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# Autonomy and the Self

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# Foreword

The initial idea for this volume grew out of a conference entitled "Norms and Persons – Freedom, Commitment and the Self," which we organized in Konstanz, Germany, in 2008. Based on the illuminating and inspiring discussions there, it quickly became clear to us that, in future work, we wanted to focus more on the complex relationship between personal autonomy and the notion of the self. This finally led to the idea of editing a volume on the topic, bringing together internationally renowned scholars and a number of aspiring young researchers.

First and foremost, we would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all the contributors to this volume for their unwavering willingness to participate in this project—putting together a volume such as this indeed always takes longer than initially expected—and for providing us with such insightful and thought-provoking papers.

We would also especially like to thank Gottfried Seebaß, research project leader of the project "Normativity and Freedom" within the Konstanz Collaborative Research Centre "Norm and Symbol," which was funded by the "Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft," for his encouragement to edit the volume in the first place and for his continuous support during the entire editing process.

Furthermore, we would like to thank Nancy Kühler for meticulously taking care of the language editing of all the papers by non-native speakers and also the Konstanz Collaborative Research Centre "Norm and Symbol" for kindly funding this language editing.

During the final stages of the publication process, we also had the good fortune to benefit from the great support that the Centre for Advanced Study in Bioethics at Münster, Germany, provided us. Aside from voicing gratitude for the helpful remarks and suggestions given to us by numerous members of the Centre, we would especially like to thank Konstantin Schnieder for his invaluable help in creating the index for the volume.

Wall, Steven. 2009. Perfectionism in politics, a defense. In *Contemporary debates in political philosophy*, ed. Thomas Christiano and John Christman. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
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# Psychocorporeal Selfhood, Practical Intelligence, and Adaptive Autonomy

**Diana Tietjens Meyers**

> *I have very specific early bodily/spatial memories of my father – it usually involved being hit, slapped, poked, prodded, spanked, or stood up against a wall and lectured to at length, ad nauseam. Never hugging, never holding hands, never a piggyback ride, never a pat on the back declaiming, "Well done, my good boy." Although I was a child, he had the power to make me insecure, a perfectionist, a driven man. And that drive to overachieve and outperform has asserted an affect on my body, especially in the wake of my father's sudden death last year. ...*
>
> *I move now toward the uncertain because my "homeland," 1260 Lincoln Place in the neighborhood of Crown Heights in the borough of Brooklyn, New York, has now been sold. This is the house in which I was raised, and the house where my father before me was raised. My father initiated the sale and then he died. We who remain had to bury him and then complete the sale. I remain. All that was once normal, oppressive, rife with insecurities, is now gone. When the structure of the old story collapsed, in time, so did I.*[1]

Rolling's autobiographical report is particularly valuable because of the emphasis he places on the relationship between embodiment and personal identity. Not only does he highlight the formative effects of his father's physical treatment of him as a boy, he also highlights his continuing reliance on physical access to the familiar environment of the house where he grew up to sustain his personal identity. Egregious as his father's child-rearing practices were, they helped to shape a functional, though clearly less than ideal, personal identity for his son – an identity that was, not altogether surprisingly, shattered upon the death of his father and the sale of his childhood home.

[1] Rolling (2004), 551–552.

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All too often, self-stories downplay the psychocorporeal[2] dimension of identity. They set forth sequenced public events and present interiority as if it were all taking place in the head. Rolling's article does not ignore the role of his mental life in his personal identity.[3] But I single out his story of the genesis and collapse of his personal identity because it synthesizes the corporeal and emotional and contextualizes them in an embodied interpersonal relationship and an emotionally meaningful physical environment. In so doing, Rolling affirms the centrality of corporeity to selfhood and agency.

Because Rolling regards his body image as integral to his personal identity, his self-story articulates memories of early psychocorporeal experiences together with his adult psychocorporeal needs – first the self-esteem trouncing physical and emotional abuse he endured in childhood and then, ironically, the indispensable support to his identity provided by the familiar setting of the scene of that very abuse, the house where he grew up.[4] Most importantly, the passage I have quoted shows that he does not conceive of his body image merely as a mental picture of his appearance. On the contrary, he correctly understands his body image to be a primarily visceral and agentic endowment upon which his ideas about his bodily states and movements depend. Losing access to his childhood home, his founding place in the world, is as much a corporeal dislocation as it is a psychic loss. His drive to "overachieve and outperform" is an embodied imperative to please a man who could never be pleased and let his displeasure be known physically. Now that Rolling's corporeal need to deflect abuse is beside the point and his yearning for the feel of a paternal pat on the back is certain to go forever unsatisfied, he suffers an acute identity crisis.

I don't know how common life stories similar Rolling's are. But there is no doubt that identity crises accompanied by anguished struggles to discover who you are and to regain your bearings are common in contemporary U.S. society.[5] Since this is so, an adequate account of selfhood must accommodate people's vulnerability to identity crises as well as their capacity to mend their personal identities and eventually move ahead with their lives. Although it is important for a theory of self and action to make sense of identity crises and recovery from them, it is no less

[2] Note on vocabulary: I coined the term *psychocorporeal* to convey an understanding of the human body that is insufficiently attended to in contemporary philosophy—the lived, experiencing human body that not only expresses meaning at the bidding of the mind, but also registers meanings on its own and enacts and expresses self-generated meanings. I discuss exceptions to this philosophical neglect in Sect. 5.

[3] Ibid., 551.

[4] Ibid., 549.

[5] See, for example, Wethington (2000) on "midlife crises" in the U.S. Eubanks-Carter and Goldfried (2006) rely on the concept of a sexual identity crisis and contrast it with Borderline Personality Disorder in their study of clinical diagnoses of U.S. LGBT individuals' problems handling the process of coming out. Applications of the concept of an identity crisis and its cognates are not limited to the U.S. Studies of immigrants—for example, Lewin's work on Iranian immigrants to Sweden (2001)—use the concept of an identity crisis to conceptualize the predicament of their target population.



important to make sense of a correlative phenomenon that Rolling's story does not illustrate – namely, drastic life changes that bring about major identity transitions without the sudden collapse and intervening drama of identity crises. Faced with comparably life-shaking circumstances, some people cope without plunging into identity crises. Like Rolling's, these people's identities are subject to attack. Nevertheless, they skirt identity crises and renegotiate the terms of their personal identities without losing their equilibrium – their sense of who they are and their capacity for self-directed action.

Philosophical psychology and philosophy of action have paid scant attention to the nexus of problems raised by identity crises and identity transitions. Because these phenomena center key questions about the resilience of selfhood, the workings of practical intelligence, and the nature of autonomous self-direction, I seek to rectify this philosophical neglect. With this aim in view, I treat accounting for people's vulnerability to identity crises and for the possibility of averting them as a test of the adequacy of theories of the self and autonomy.

Philosophers customarily regard reason as essential to identity and as the ultimate arbiter of autonomous choice and action. Yet, reason's superordinate status has been challenged. Marilyn Friedman maintains that abiding patterns of affective response reveal what you care about and thus help to demarcate your identity as an autonomous agent.[6] Likewise, Martha Nussbaum has been at pains to show that emotions have normative authority.[7] I believe that there is still another source of individual identity, normative authority, and autonomous action – the sensitive, enskilled, enculturated body. Practical intelligence, in my view, is a system in which no single faculty is paramount. It is comprised of semi-autonomous capabilities that include reason, emotion, and corporeity. Each of these capabilities can misfire and issue wrongheaded action directives, for biased predispositions, flawed perceptions, or wayward interpretations can infect each of them. If optimally (at least adequately) calibrated, however, each of them makes a distinct and valuable contribution to practical intelligence and hence to autonomous action. In this paper, I seek to motivate the claim that agentic human corporeity is constitutive of the agentic subject and to describe agentic corporeity's distinctive contribution to autonomous action.

After clarifying what an identity crisis, as opposed to an identity transition, is, I explain how individual identities may be threatened (Sects. 1 and 2). Charles Taylor and J. David Velleman are among the few philosophers who comment on the topic of identity crises in the context of their theories of autonomy.[8] I share with them a basic understanding of autonomy as requiring a stable, though not a fixed, self to guide

[6] Friedman (2003), 9–10, 14, 58.

