurs would be irrational in their attempts to secure the continuity of their legacy after they die. Perhaps this would not be such a great cost considering that no plausible object of self-concern exists after one dies.

But I will defend a different strategy. In what follows I will argue that not all relevant continuities that compose the human life end with the demise of psychological, biological and bodily continuity and that some continuities that survive us can be the basis for self-concern. The advantage of this approach is that it shows why indirect non-anticipatory self-concern can be rational and it can account for both types of non-anticipatory self-concern in the same way.

V. A NARRATIVE THEORY OF IDENTITY

To account for non-anticipatory self-concern, I will defend an adapted version of the narrative self-constitution theory of personal identity. The idea that a narrative theory can be used to account for self-concern is not new. In contemporary personal identity theory it has been most clearly articulated by Marya Schechtman. However, her early formulation of the theory cannot explain non-anticipatory self-concern, because a person's identity-constituting narrative can only incorporate *actions* and *experiences* and unify *agents* and *experiencers*. In what follows, I will outline the theory and show its limitations. Then I will focus on Schechtman's latest Person Life View, in which she modifies her early theory so that even people in PVS can be the subjects of a narrative. The new theory can be used to make sense of cases of direct non-anticipatory self-concern. But I will show that the logic of the modifications allows for even more radical alterations of the narrative theory, which will enable us to account for non-anticipatory self-concern even in the indirect forms.

Schechtman first defends a narrative self-constitution account of personal identity in her book *The Constitution of Selves* (2007). According to that theory, *personhood* is not an objective property holding independently of people's attitudes. It is a property that people construe by coming to think of themselves as persisting subjects who have had experiences in the past and will continue to have experiences in the future, taking certain experiences as theirs. The notion of *personal identity* in the narrative theory is very different from the notion used in the classical psychological or physical theories of personal identity. Schechtman terms the latter *reidentification* theories, for their goal is to provide criteria of identity between people identified at different times. The narrative theory, in contrast, offers a *characterization* criterion, which provides an answer to the question *Who am I really?* A person's identity is a complex property that is constituted by the person forming an autobiographical narrative, a story of her life. It consists of traits, actions, and experiences which the person

includes in her narrative. By virtue of that inclusion, these traits, actions and experiences become hers.

Three features of the early narrative theory are important, as they provide the ingredients that will enable us to account for non-anticipatory self-concern (Schechtman 2007, 93-96). First, Schechtman recognizes that actions and experiences can characterize a person to differing degrees, depending on how important a role they play in the person's narrative. Certain characteristics are such that the person strongly identifies with them and makes them focal points of her life. A professional sports-woman may highly value her competitiveness and determination; an academic philosopher may regard her life primarily as a quest for knowledge. For both of them, the joy brought by the interior design of their homes might just be a peripheral aspect of their lives, one for which they would not be willing to sacrifice much.

Second, both personhood and personal identity are intrinsically social concepts. Schechtman states that personhood is intrinsically related to the capacity to take one's place in a certain complex web of social institutions and interactions and that these help construct one's identity as well as make sure that the construction is realistic. In other words, one's self-conception must be in sync with the view of oneself held by others. This is a point that Schechtman emphasizes and substantially develops in her second book.

Lastly, all of the experiences and actions take their meaning from the broader context of the story in which they occur and none are intelligible in isolation. The value and interpretation of present experiences is influenced by memories as well as anticipated future experiences, and vice versa. The strength of this influence indicates how deeply the experiences are incorporated into the person's narrative (Schechtman 2007, 109-113).

These three features of narrative identity – the fact that a characteristic can be part of one's identity to differing degrees, the fact that identity is a product of personal interactions, and the fact that individual characteristics derive their value and meaning from the whole narrative –

are elements that will eventually help us explain non-anticipatory self-concern. Let us first see, however, how this theory purports to explain some ordinary cases of self-concern.

The idea is that the degree of centrality of a feature such as a character trait or a desire in one's narrative is indicative of the degree to which one identifies with the feature and values it, and, in turn, corresponds to the degree to which one is concerned about its preservation or fulfilment. Because the professional sportswoman identifies much more with being a sportswoman than with being an interior designer, the experiences and desires related to her sports career are much more important to her and her concern for their preservation and fulfilment is much stronger. She would be willing to sacrifice much more for these aspects of her identity than for anything related to interior design, which is only a peripheral aspect of her identity. We will return to the mechanisms of explanation of self-concern in greater detail when we have assessed the plausibility of the present form of narrative theory.