[7] Nussbaum (2001).

[8] Harry Frankfurt's account of the authentic self offers many insights that could be adapted to addressing the problems I take up (see especially 1971; 1988, chapters 5 and 12; 1999, chapter 11). However, to the best of my knowledge, Frankfurt never considers identity crises as such. For lack of space, I do not attempt to apply his theory to the issues raised in this paper.

choice and action.[9] Moreover, my review of Taylor's and Velleman's work on the self, personal identity, and identity crises shows that both of their views account for people's vulnerability to identity crises and that each spotlights a practical capacity that may enable a person to avert an identity crisis or recover from one (Sect. 3).

Still, something is missing. Examining realistic cases of identity-threatening circumstances and reflecting on what it takes to negotiate them brings out the need to explicate how corporeity figures in autonomous action (Sect. 4). No one's identity is immune to life's seismic shifts. But, I argue, theories of identity and autonomy that overestimate people's intellectual perspicacity and the reliability of rational deliberation make people appear to be even more vulnerable to identity-threatening circumstances than they are, for such theories erase the possibility that individuals might entrust themselves in part to the resources of intelligent agentic corporeity if faced with identity-threatening subjective, interpersonal, or economic upheaval. By grasping predicaments and taking the initiative apart from propositional interpretation and deliberate planning and decision making, psychocorporeal practical intelligence can be vital when an individual needs to keep pace with identity-threatening events and keep control over the direction of her/his life.[10]

The human body is not inert matter except for autonomic functions, nor is the human body merely an input–output device for the mind. An ever-expanding body of neuroscientific evidence calls these conceptions into question.[11] Still, it is far from obvious how to theorize intelligent agentic corporeity, and I do not claim to give a complete account in this paper. Rather, guided by several insights from Merleau-Ponty's account of habit, I propose five components of a theory of psychocorporeal practical intelligence, and I sketch how they contribute to autonomous control (Sect. 5). Whereas Taylor's use of Merleau-Ponty in some of his papers convinces me that he would be receptive to my suggestions, Velleman's resolute mentalism is inimical to my line of thought. Nevertheless, I conclude by offering a reason for Velleman to endorse my position (Sect. 6).

## 1 What Is an Identity Crisis?

Psychologist Eric Erikson first used the expression "identity crisis" to refer to a stage of normal adolescent development. During these years, individuals who have not yet formed their personal identities confront the task of finding social roles

[9] As will become apparent in Sect. 3, there are profound differences between Taylor's and Velleman's accounts of autonomy. What I single out here as a commonality serves only to distinguish their views and mine from theories that invoke personal style or existential choice. For my account of autonomy, see Meyers (1989) and (2004).

[10] I use the expressions *psychocorporeal practical intelligence* and *intelligent agentic corporeity* to refer to the human body's capacity to grasp situations and respond appropriately. I explicate this capacity in Sect. 5.

[11] For discussion of this evidence in relation to a phenomenological account of the body, see Gallagher (2005). For a philosophical treatment of the relevance of individual embodiment to personal identity, see James (2000).



that mesh their abilities and values, on the one hand, with their occupational and interpersonal opportunities, on the other. Failure to resolve the identity crisis results in disorientation, stagnation, or alienation if not self-destructive or criminal behavior. Success synthesizes who you are with a condoned place in society and readies you for a fulfilling life. I sketch Erikson's view for background; however, this paper is not concerned with the adolescent identity crisis he hypothesized.

In the social sciences, the concept of an identity crisis remains in currency, and it has filtered into colloquial usage. Since Erikson wrote, however, its application has broadened, and it is no longer restricted to adolescence. At any point later in life, your personal identity might be shaken, with the result that you are obliged to "find yourself" all over again. Along with this expanded range of reference has come ambiguity in usage.

"Identity crisis" is not a psychiatric diagnostic category, but it is understandable that it is sometimes confused with one. The diagnostic criteria for Borderline Personality Disorder include an identity component:"Identity Disturbance: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self."[12] Glossing this criterion, David Barlow states that persons suffering from the disorder "do not 'know' who they are".[13] The overlap between this psychiatric criterion and a vernacular expression for an identity crisis – "I no longer know who I am" – can even grease the wheels for clinical errors. A study of gender and sexual orientation biases in diagnoses of Borderline Personality Disorder found that clinicians who judged a prospective male client to be gay or bisexual were more likely to diagnose Borderline Personality Disorder although the presenting symptoms warranted only a diagnosis of "sexual identity crisis," which befits individuals who are confused or in denial about their sexual orientation.[14] However, Borderline Personality Disorder is a far more grave condition than an identity crisis. Although some people seek out psychotherapy to help them through identity crises, others successfully cope with identity crises without consulting professionals.[15]

Other psychiatrically cognized identity disorders include Dissociative Identity Disorder and Gender Identity Disorder. Popularly known as Multiple Personality Disorder, Dissociative Identity Disorder divides subjectivity into two or more compartmentalized selves. Similarly, someone undergoing an identity crisis may speak of being "torn in two," but this colloquialism references a far less serious and far more tractable condition than Dissociative Identity Disorder.

Gender Identity Disorder picks out transgender and transsexual identities for pathologization. So far as I can see, this diagnosis is best understood as a manifestation of the injustice of stigmatizing relatively unusual, but innocuous gender identities, as opposed to an individual psychiatric problem. The same is not true of identity crises. Although

[12] DSM-IV-TR.

[13] Barlow (2008), 366.

[14] Eubanks-Carter and Goldfried (2006).

[15] The psychiatric profession currently recognizes a catch-all category called "Identity Problems" for which patients may seek help (DSM IV TR 741). Identity Problems include sexual and relationship difficulties and trouble establishing values and goals and settling on a career.

social contingencies can precipitate, exacerbate, or ease an identity crisis, these social contingencies are not necessarily unjust or remediable. Some mothers suffer identity crises when their last child leaves home. Although fewer women might go through "empty nest" crises if social norms did not equate womanhood with motherhood and if paid employment were structured more equitably, it is not wrong for adult children to leave home and lead independent lives. Moreover, it is doubtful that any cultural or structural change outside the domestic sphere could guarantee that no mother would be thrown into an identity crisis by this diminution of the family unit.

Medical science helps to demarcate the outer limits of identity crises – that is, the diagnoses of Borderline Personality Disorder and Dissociative Identity Disorder specify forms of psychic disturbance that exceed the needs for clarification, modification, or unification that identity crises present. As well, these diagnoses refer to persistent conditions rooted in ingrained psychic mechanisms as opposed to disturbances that render your identity in some respect(s) dysfunctional. The similarities and differences between the specious diagnosis Gender Identity Disorder and the concept of an identity crisis bring out the interplay between social norms and practices and the vulnerabilities of personal identity. On the one hand, most people identify strongly with social categories; consequently, losing your place in a socially valorized category can snap your identity. But, on the other hand, there may be little that society can or should do to protect you from some kinds of identity crises, for the intensity of your identification with a particular social role may be impervious to social interventions.

The social sciences are frequently misleading with regard to the concept of an identity crisis. Some sociologists (and many pop psychologists) use the concept to characterize the life experiences of vast social congeries – e.g., retirees or male 40-year-olds. Not surprisingly, social scientists with more rigorous methodologies soon debunk these inflated claims. This much is clear: Unless there's no difference between an identity crisis and an identity adjustment, there are no points in the life span or changes in life circumstances that are bound to provoke an identity crisis, for susceptibility to identity crises hinges on personal characteristics as much as it does on life events or social contexts.

Psychologists Roy Baumeister, Jeremy Shapiro, and Dianne Tice propose two kinds of identity crisis – identity deficit crises and identity conflict crises.[16] In an identity deficit crisis, your identity proves to be insufficiently defined relative to your agentic needs. Drawing on their review of an extensive literature, they inventory subjective states that they associate with identity deficit crises:

> vacillating commitment and confusion about values; periodic feelings of vagueness, emptiness, or generalized malaise; preoccupation with great, seemingly unresolvable questions …; self-consciousness, including rumination about implications of one's actions; anxiety, tension, and feelings of confusion, bewilderment, and occasional discouragement.[17]

[16] Baumeister et al. (1985).

[17] Ibid., 413.



Because your "existing commitments are inadequate to guide behavior," identity deficit crises are inimical to autonomy.[18] They foster impulsive behavior, susceptibility to influence, and acting out.[19] To resolve this type of crisis, it is necessary to add to your identity – that is, to augment yourself in ways that enable you to know what you want and what you should do across the full range of situations you encounter.[20] The alternative is accepting a "diffuse identity" and the apathy or alienation that go with it.[21]

In contrast, you may suffer an identity conflict crisis if your circumstances bring about conflicts within the set of values, goals, people, and/or projects to which you are deeply committed.[22] This type of identity crisis does not appear to be as extensively documented, but the authors single out several of its characteristic subjective states: the feeling of being in an impossible situation because "your felt commitments … are situationally irreconcilable;" the feeling of being unable to act without betraying yourself and your "loyalty to other persons, to an ideology, or to an institution;" guilt and resentment if you are forced to act, otherwise "emotional paralysis."[23] Like identity deficit crises, identity conflict crises are inimical to autonomy but for different reasons. As conflicted individuals are overloaded with behavioral demands, they tend to take refuge in passivity and evasion, and they may resort to emulating role models who have contended with similar problems.[24] Resolving this type of crisis requires subtracting from your identity – that is, shedding enough of your commitments to eliminate the internal conflict.[25] Compromise either through scheduling or through compartmentalization is the only alternative to resolution.[26]

I am not convinced that identity crises and resolutions divide neatly into the dyad Baumeister, Shapiro, and Tice set out. However, their sketches of the phenomenology of identity crises provide a useful point of departure for differentiating between identity crises and identity transitions.[27] Baumeister, Shapiro, and Tice are surely

[18] Ibid., 420.

[19] Ibid., 421.

[20] Ibid., 442.

[21] Ibid., 413.

[22] Ibid., 408.

[23] Ibid., 414–415. Baumeister, Shapiro, and Tice's account of identity conflict crises bears a notable resemblance to Frankfurt's conception of ambivalence—a state in which you identify with two second order desires that are inherently opposed (1999, 99).

[24] Baumeister et al. (1985), 416.

[25] Ibid., 422.

[26] Ibid., 419. Yet, tragic moral dilemmas such as "Sophie's Choice" bar both scheduling and compartmentalization and cannot be resolved without moral remainder. In this connection, see Tessman (2005), 28, 87–89.

[27] In a sense, people's identities are constantly in transition, for they gradually evolve, often imperceptibly, as new experiences come along and time passes. However, in this paper, I reserve the expression 'identity transition' for changes that take place in response to identity-threatening circumstances, where identity-threatening circumstances are understood to be serious enough to force a substantial identity transition or to precipitate a full blown identity crisis.

right that identity crises are marked by persistent and salient feelings of emptiness or self-betrayal. I agree with their claim that emptiness and self-betrayal need not be conjoined in every identity crisis. If your identity is strong enough to support a sense of self-betrayal, you may have no reason to feel deprived of an identity and therefore empty, and conversely, if your identity is so impoverished that you feel empty, it is possible that nothing you could do would cause you to experience the regrets of self-betrayal. But I disagree with their claim that emptiness and self-betrayal never go together in identity crises. It is possible to be afflicted by both emptiness and self-betrayal – emptiness because circumstances can render a substantial part of your personal identity obsolete and self-betrayal because circumstances can oblige you to go against something that you can't help but care about. Moreover, it is possible for self-betrayal and emptiness to be sequenced in an identity crisis. Stinging feelings of self-betrayal that cannot be assuaged might become so unbearable that you are driven to relinquish the value that you've betrayed only to find yourself afflicted by feelings of emptiness.[28]

It is necessary, as well, to bear in mind a number of other subjective features of identity crises that Baumeister, Shapiro, and Tice call attention to – namely, anxiety, confusion, discouragement, self-consciousness, and preoccupation with seemingly unresolvable questions. However, I think Baumeister, Shapiro, and Tice's account errs in holding that people who are undergoing identity crises that give rise to a sense of unavoidable self-betrayal (but spare the individual persistent and salient feelings of emptiness) don't experience anxiety, confusion, discouragement, self-consciousness, and preoccupation with seemingly unresolvable questions. The latter are features of all identity crises, as is impaired autonomy, although the nature of the impairment varies and the axes of variation are more numerous than Baumeister, Shapiro, and Tice acknowledge.

In my view, then, an identity crisis besieges the individual with persistent and salient feelings of emptiness, self-betrayal, or both, frequent and disruptive anxiety, confusion, discouragement, and self-consciousness, and protracted and disquieting preoccupation with seemingly unresolvable questions. Correlatively, people in the process of making identity transitions are not troubled by emptiness or self-betrayal; their flare ups of anxiety, confusion, discouragement, and self-consciousness are not overwhelming; and they enjoy basic confidence in their ability to handle their problems.

Conceivably, though, you could experience symptoms of an identity crisis for reasons other than an identity crisis – for instance, you might be suffering from clinical depression. Because I do not have space to analyze all of the symptoms a person must not display if various psychiatric disorders that require psychiatric treatment are to be ruled out, I must ask readers to be satisfied with the observation that the miseries of an identity crisis are much milder than those of psychiatric disorders and much more acute than those of identity transitions.

[28] Thanks to Michael Kühler for this point.



## 2 Identity-Threatening Circumstances and Individual Identities

To supplement the admittedly imprecise distinctions I have drawn between clinical identity disorders, identity crises, and identity transitions and to connect identity crises to common human problems, I illustrate the kinds of upheavals that *can* precipitate an identity crisis and the motivational disorientation and autonomy deficits an identity crisis entails. Consider these predicaments:

1. the middle class, stay-at-home mother and homemaker whom her husband's sudden death repositions as an unemployed, uncredentialed, single head of household.[29]
2. the smart, all-American prom queen who discovers she's sexually attracted to other women during her first semester at Smith.[30]
3. the handsome leading man whom an equestrian accident repositions as a quadriplegic invalid.[31]
4. the inner city youth whom Choate's zealous recruitment repositions as a preppy.[32]
5. the business executive who, soon after retiring to a sun belt community to play tennis and hang out with other sports enthusiasts, suffers a massive coronary and learns that he will never be able to exercise strenuously again.[33]
6. the office cleaner who wins a $50 million lottery jackpot.[34]

[29] Van de Hoonaard reports that her study of young widows' autobiographical writings shows that this group of individuals suffered severe identity crises as a result of the deaths of their husbands (2001, 1–2).

[30] Smith is a New England women's college with a reputation for a lively lesbian social scene as well as for academic excellence. For relevant discussion of sexual identity crises, see Eubanks-Carter and Goldfried (2006).

[31] Christopher Reeves's career and equestrian accident inspired this example. However, I should note that I have no biographical knowledge that would lead me to believe that he suffered an identity crisis after his career was abruptly and prematurely ended. Later, I discuss some corporeal skills that his acting career strengthened and that might have helped him to cope with his post-accident disabilities. Strauss, Aldrich, and Lipman report findings that forced, as opposed to voluntary, retirement is particularly difficult for men to negotiate (1976, 225), and much of Tinley's data on and discussion of the identity problems elite athletes face when they retire is relevant to this example and suggestive (2002).

[32] Choate Rosemary Hall is an elite, expensive preparatory school in New England. Costello's analysis of the identity crises that many professional school students who are not middle-class, white, heterosexual males undergo as they try to cope with law school or social work at Berkeley lends support to this example (2005).

[33] Tinley's observations concerning the ties between sport, fitness, and identity in elite athletes and Atchley's analysis of the troubles "narrowly engaged" men face in retirement can be applied with qualifications to the type of case I have described (Tinley 2002, 24; Atchley 1976, 119).

[34] The most universal problem jackpot winners face is brazen requests for money from long-lost relatives, slight acquaintances, and complete strangers (Ginsburg 1993). The problem is so severe and so persistent that many obtain unlisted phone numbers to retain a modicum of peace and privacy. Many winners also encounter difficulties in their relations with family members or coworkers. "For the first six months after I won they treated me like a celebrity," states Donald Bakely, "but after that it turned to jealousy" (Ginsburg 1993). The poisoning of his work environment led to his decision to quit his job.