While this theory constitutes a novel approach to personal identity and related practical concerns, there are some apparent limitations. It is uncontroversially true that in order for one to be a person, and in order for one to be able to create a personal narrative, one has to have mental states and the capacity for self-reflection. But it seems to be an unnecessary limitation of the theory that it only allows the inclusion of *actions* and *mental states*, such as experiences, desires, and emotions, in one's narrative. The way that the narrative theory is formulated implies that a narrative can only incorporate *remembered* past mental states and actions, currently *experienced* mental states and actions and *anticipated* future mental states and actions. As a result, what a person cannot remember, experience and anticipate cannot characterize him or her (Shoemaker 2009, 96-98). And because only mental states and actions that are part of one's narrative can be the objects of one's self-concern, there is no reason, according to this theory, for me to worry about being abused in anaesthesia or being mistreated in PVS.

This worry is taken seriously in Schechtman's latest book *Staying Alive*, which presents several modifications of the early theory, resulting in the *Person Life View* (Schechtman 2014). First, while in *The Constitution of Selves* person-constituting narratives are mainly described as the products of the relevant person's own activity, with the role of others being primarily corrective, in *Staying Alive* a narrative is essentially an intersubjective construct. A person's narrative is the result of a complex network of interactions that the person participates in, and people related to the narrator play an equally important role in its construction. Second, as a result of the intersubjective nature of a person's narrative, such a narrative can actually be developed and maintained even if the main narrator does not have the capacities to actively participate in this process (Schechtman 2014, 103-107). This is an important point that deserves elaboration. Schechtman's motivation is to expand the notion of narrative in order for it to cover infants, people with dementia, and even people in PVS who are incapable of forming narratives and could not be classified as persons according to her early narrative theory. Schechtman has come to the conclusion that these beings are as much part of the complex network of relations that are characteristic of human persons as healthy adult people are, and that an extension of the narrative account to include such people is a well-motivated and plausible step. She writes:

The life narrative with which someone operates does not begin with self-consciousness and end with its dissolution, however, even when she is actively narrating it. We all know that we have pasts that go back to a time before we can remember and that what happened in that past is partially responsible for how things are for us now [...] Similarly, we all know that we might end up with dementia or in a PVS and this, too, is a part of present experience. People express this knowledge in different ways – by saving money or buying insurance to make sure that they are cared for, by drawing up a living will, by living for the moment while they can still enjoy it – all of these common behaviors acknowledge a possible future in which self-narration is not possible (2014, 106).

This extension of narrative theory responds to the reservations we formulated with respect to the original theory. In the Person Life View, there is no reason why the characteristics of someone in PVS could not be part of his or her narrative, for the theory does not require that a narrative only unifies mental states. But as such, the theory still cannot account for the whole range of non-anticipatory self-concern. Even though one does not have to have experiences to be included in a narrative, Schechtman does not suggest that a narrative could incorporate one's states after one's biological death (such as the state of being cremated against one's will) or events and states of affairs that may be deeply relevant to the value of one's life, which only occur after one ceases to exist (such as one's company being bought and closed down by a competitor). But we have seen that these seem to be legitimate targets of non-anticipatory self-concern. As a result, the posthumous forms of non-anticipatory self-concern defended cannot be accounted for by this extended narrative account.

But the logic of the alterations to the original narrative theory allows for even more extensive narrative inclusion than Schechtman describes.⁵ Schechtman argues that there can be narratives of people in a PVS because they often participate, albeit passively, in the network of social relationships constitutive of narratives and because others can maintain and develop their narratives for them. But we could argue, then, that the dead could also be the subjects of a narrative, at least for a certain length of time. It is not the case that once people breathe their last, they vanish from the network of relationships they have been part of. There are deeply ingrained social practices and patterns of concern related to the dead. For instance, we show respect to them by adopting forms of behaviour in tune with their deepest values and preferences: we keep promises we gave to them, avoid ways of speaking they would not approve of, and sometimes choose careers and lifestyles that conform to their idea of what kind of person we ought to be. If we can maintain a narrative for someone who is no longer capable of contributing to it actively, there

seems to be no reason why we could not also maintain the narratives of people who are dead. Although in the former case there is a living human body while in the latter there no longer is, in both cases we feel our behaviour is affected by what the person stood for and cared for, and we often respect it as if the person were still with us.