Not everyone who faces a staggeringly different social situation, a heartbreaking interpersonal loss, a wrenching revelation about her/himself, or a major personal reversal succumbs to an identity crisis. A study of elderly widows, for example, found that most mourn their husbands and transition into solo living without being beset by identity crises.[35] Yet, recent memoirs by younger widows describe identity crises and the daunting frustration and anguish that attend them.[36] Although situations like the ones I have sketched do not automatically bring about identity crises, they do mandate significant personal change. Thus, I have distinguished the debilitating subjective condition that is a full-blown identity crisis from the smoother subjective process of an identity transition. I hasten to add that life-changing turns of events can only precipitate identity crises for people whose particular vulnerabilities they engage. Identity-threatening circumstances target your distinctive mix of talents and developed capabilities, values and goals, ties of friendship or love, and/or abiding interests and projects – in short, they target who you are.

It follows that there are no intrinsically identity-threatening circumstances, for individual vulnerabilities are embedded in people's unique configurations of attributes. For a woman who doesn't love her husband, isn't economically dependent on him, and doesn't value being married as such, the death of her husband would probably not be identity-threatening – indeed, it might be identity-liberating. Throughout this paper, then, I distinguish between circumstances that have the potential to bring about an identity crisis for a particular person and circumstances that are identity-neutral for that person. Turns of events that are identity-neutral for you may be identity-threatening for someone else, and vice versa. Moreover, should identity-threatening circumstances befall you, they can lead either to an identity transition or to an identity crisis depending on your agentic resources.

Together with my characterization of identity crises, my scenarios adumbrate the magnitude of the peril identity crises represent. Succumbing to an identity crisis can be ruinous, for it leaves you without direction and at risk of never regaining forward momentum. Failure to overcome an identity crisis means never succeeding in fashioning an identity that is truly your own and that effectively guides your conduct.[37] To go without such an identity is to fail to lead a life that expresses who you are – an autonomous life. It means stoically or bitterly enduring your lot. Overcoming an identity crisis is a formidable task not only because this condition undermines autonomy but also because identity crises typically coincide with emotional turbulence that further strains people's coping skills. There is every reason, then, for philosophers of action to make sure that their accounts of the self and autonomous agency can explicate not only the possibility of suffering an identity crisis but also the preferable possibility of identity transitioning.

What must selfhood be like to be vulnerable to identity crises – identity crises brought on by bad or good fortune as well as identity crises brought on by self-examination

[35] Van den Hoonard (2001).

[36] Ibid.

[37] I borrow this phraseology from Frankfurt (1971), 13.



or unforeseen, inescapable circumstances? What forms of resilience must a vulnerable person possess to negotiate such drastic life changes without suffering an identity crisis – to avert an identity crisis and instead to transition autonomously toward an adjusted identity? What does it take to rally yourself to take advantage of whatever opportunities are available to you and to redefine yourself without losing yourself?

## 3 Two Philosophical Accounts of Identity Crises

Although the self and personal identity have received a good deal of attention in the recent philosophical literature, identity crises have not. There are, however, a couple of notable exceptions – Charles Taylor's normative account and David Velleman's cognitive account.

To have an identity, according to Charles Taylor, is to be committed to values and projects and to be identified with certain communities which together comprise what for you is a life "worth living" – a meaningful life.[38] Coining a phrase that has now entered the philosophical lexicon, Taylor claims that figuring out how to live well requires "strong evaluation".[39] Unlike weighing which of several competing sets of desires or preferences to act on by gauging their strengths, the amount of pleasure likely to be gained by opting for one set rather than another, and the probability of succeeding in satisfying each of the sets, strong evaluations are qualitative. They are judgments about what is valuable or good. They single out an overall manner of everyday living – including affective attitudes, patterns of emotional response, and kinds of behavior – that is "incomparably higher" than any other that is within your power.[40] Your convictions about these matters are "essential" to your identity because, as a person, you "*need* to be connected to, or in contact with, what [you] see as good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value".[41]

An identity crisis can come about when your strong evaluations are called into question or when you are prevented from acting on the imperatives you have apprehended. I stress that such doubt or obstruction can but does not necessarily precipitate an identity crisis. Taylor observes that the question of whether you have achieved the best possible understanding of how to live well is always open and sometimes worth revisiting.[42] Most such self-questioning is piecemeal and leads either to an identity transition or to a reaffirmation of your identity. However, losing confidence in your core strong evaluations – values or commitments that guide much of your conduct and values or commitments that provide justification for your cherished projects – is identity-threatening and may lead to an identity crisis. Similarly, finding

[38] Taylor (1989a), 3, 14; (1976), 296.

[39] Taylor (1976), 282, ff.

[40] Taylor (1976, 1989a), 14–23.

[41] Taylor (1976), 296 (emphasis added); (1989a), 42.

[42] Taylor (1976), 196–197.

yourself in circumstances that stop you from conforming to core strong evaluations is identity-threatening and may lead to an identity crisis.

Taylor explicates identity crises obliquely. Experiencing an identity crisis is equivalent to not knowing where you stand.[43] This metaphor of "standing" points up a pair of interlocking themes in his account of the self.

First, your standing in relation to your conception of the good is at stake in an identity crisis. Your commitments and identifications and the way you enact them define where you stand with respect to what you deem valuable, important, admirable, and the like. In an identity crisis, you distrust your beliefs about how you should live, or you lose your ability to live as you believe you should. Thus, your bond with the good is shattered. Second, your standing in relation to other people is at stake in an identity crisis. To engage in strong evaluation – to discover what matters to you and why – you must exchange ideas with people you trust.[44] In Taylor's view, no one could have an identity outside of one or more "webs of interlocution".[45] Who you are, then, positions you as an interlocutor, for your identity indexes where you stand within what might be called your home communities or affinity groups as well as where you stand vis-à-vis other social groups.[46] It follows that an identity crisis isolates you from the speech communities in which you might repair your identity. In robbing you of your standing as an interlocutor, an identity crisis attacks your ability to (re)define yourself and recover – that is, to figure out where you *now* stand.

For Taylor, the subject of an identity crisis is a self – a being "of the requisite depth and complexity to have an identity".[47] Such beings are necessarily concerned with their relationship to the good, and their strong evaluations delimit value systems by which their proximity or distance from the good is measured. Reconstituting your identity – figuring out why your strong evaluation(s) went wrong or reconciling yourself to a devastating loss of a key personal relationship or valued social role and how to replace it (them) – requires concerted self-examination and self-redefinition, and it requires repositioning yourself in your current webs of interlocution or finding new ones. Given an identity-threatening state of affairs, it would seem that high proficiency with respect to reflexive, interpersonal, and interpretative skills would facilitate an identity transition, whereas deficiencies in these areas would seed an identity crisis.

David Velleman's answer to the question of what it is to have a self that is vulnerable to identity crises is neither normative nor relational. Briefly, Velleman holds that your identity – your answer to the question, 'Who am I?' – is your self-conception.[48] Whereas Taylor maintains that an identity cannot be defined by mere preferences or

[43] Taylor (1989a), 27.

[44] Ibid., 18, 34–36.

[45] Ibid., 36.

[46] Taylor (1989a), 29; also see Taylor (1995), 173.

[47] Taylor (1989a), 32, 93.

[48] Velleman (2002), 112.



desires and therefore that being disabused of such attributes can never give rise to an identity crisis,[49] Velleman accounts for personal identity without excluding any species of motivation that can be ascribed to persons. In this respect, Velleman's view is much closer to current social scientific accounts of identity crises than Taylor's.

Your identity, in Velleman's view, is you as you represent yourself to yourself – in all your superficiality, frivolity, pettiness, and fecklessness as well as your sagacity, conscientiousness, and emotional profundity. Despicable attributes can be part of your identity, not because you erroneously judge them to be meritorious, but because you know that these vices sometimes move you to act and that omitting them would disingenuously sanitize your self-conception. Realistically, these regrettable attributes are no less you than your sterling qualities.

Velleman's account of identity not only countenances the full spectrum of human motivations, it also takes notice of how an individual's motivations aggregate or commingle synergistically. A self-conception is not an undifferentiated list of traits, beliefs, desires, values, projects, interpersonal ties, reflexive attitudes, and so forth. Some of your attributes (or collocations of attributes) may have extra influence in bits of your day-to-day conduct, or they may set a broad agenda that occupies a good deal of your time. Circumstances may bring some of your attributes (or collocations of attributes) to the fore and oblige you to sideline or suppress others. You may choose to prioritize some of your attributes (or collocations of attributes) and to neglect or stifle others. These prepotent motivational motifs furnish "organizing principles" for your self-conception.[50] The structure they impart to your self-conception imbues it with as much cogency and stability as a person's identity can have.

Although these organizational principles have no special normative status, they are psychologically key, for an identity crisis can erupt if they are destabilized or discredited.[51] An identity crisis throws your self-conception into disarray. Lacking a credible and secure self-conception, you don't know who you are or what to do.

Velleman does not deny the reality of embodied motivations. Along with naive witnesses to the human condition, he affirms that people commonly modify their self-conceptions as a result of changes in these motives.[52] What he denies (and here he parts company with philosophical innocents) is that motivations per se are constitutive of the self or any aspect of the self. Only after you take notice of a motive and incorporate it into your self-conception does it become a feature of your self, and only those motivations that function as organizing principles for your self-conception are "definitive of [your] identity or essential to the self".[53] Self-conceptions are comprised of representations of motives that correspond to real live, robust, action-priming motives, but none of the latter are constituents of anyone's self or identity.

[49] Taylor (1989a), 30.

[50] Velleman (2002), 112.

[51] Ibid., 112–113.

[52] Ibid., 112.

[53] Velleman (2002), 112; also see Velleman (2000a), 6.

Velleman inserts a layer of intellection between your motivations and your identity. To think about anything, including who you are, you must summon your stock of concepts, interpretative templates, and inferential licenses.[54] To have an identity, then, your cognitive resources must be sophisticated enough to grasp your attributes along with their interplay. The scope of your cognitive faculties delimits the range of identities that are conceivable by you and hence in principle possible for you. In identity-threatening circumstances, you will suffer an identity crisis if your cognitive faculties are insufficiently versatile to mediate a transition that your changed situation calls for.

In Velleman's view, your agentic self is your understanding, for your understanding furnishes reasons for action.[55] Reasons are "integrative act descriptions".[56] Your understanding validates acting on an occurrent micromotive by supplying a description of the prospective action that assimilates the micromotive to relevant components of your self-conception.[57] In other words, agentic understanding is the ability to vet micromotives as consistent or inconsistent with your identity, and you have reason to act when your understanding is satisfied that your effective micromotive is compatible with your identity.

At a minimum, then, if you are to avert an impending identity crisis, your understanding must generate reasons for you to act in ways that would not previously have been authorized. Perhaps identity-threatening developments set off an expedited inventory of your needs, preferences, and capabilities – an introspective hunt for information that could be used to update your self-conception and reinterpret your identity. In conjunction with a self-conception that you are incrementally revising, your understanding can authorize action that is appropriate to your changed circumstances. In this way, you might feel your way along and autonomously avert a full-scale identity crisis. By freeing you to act differently, your understanding sends you off in a direction that avoids or solves the problems posed by the identity-threatening circumstances.[58]

Presumably, recovering from an identity crisis would proceed along the same path.[59] Indeed, the difference between preemption and recovery might amount to nothing more than the difference between (1) being able to expand your stock of concepts, interpretative templates, and inferential licenses rapidly and to use these cognitive resources deftly to mend your ailing identity, and (2) being trapped in a system of concepts, interpretative templates, and inferential licenses that is so rigid or so impoverished that a clash between an unexpected, disquieting turn of events and your identity is insupportable. In the former case, you are able to arrest the onset of an identity crisis by accelerating your identity construction process. However, if your understanding cannot readily augment or shrink your self-conception in ways that legitimate acting on potentially adaptive micromotives, you are stuck. You succumb to identity-threatening contingencies and, if all goes well, gradually accumulate the cognitive wherewithal to reframe your identity and overcome the identity crisis.

[54] Velleman (2002), 114.

[55] Ibid., 114–115.

[56] Velleman (2000b), 368.

[57] Velleman (2000b), 366–368.

[58] In the section where Velleman discusses identity crises, he does not comment on how people might avert or recover from them except to note that their self-conceptions must change (2002, 112–113). However, I note that my suggestion is in line with his discussion of Freud's Rat Man case. Although the Rat Man's problem was not an identity crisis, Velleman's comments on this case are consistent with my suggestion that introducing previously unacknowledged attributes into your self-conception facilitates dealing with an identity crisis (2002, 101–104).

[59] I leave aside a third possibility—namely, failure to avert or overcome an identity crisis. I would add though that intransigent repudiation of change is not necessarily bad, for it seems to me that treating a horrific fate as absolutely alien to who you are could be an act of good faith. Still, clinging to an identity that cannot be enacted would permanently impair your autonomy.



## 4 Another Dimension of Identity and Autonomy – Corporeity

The social scientific literature confirms that strong, supple people can defend against blows to their sense of self by improvising day-by-day and reworking their identities bit-by-bit. Often they begin to act differently, and their ideals and their self-understandings eventually catch up. They retrofit their strong evaluations or their self-conceptions as a result of taking action. Colloquially, this way of moving on is sometimes referred to as "going through the motions" – making yourself act in ways that popular wisdom deems beneficial regardless of how you feel.[60]

It is undeniable that forcing yourself to buck up and "go through the motions" sometimes jumpstarts adjustment to identity-threatening circumstances. However, forcing yourself to "go through the motions" can be counterproductive. Grudgingly doing whatever it is that your new circumstances supposedly require can prevent you from ever integrating those allegedly mandatory, but more and more hated behaviors into your identity. As well, following a socially ordained script can interfere with finding a resolution that's right for you as a particular individual. Clearly, this strategy is no panacea. Indeed, enacting a standardized recipe for coping when your identity is under attack can preempt autonomy.

Equally worrisome, in my view, the expression, 'going through the motions,' leads to philosophical obfuscation and confusion. Analyzing agentic responses to identity-threatening circumstances as acts of will that pull you out of your funk and put you on the road to recovery distracts philosophical attention from the bodily competencies that fulfilling your intentions presupposes. Without a competent, as well as a compliant, body your effort to "go through the motions" will never get off the ground. Moreover, conceptualizing identity transitions as "going through the motions" obscures non-rote coping mechanisms, such as "getting the hang" of novel situations and "feeling your way" through them. Both of the latter entail responding in an individualized, intelligent, though non-ratiocinative way to your predicament.

[60] Thanks to Catriona Mackenzie for pointing out this strategy to me.

In this section and the next, I focus on the psychocorporeal dimension of dealing with identity-threatening circumstances, and I argue that relying on psychocorporeal practical intelligence can sustain autonomy, secure resilience, and underwrite an identity transition. I begin to make my case by pointing up different types of psychocorporeal skillfulness that adaptation to identity-threatening circumstances brings into play. In Sect. 5, I explain why adaptive behavior, even when inconsistent with an individual's core strong evaluations or the organizing principles of the individual's self-conception, need not be random, arbitrary, or uncontrolled. Provided that your psychocorporeal practical intelligence is adequately developed and engaged in negotiating your circumstances, you go through *your* motions, to adapt the phrase.[61] If so, your transitional behavior expresses who you are and is therefore autonomous.

This passage from Margaret Atwood's novel, *Alias Grace*, points to the form of autonomous action I have in mind:

> That is it, I thought, I have been rescued, and *now I must act like someone who has been rescued*. And so I tried. It was very strange to realize that I would not be a celebrated murderess any more, but seen perhaps as an innocent woman wrongfully accused and imprisoned unjustly, or at least for too long a time, and an object of pity rather than of horror and fear. It took me some days to get used to the idea; indeed, I am not quite used to it yet. It *calls for a different arrangement of the face*; but I suppose it will come easier in time.[62]

As Atwood's protagonist Grace discovers, coping with identity-threatening conditions and transitioning towards a reconstructed identity is at least as much a psychocorporeal endeavor as it is a normative dialogical or reflexive intellectual one. Her facial musculature must learn to convey new meanings.