I have argued that not all continuities end with the demise of the psychological and biological life of a person. Just as a star that collapsed in a distant region of space millions of years ago can still causally influence objects in other regions, a person who is no longer with us can still influence our lives and attitudes, especially if we loved and respected the person deeply. This is the sort of continuity that can outlast one's existence and, as I will claim, ground one's self-concern.

VI. EXPLAINING NON-ANTICIPATORY SELF-CONCERN

With this wider notion of personal narrative we can now approach the question of the rational permissibility of self-concern. The claim I want to defend is that self-concern is rationally permissible if the object of the self-concern comprises experiences, actions, non-mental states, and events that are consistent with, coherent with, naturally flow from, and complete the personal narrative that the person, together with the people in his or her surroundings, developed and maintained during his or her life. In direct self-concern, the object of people's self-concern is their future self, regardless of whether they will be conscious or alive. If the self-concern is indirect, its object can be situations or states of affairs that have a bearing on the person's values and self-conception represented in their narrative.

Let us revisit in greater detail Schechtman's early narrative theory and the mechanisms by which having a narrative can explain and justify one's concern for one's future. Recall for a moment the claim that the value and interpretation of current experiences is influenced by remembered or anticipated experiences and that such influence is a condition

of their incorporation in a narrative. Let us focus on future experiences. What makes a future experience one's own is the fact that its anticipated character can dramatically alter one's perception of the present. For instance, anticipating future pain may cast a shadow over one's present pleasant experiences. This relationship between anticipation and current experience is not atomic in the sense that a single anticipated future experience influences a single present experience. Rather, the recognition that one has a future influences the whole network of current mental states and actions, including memories of past experiences and actions. It shapes one's perception, preferences, desires, beliefs, motives, and reasons and influences one's actions and provides them with meaning and value. As a result, the narrative subject "[...] has an interest not only in the quality of the present moment, but in that of the narrative as a whole. At each moment the possessor of an autobiographical narrative is claiming the whole story to be *her* story, and a story with a happy ending is generally more desirable than a story with a sad one" (Schechtman 2007, 157).

I contend that the relationship between self-concern and narrative prevails even if we widen the notion of self-concern to include a non-anticipatory dimension. Non-mental states that I cannot anticipate, because they do not involve experiences, can influence my current perception as deeply as any anticipated experience. The thought of being sexually abused under anaesthesia may cast a shadow over one's excitement that after the operation one will be able to walk painlessly again. The belief that one's organs will be posthumously harvested, contrary to one's desire for bodily integrity, may cause a feeling of hopelessness. An entrepreneur's belief that her offspring will not keep the company she has built from scratch after she dies may cause a sense of futility, as might a dying physician's belief that a promising and inexpensive method of cancer treatment he discovered will likely be blocked by the pharmaceutical lobby. That is, if the inclusion of a characteristic in one's narrative is preconditioned by its ability to form one's current experience and give it

meaning and value, one's non-mental states, posthumous states, and even other posthumous events related to one's core characteristics and values may legitimately be part of one's narrative.

Further, if narrative unity is the source of our self-concern, because it provides our current experiences with meaning and our life with value, certain non-mental states and posthumous events may be legitimate targets of our self-concern, for they can undoubtedly contribute to the overall meaning of the story of one's life as much as any lived experiences. The ending of one's life that, according to Schechtman, plays a key role in the meaning of the whole narrative may not necessarily be a psychological or biological ending. The ending may only come with the satisfaction (or ultimate frustration) of one's deep preferences, which need not necessarily occur during one's existence.

This leads to the role of others in developing one's narrative, which is another component of the narrative theory emphasized above. Obviously, one cannot directly satisfy those of one's desires and preferences related to unconscious or posthumous stages of one's existence. One can only strive to make sure that these desires and preferences are satisfied. This is the point of living wills and advance directives. It is others who can satisfy these desires and, by doing so, actively participate in the maintenance or completion of the narrative. A physician who does not live to see his groundbreaking cancer treatment method put to use has lived an incomplete story. The story may reach its conclusion if people strive to push the method through the necessary testing and ensure its widespread medical use. And if they succeed, they add a level of importance and meaning to the physician's individual actions, efforts, and desires. Of course, others may also seriously damage or alter one's narrative posthumously. The physician's efforts and desires may be thwarted by a ruthless intervention by a pharmaceutical lobby or simply put into a drawer by a jealous colleague. Or, to take another example, a distinguished civil rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate may be defamed by his political opponents and his activities deliberately reinterpreted in public to indicate

utterly narcissistic motives, for instance. But the general point is that some actions by others may significantly affect the story that a person lived and, since the meaning and value of the individual elements of the person's life are influenced by the whole picture, dramatically change the value of that person's life.