To see how psychocorporeal selfhood and agency come into play when a person's identity comes under attack, let us return to the examples of identity-threatening circumstances sketched in Sect. 2. The middle class, stay-at-home mother and homemaker now faces huge time pressures and money worries. She must master shopping for food and clothing for herself and her children within these merciless constraints and thus redefine how to be a good mother. The smart, all-American prom queen must rediscover her own eroticism and find how best to pleasure her same-sex lovers. The inner city youth must negotiate a world in which his handshake finds no takers. He must relearn how to greet acquaintances – how to be friendly. The retired business executive has to acclimate himself to largely sedentary pastimes. His body must get over boredom and restlessness and learn new forms of enjoyment. To protect her good fortune, the office cleaner needs to reconfigure her bearing with ingratiating friends and relations and convey reserve, even wariness, as they flock 'round hoping to get handouts.

None of these new behavioral modalities can be planned out in advance and executed according to plan. On her way to the store, the mother can tell herself that she's got to shop more efficiently. But that thought hardly guarantees that she'll pick

[61] Thanks to Michael Kühler for suggesting this way of putting my point.

[62] Atwood (1996), 443 (emphasis added).



out the best products at the lowest prices in the least amount of time. The prom queen may daydream about sexual encounters with classmates, but her fantasies are no substitute for exploring real flesh in real assignations. The youth could take lessons in preppy ways similar to the lessons in Japanese etiquette U.S. business executives take before going abroad. But this sort of tutoring teaches students merely how to be polite – how to avoid appearing rude or uncouth – not how to be friendly. High-end home entertainment systems help many people unwind. But staring at classic movies or sports broadcasting may exacerbate the athletic retiree's problems instead of relaxing him.

The behavioral modalities these people need must be acquired in essaying a transformed situation – that is, by calling upon corporeal capabilities they may not realize they have.[63] Reminders, imaginary scenarios, practicing, and redesigned environments may help these people act as they need to and may help them hold onto their sense of identity. But in the end, these cues and self-preparations aren't enough. Unlike Grace, who notices the implications of her exoneration and self-consciously decides to adjust her behavior, the lottery winner might adjust hers without thinking through why modifications are needed. She might act on a vague sense that she is at the center of unaccustomed and overbearing attention. Similarly, the prom queen and the culture-shocked youth may discover appropriate ways to act without mental planning and self-conscious prompting. She may improvise erotic gambits, and he may improvise ways of greeting his fellow students. In feedback loops, both may viscerally register whether their moves are welcomed or shunned.

Her intention to assume the status of a rightfully freed prisoner notwithstanding, Grace needs corporeal skillfulness to successfully modify her self-presentation. Similarly, neither the divorced mother who won't allow herself to leave the discount store until she purchases the school outfits her kids need nor the coronary patient who makes himself go to a support group instead of sitting home feeling sorry for himself can fulfill their intentions unless their bodies cooperate – in her case, by sorting garments for size and match with her children's tastes; in his, by coming across as a sympatico participant in the group. To handle their respective identity-threatening situations, these individuals must rely to a significant extent on intelligent agentic corporeity. Either they have bodies that are intelligent enough to cope (see Sect. 5 below), or their identities are on the brink of collapse.

Only the handsome leading man seems not to need psychocorporeal practical intelligence, but that is because he lost control over nearly all of his body. For him, it might seem that identity reconstruction is confined to Taylor-style conversational reassessment of values or Velleman-style self-reconceptualization. I doubt, though, that Taylor's interlocutionary normativism or Velleman's mental cognitivism[64] fully captures this man's identity recuperation needs. Because he has lost his ability to

[63] For related discussion see Meyers (2004, 85–89; 2005, 33–36).

[64] It is important to bear in mind that "mental cognitivism" is not a redundant expression. Since cognition includes all processes of knowledge acquisition, cognition can be bodily. In acquiring know-how, such as the ability to ride a bike, your body is the vehicle of cognition, not your mind.

move his torso and limbs, his facial expressions may carry so much weight in interaction with others that he must greatly refine them in order to prevent miscommunication.[65] As an actor, his training equips him to reflect on and practice how best to effect these subtle adjustments, but there is no reason to believe that thespian proficiency is necessary to achieve comparable results. Although they lack the leading man's simulation skills, Grace and the office cleaner are no less in need of resetting their facial response patterns. They (and countless others – paraplegic or not) extemporaneously fine-tune their facial muscles in the course of interacting with other people.

Exploring what safeguards people against the ravages of identity crises accents the role of intelligent agentic corporeity in the "feeling your way" approach to keeping the lid on an identity crisis. Beset by identity-threatening circumstances, you may well need a fresh self-conception and refurbished values. But you also need psychocorporeal practical intelligence to sustain a previously unthinkable and now barely fathomed way of life.

Merleau-Ponty's influence on Taylor connects his work to my cases and the conclusion I draw from them. I have treated friendliness and reserve as embodied practices, and similarly he characterizes dignity and deference in terms of bodily comportment.[66] Somewhat cryptically, he avers, "My body is already a direction of life, partly sketched, and the locus of the as yet undetermined".[67] Surely my paralyzed actor and my retired cardiac patient are cases in point inasmuch as their needs to reshape their lives stem directly from their inborn bodily vulnerability to injury and disease. But I believe Taylor has something broader in mind, for he affirms the body's role in practical reason and autonomy.[68] If practical reason is in some way corporeal, it follows that strong evaluation and identity formation cannot be exclusively cerebral, discursive processes. Yet, Taylor does not supply an account of the contribution of psychocorporeal practical intelligence to your judgments of value and the resulting consolidation of your personal identity. Although I disagree with Taylor's claim that strong evaluations are the only type of attributes that are constitutive of personal identities, I agree that philosophy of the self and action sorely needs an account of psychocorporeal practical intelligence, for psychocorporeal practical intelligence is a key resource for people in identity-threatening situations.[69] Indeed, it may underwrite the mysterious "reserves of strength" that we often say come to the rescue when life explodes in a blur of traps, obstacles, and dilemmas.

[65] The reverse predicament is also possible – that is, to avoid being misunderstood a person with facial paralysis must compensate by expressing feeling through exceptionally legible bodily gestures and comportment (Carey 2010).

[66] Taylor (1989a), 15; Taylor (1995), 171

[67] Taylor (1989b), 16.

[68] Taylor (1989b), 16–17; Taylor (1995), 170–171.

[69] In this connection, it is worth noting that intelligent agentic corporeity may play an important role in resistance to an oppressive upbringing, such as Rolling's, or to oppressive social structures. Your body's grasp of wrongs being done to you may outrun your intellect's understanding of them. Thus, many women recoiled from sexual harassment long before there was a name for it or a theory of why it was wrong. Such psychocorporeal insight might prompt you to undertake major changes in your life, possibly though not necessarily leading you to the brink of an identity crisis.



## 5 Psychocorporealizing Identity, Practical Intelligence, and Agency

Luckily, who you are and your powers of self-direction exceed who you understand yourself to be, who you can conceive yourself becoming, what you can conceive yourself valuing, and where you can picture yourself ending up. If this were not so, identity-threatening situations would be even more perilous than they are, and it would be far more difficult to forestall an identity crisis in the making. As things are, people sometimes avoid succumbing to identity crises in virtue of psychocorporeal attributes and capabilities that have yet to be incorporated into their self-conceptions or articulated as strong evaluations but that nonetheless enable them to cope with the seemingly insurmountable problems that an incipient identity crisis presents. Their psychocorporeal attributes and capabilities – often in combination with residual value commitments and/or thematic elements from their existing identities – point them towards a solution and enable them to keep their balance and retool in the face of identity-threatening circumstances.

Although integral to personal identity and autonomous action, psychocorporeal practical intelligence seems theoretically inscrutable. However, Merleau-Ponty's discussion of habit offers some promising pointers. He characterizes habit as "the power to respond with a certain type of solution to situations of a certain general form" – that is, to situations with shared meanings.[70] This power is located in the experiencing human body, for it is a "motor grasping of a motor significance".[71] From context to context, your body registers your possibilities for meaningful movement – that is, movement that comports with your needs, values, and aims.

Your psychocorporeal know-how enables you to act while greatly reducing the demands on your capacities for explicit, conscious deliberation.[72] Habit could not provide this benefit, however, if it were rigid or static. Your psychocorporeal know-how has many interrelated, but by no means identical, applications. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty adds that habit constitutes "our power of dilating our being in the world, or changing our existence by appropriating fresh instruments".[73] Your psychocorporeal know-how expands as you put it to use. Merleau-Ponty's illustrations of habit include driving a car, typing, moving about wearing a hat adorned with a long feather, and using a white cane instead of your eyes to avoid obstacles and find curbs at street corners. Supposing that you've mastered using a white cane to locate curbs, to differentiate them from large vertical obstacles or deep holes, and to cue yourself

[70] Merleau-Ponty (1962/2004), 164–165.

[71] Ibid., 165.

[72] Shaun Gallagher's account of the body schema in relation to contemporary work in neuroscience lends support to this claim (Gallagher 2005). Also notable are the results reported by psychologist John Bargh. He and his collaborators argue that conscious deliberation is not necessary for people to set goals and pursue them effectively (Bargh and Chartrand 1999; Bargh and Ferguson 2000; Bargh et al. 2001).

[73] Merleau-Ponty (1962/2004), 166.

to step up or down, you might then get the hang of ascending and descending staircases. In this way, your possibilities for action expand.

Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus gloss Merleau-Ponty's conception of habit as a system of skills and point up the overlap between his conception of habit and James J. Gibson's account of how affordances – physical entities in the environment – solicit our "skillful responses".[74] I agree that it makes a lot of sense to view psychocorporeally guided autonomy as a capacity for skillful functioning.[75] However, Dreyfus and Dreyfus conceive skillful functioning too narrowly.

In their view, it is up to deliberative rationality to compensate for gaps and flaws in skillful functioning, and deliberative rationality is a mental activity.[76] As a result, their treatment of habit cannot adequately account for the role psychocorporeal practical intelligence can play in averting an identity crisis. The retired executive needs to scale back his athletic skills and free himself from the beckonings of tennis courts, rackets, and balls. He needs to recalibrate his needs, values, and aims in light of his fragile coronary health. The divorced mother needs to block the genteel solicitations of Saks, sharpen her eye for a bargain, and become attuned to the allure of Walmart merchandise. She needs to recalibrate her needs, values, and aims in light of her reduced economic position. So far as I can see, the Dreyfuses' reading of Merleau-Ponty gives no hint of how habit might enable these individuals to reorient themselves – to dilate their being in the world – for they seem to regard projects (needs, values, and aims) as simply given or furnished by deliberative rationality. Yet, we have seen that individuals whose identities are threatened cannot cling to the projects they take for granted. Nor can they count exclusively on critical reason to reconfigure their identities and realign their needs, values, and aims. To make good on Merleau-Ponty's claim that habit conduces to dilating your being in the world, I propose distinguishing five components of psychocorporeal practical intelligence, each of which is constitutive of the agentic subject and each of which therefore contributes to autonomous action.

By psychocorporeal *virtue* I mean corporeally encoded values that install a basic motivational structure in corporeity that facilitates and enhances coping. Among the psychocorporeal virtues are courage, curiosity, prudence, patience, communicativeness, modesty, dignity, respect, friendliness, empathy, compassion, kindness, and generosity. I have already taken note of Taylor's somaticization of dignity and commented on communicativeness in connection with the challenges of the paraplegic actor, the exonerated murderess, and the lottery winner. Prudence is evident in various forms of corporeal reluctance – such as aversion to dizzying heights, drawing back from nonconsensual touching, and inertia-like hesitation before finalizing a momentous decision. Respect is evident in a considerate, never overbearing, never obsequious demeanor. While leaving the many other psychocorporeal virtues to your imagination, I stress

[74] Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1999), 104–110; also see Gibson (1977).

[75] Meyers (2005).

[76] Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986), 36–40.



that the particular selection of these virtues and the ways they interrelate are constitutive of who you are and play a role in guiding your conduct.

Your psychocorporeal virtues would be otiose, though, unless you had awareness of a world of possible actions. Psychocorporeal *cognition* depends on the sensitivity of the body to the use value of affordances as well as its sensitivity to the meanings of ambient affect, attitudes, and the like. The phenomenon of psychocorporeal cognition is familiar. Your body doesn't need instruction in how to suck a nipple or follow a path through the woods. If you grew up in an affluent late twentieth to twenty-first century society, your body recognizes park benches as opportunities for resting, revolving doors as opportunities to enter buildings, and sandwiches as opportunities to satisfy hunger.[77] Kinesthetic apprehension of grief and loss at a funeral routinely substitutes for deciphering the behavior of the bereaved family just as kinesthetic apprehension of triumph upon hearing Handel's *Water Music* psychocorporeally interprets the music.[78] Psychocorporeal cognition links your environment to your capacity for action by furnishing an array of possible behaviors. The psychocorporeal sensibilities of different individuals are attuned to different elements of the environment and vary in their degree of acuity. What your bodily sensibility characteristically takes notice of and how you tend to be psychocorporeally insightful or obtuse are dimensions of your identity that in turn structure your conduct.

Psychocorporeal *versatility* has several forms. It includes your physical vigor – energy, stamina, strength, agility, limberness, and so forth – as well as the extent of your behavioral repertoire – your accumulated embodied know-how. Although passable physical vigor suffices for the everyday lives of many twenty-first century, middle class, urban people, higher levels of physical vigor endow people with the background capacity to cope with a wider range of circumstances. In this way, it expands your possibilities for action. Yet, the scope of your control over your life would remain severely limited without psychocorporeal cognition and know-how.

In regard to know-how, it is crucial to appreciate that acquiring know-how isn't merely a matter of learning movement sequences. It is also a matter of learning when to put them to use and when not to. No one who knows how to swim is tempted to try to swim in a puddle. You haven't learned how to swim if your body hasn't absorbed the fact that fairly deep water is necessary for swimming. Thus your behavioral repertoire encodes knowledge of exercising skills appropriately and inappropriately by securing coordination between your perceptual system and your trained body, and your psychocorporeal virtue provides further direction in the use and abuse of your behavioral repertoire.

[77] For an account of affordances, see Gibson (1977). Although many responses to affordances are learned, you do not learn them by following a set of rules. You learn them by imitating people who are already enculturated and therefore respond appropriately to the environment you share.

[78] Robin Dillon's distinction between intellectual understanding or "having beliefs which one has reason to accept as true" and experiential understanding or "experiencing something directly and feeling the truth of what is experienced" bears a close resemblance to my distinction between intellectual cognition and kinesthetic cognition (1997, 239–240).

More controversially, perhaps, psychocorporeal versatility includes psychocorporeal mood – that is, your sense of corporeal competence.[79] Psychocorporeal mood depends on at least two factors: (1) the safety spectrum, which ranges from trust to fear, and (2) the comfort spectrum, which ranges from being at ease and relaxed to being stressed and taut. Consider the predicament of a rock climber whose partner is hit and pinned down by a large, heavy rock. If she trusts her bodily abilities, feels comfortable in her environment, and is in a bodily state of unstrained readiness, she has a better chance of pushing the stone off and, having done so, realizing that she is stronger than she thought.[80] Just as physical enervation interferes with autonomy, so too a psychocorporeal mood of distrust, fearfulness, and tension interferes with autonomy.

Here it is important to differentiate between kinaesthetic cognitions – that is, occurrent affective psychocorporeal states that register the agentic significance of particular situations – and psychocorporeal mood. On the one hand, if you meet up with a grizzly bear while hiking, occurrent fear and arousal signal the danger and help trigger the coping skills you (hopefully) learned. On the other hand, if your psychocorporeal mood is one of fear and stress, you are more likely to panic should you encounter a bear, and your constant vigilance and stress will surely exhaust you and deplete your capacity to act autonomously. Both separately and in concert, your degree of physical vigor, the amplitude of your behavioral repertoire, and the quality of your bodily mood define your agentic identity and constrict or enlarge your possibilities for autonomous action.