The final explanatory ingredient of the narrative theory emphasized above was the claim that the way that a feature characterizes a person can be a matter of degree. We can see that this observation plays a similar role in accounting for non-anticipatory self-concern as it did with ordinary self-concern. The actions, desires, beliefs, and states that a person considers to be central to his or her identity are those that will generate the strongest forms of non-anticipatory self-concern. A prominent political dissident facing the prospect of assassination may put much more effort into making sure that his or her visions and ideals are preserved than into preventing his or her property from being confiscated by the state, as his or her political values may be much more central to who he or she is than material property. It also seems that the more central a role that a feature plays in one's narrative, the stronger the obligation one's loved ones feel to respect, retain, develop, or complete it.

The picture of self-concern that has emerged from these thoughts is the following. The sources of self-concern seem to include much more than a person's future experiences. Self-concern is rooted in a person's desire to live a meaningful life. The rational permissibility of this form of self-concern is not preconditioned by the psychological continuity between the person expressing the concern and the person who is the target of the concern, and it does not require the ability to anticipate the latter's experiences. Rather, the rational permissibility is grounded in narrative continuity and requires, at best, a justified belief that certain events may or may not take place. A person's narrative is a story that constitutes the meaning of his or her life and provides the individual elements of that life with significance. With many people, however, the story ends neither

with the cessation of the person's consciousness, nor with the end of their life. It may continue and be maintained and completed by others, and the way it is maintained or completed may have a bearing on the meaning and value of the person's life. Thus, it is a legitimate source of self-concern that both conscious and non-conscious (including posthumous) states and events related to the person's life are in tune with the narrative that the person has striven to develop.

VII. CONCLUSION

At the beginning we assumed that there is an intimate relationship between personal identity and self-concern. Some authors believe that the limits of rational self-concern are set by the best account of personal identity. Others believe that the best theory of personal identity must be responsive to our deepest intuitions about the nature of self-concern. I have attempted to look closely at the different dimensions that human self-concern may involve. A question now arises whether, in the face of this broad conception of self-concern, we can retain the belief that there is an intimate relationship between self-concern and personal identity. The extended narrative theory that I believe is best suited for the job is a theory of personal identity *in the sense of characterization*. As such, it has little to do with the persistence of human beings – unless you are willing to use the term 'persistence' in a metaphorical sense in which Aristotle and Shakespeare still persist, because they are represented in our culture and their works are widely read. Rather than answering the question *On what conditions do I persist?* it focuses on the question *Who am I?* And the extended narrative theory points out that the question cannot be answered just by providing a list of mental states that characterize me during my conscious life. Properties and states that I am not aware of may characterize me as much as any experience that I identify with, and even states of affairs obtaining after I cease to exist may influence my characterization. Whether this comprehensive theory of all the aspects that may affect my

characterization is *rightly* called a theory of personal identity is, I believe, merely a verbal issue. What is important is that self-concern is rationally permissible as long as it targets any of the aspects that may have a bearing on one's characterization and these are not limited to anticipated mental states only.⁶

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NOTES

1. Besides Martin, the requirement of anticipation can be found in, for instance, Shoemaker (2007); Schechtman (2007, 154-157); Parfit (1984, 312).

2. An anonymous reviewer has suggested that the anticipatory character of self-concern does not require psychological continuity between the person expressing the concern and the being that is the object of the concern at all; it only requires that the object must have experiences. It seems to me that this idea faces the challenge of specifying what exactly makes such a being's experiences relevant for self-concern as opposed to other-regarding concern without having to invoke some bodily or biological relations that could unify the being with the person expressing the concern. If bodily and biological relations are deemed irrelevant, and, in addition, psychological

continuity is dismissed as well, there seems to be little that unifies the two and thus justifies self-concern.

3. *National Post*, November 19, 2013. George Doodnaught, Toronto anesthesiologist, found guilty of sexual assault. <http://news.nationalpost.com/2013/11/19/george-doodnaught-toronto-anesthesiologist-found-guilty-of-sexual-assault/> [accessed March 5, 2015].

4. Shoemaker illustrates this argument by a different type of concern – the attribution of moral responsibility. While I find it absolutely convincing when applied to moral responsibility, he seems to apply it more generally to cover also other concerns such as anticipation and self-concern, where I think the argument loses plausibility.

5. See Bělohrad (2014).

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