Although many philosophers invoke memory to account for personal identity, psychocorporeal memory is seldom cited. Yet, psychocorporeal memory is indispensable to autonomy, for it provides continuity for and augments the powers of psychocorporeal virtue, cognition, and versatility. Psychocorporeal memory takes more than one form. One is the "muscle memory" that ensures that you will remember how to walk when you wake up tomorrow morning, strengthens a tennis pro's game, and prevents a ballerina from departing from the choreography. Another is your recollection of past events through their "corporeal feel," as in Proust's response to the Madeleine cookie or visceral traumatic flashbacks. Psychocorporeal memory contributes to psychocorporeal virtue by situating present circumstances and the options available to you in a bodily history of actions – some successful, others flawed. It contributes to psychocorporeal cognition by bringing your previous experience to bear on present inputs. It contributes to psychocorporeal versatility by enabling you to increase your vigor, to acquire and improve skills, and to modulate your corporeal mood. The interplay between psychocorporeal virtue, cognition, versatility, and memory can move you to act in keeping with your identity – that is, autonomously – yet without premeditation.

Your psychocorporeal virtue, cognition, versatility, and memory distinguish you as an individual agent. Yet, *individualized motivations*, including needs, desires, values, and aims, are also integral to personal identity. Freud's theory of how unconscious

[79] I believe Jean Grimshaw has something similar to psychocorporeal mood in mind in her excellent discussion of the phenomenology of aerobic exercise (Grimshaw 1999, 110–113).

[80] Thanks to Asha Bhandary for this example.



drives and defenses transform social inputs into distinctive motivations is well known. The role of intelligent corporeity in the genesis of individualized motivations is often overlooked.

Not only do your psychocorporeal virtue, cognition, versatility, and memory shape the way in which your motivations are expressed in action, they also contribute to the formation of your motivations. Some casual visitors to the Alps, for example, develop a passion for mountaineering, whereas others can't wait to escape to a beach. There is no invariable route to these outcomes. But it's clear that different individuals' psychocorporeal virtue, cognition, and versatility differentially affect the formation of their desires and values. If your psychocorporeal prudence morphs into timidity on narrow cliff-side paths, if your kinesthetic response to being surrounded by towering peaks is claustrophobic, if you are so out of shape that an uphill walk feels strenuous and your muscles become stiff, you won't store up pleasant psychocorporeal memories of your hikes, and you probably won't come to regard Alpine experiences as valuable. With a different psychocorporeal economy, however, you might actually suffer if deprived of Alpine scenery and activities because you psychocorporeally value them so highly.

My analysis is in line with Merleau-Ponty's claim that habit is concomitantly perceptual and behavioral.[81] Psychocorporeal cognition enables you to pick up on a wide variety of affordances and affective tonalities. Psychocorporeal virtue and versatility enable you to smoothly adjust your comportment and to act in diverse settings. Aided by psychocorporeal memory, these capacities individualize your psychocorporeal motivations and give rise to psychocorporeal values that move you to act in ways that immediately present themselves as both appropriate to the situation and expressive of your identity. Should you pause to reflect on what you've done and to evaluate it rationally, you would seldom fault your course of action. Your psychocorporeal practical intelligence both guides and primes action. On the one hand, it functions as conceptual and narrative templates do – that is, it presorts and preferentially discloses possibilities for action within a particular environment. On the other hand, it functions as desires do – that is, it identifies some courses of action as sources of satisfaction and thus makes those courses of action more attractive than others. Somatically anchoring understanding and motivation in intelligent flesh, your psychocorporeal attributes and abilities constitute a system of agentic vantage points and dispositions that are pivotal to your agentic identity and your ability to act autonomously.

## 6 Recruiting Velleman

The analysis I have presented amplifies Taylor's claim that practical intelligence is an embodied faculty. I conclude by urging that Velleman too has reason to embrace my expanded conception of the agentic self and autonomous action. One attraction

[81] Merleau-Ponty (1962/2004), 175.

of my view for Velleman is that it disposes of a misgiving that he says he capitulated to – namely, his worry that his account of autonomous action might be too "intellectualist".[82] In contrast to his, my view explicitly includes psychocorporeal attributes and capabilities without denying that practical intelligence governs autonomous action. In addition, my argument brings Velleman's thinking closer to a passage from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* that he repeatedly cites: "[E]ach person seems to be his [sic] understanding, if he is his controlling and better element".[83]

Shortly after the line Velleman quotes, Aristotle distinguishes two kinds of understanding: (1) a "divine" type of understanding that studies first principles and necessary truths and (2) a practical type of understanding that addresses human affairs and figures out how one should act. Unlike theoretical understanding, practical understanding is as corporeal as it is mental:

> [S]ome feelings seem to arise from the body; and in many ways virtue of character seems to be proper to feelings. Besides, intelligence [agentic understanding] is yoked together with virtue of character, and so is the virtue of intelligence. ... And since these virtues are also connected to the feelings, they are concerned with the compound.[84]

I very much agree with Aristotle that human agency is inseparable from feelings or, as I prefer to put it, psychocorporeally encoded values, psychocorporeally procured insight, and psychocorporeally embedded skillfulness.

In line with Aristotle's view, I have urged that autonomously transitioning through identity-threatening circumstances requires psychocorporeal practical intelligence, and I have amplified Merleau-Ponty's conception of habit in order to identify key components of psychocorporeal practical intelligence. I acknowledge that many questions remain to be answered, especially concerning the relations between psychocorporeal practical intelligence and practical reason, as philosophers usually conceive it. My aims in this paper are modest: (1) to render the claim that the body's role in action is merely instrumental implausible, and (2) to render the claim that the body might give rise to autonomous action without the proximate intervention of ratiocination plausible. What I offer here, then, is one step toward giving Aristotle's astute observation its due.

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[82] Velleman (2000a), 30–31.

[83] Aristotle (1985),1178a; cited, e.g., in Velleman (2000a), 30; Velleman (2002), 114.

[84] Aristotle (1985), 1178a, 15–20. I am not convinced that theoretical thought and practical thought are as distinct as Aristotle suggests in these passages. Nor do I share Aristotle's valorization of the pure and simple and his derogation of the compound and complex.



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# Emotion, Autonomy, and Weakness of Will

**Sabine A. Döring**

## 1 Introduction

Let me begin with an example which was first introduced into the philosophical literature by Jonathan Bennett (1974). After having helped his friend Jim to run away from slavery, Mark Twain's character Huckleberry Finn decides to turn him in. But when he is given the opportunity to do so, Huck finds himself doing just the contrary. Instead of turning Jim over to the slave hunters, he lies in order to protect the fugitive slave. It is his growing sympathy and friendship with Jim which leads Huck to do what he knows is wrong according to every moral principle familiar to him, even though he does not endorse his emotion but castigates himself for his weakness. Could Huck's weak-willed action nonetheless qualify as the rational action of an autonomous agent? This is the question which I will address in this article.

A view very fashionable today says that Huck does act rationally, thereby challenging the traditional view according to which weakness of will is the paradigm of practical irrationality (de Sousa 1987; McIntyre 1990; Arpaly 2000; Tappolet 2003; Jones 2003; Holton 2009). Among the proponents of this view, there are some who restrict the possible rationality of weakness of will to emotional weakness of will (Tappolet 2003; Jones 2003). They claim that weakness of will is sometimes – not always – rational if it is caused by emotion. In defense of their claim, these philosophers also refer to recent results in science. From neuroscience to psychology and on to economics and social science, voices have been raised saying that, when it comes to conflict between 'better' judgement and emotion, it need not be emotion which gets things wrong; it may equally be judgement. This is precisely what examples like that of Huckleberry Finn are said to illustrate. After all, Twain gets the reader to believe that his protagonist did the right thing and even deserves moral praise for his action.[1]

[1] I will leave open whether this interpretation is what Twain had in mind as it is of no consequence for the argument.

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