

The Extreme Claim, Psychological Continuity and the Person Life View

Simon Beck

Philosophy Dept, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa

sbeck@uwc.ac.za

[This is an un-edited and unformatted version of the paper that appears in the *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 34(3), pp 314-322.]

Marya Schechtman has raised a series of worries for the Psychological Continuity Theory of personal identity (PCT) stemming out of what Derek Parfit called the 'Extreme Claim'. This is roughly the claim that theories like it are unable to explain the importance we attach to personal identity. In her recent *Staying Alive* (2014), she presents further arguments related to this and sets out a new narrative theory, the Person Life View (PLV), which she sees as solving the problems as well as bringing other advantages over the PCT. I look over some of her earlier arguments and responses to them as a way in to the new issues and theory. I will argue that the problems for the PCT and advantages that the PLV brings are all merely apparent, and present no reason for giving up the former for the latter.

1. The PCT, the Extreme Claim and Schechtman's earlier criticisms

Parfit's description of the PCT's account of personal identity will provide a good starting point.

Psychological continuity is the holding of overlapping chains of *strong* connectedness...For *X* and *Y* to be the same person, there must be over every day *enough* direct psychological connections. (Parfit 1984: p. 206)

The connections to which he refers are links of memory (or, rather, apparent memory), continuing beliefs, desires, intentions, emotional attitudes, character dispositions, and so on. The view does not require such direct links over a whole life - they may in many cases be only short-term; it is the continuity that overlapping links provide that constitutes someone's persistence.

The PCT account of identity forefronts our *agency*. By highlighting sophisticated psychological attitudes like intentions and second-order desires as well as memories, it aims to provide an account of the persistence of things which are capable of agency and which are appropriate as the subjects of judgments of responsibility and attitudes of self-concern.

Schechtman characterises the core of the view as follows.

In the finished psychological continuity theory, what we have are a collection of 'persons-at-times' that are cobbled together through memory and other connections. (Schechtman 2005: p. 15)

She suggests (1996, 2005 and 2013) that, since it only offers 'likeness or continuity in the *contents* of consciousness', the PCT is unable to explain why the special concern we feel for our own future states is rationally required, or to explain our moral responsibility for past states and actions. This is what Parfit called the 'Extreme Claim' (Parfit 1984: p. 307).

Schechtman's reasoning as to why what the PCT offers is inadequate in her *The Constitution of Selves* (1996), (2005) and (2013) is directly related to the way she characterises the theory.

Self interested concern is an emotion that is appropriately felt only toward my own self and not toward someone like me. (Schechtman 1996: p. 52)

and

It doesn't matter if the person who gets my paycheck is more *like* me than someone else; I am only compensated if *I* get the money. (Schechtman 1996, pp. 52-3)

The PCT can easily respond to these claims, as they turn on what appears to be a misrepresentation of its claims.¹ It does not require mere similarity in the content of mental states, but that the later states be what they are *because of* the earlier states; any similarity between states will only be a consequence of this. My future self will have specific mental states because of the ones I have now – just as I am the kind of person I am now because of earlier experiences and influences. This is

¹ As I argued in Beck (2013c).

relevant to issues like desert, responsibility and self-concern. It doesn't matter that someone like me gets paid for what I did because their current states don't have the right relation to experiences of mine: they do not feel the aches I feel *as a result* of the effort I put in to earn the paycheck, nor do they feel satisfaction as a result of a task well done. If they did feel aches and satisfaction because of that effort and I did not, then it becomes much less clear that they do not deserve the compensation.

More generally, psychological continuity involves much more than just a chain of similar states. My decision to act now results from choices I made and commitments I formed in the past, and it comes with (apparent) memories of those choices and of events that led to those commitments, as well as a range of other related mental states. The decision is part of a complex pattern, and psychological continuity is a complex pattern of complex patterns like this one. All of this is familiar from a broadly functionalist account of the mind and is not particularly controversial. Indeed, it is just what is to be expected of what would be required for the persistence of an agent.

With these complex patterns in place, self-interested concern and matters of responsibility do anything but fall out of the picture. Self-interested concern may not be *rationally required* of the self of the psychological view, but it certainly can be explained and justified why you have a special concern for your own future self that you do not have for others. And while the Psychological View may not have an explanation of why you are morally responsible for all and only your actions, the complex causal links between you now and the self who performed the action go a long way to doing that.

But does my admission that the PCT cannot explain why you are morally responsible for all and only your actions not admit its failure? After all, it was meant to give an account of the persistence of an agent. Schechtman thought so and thought that this was where the neo-Lockean PCT lost its sight of Locke:

They [experiences of which we are conscious] are also, at least according to Locke, tied to responsibility in this way, because we can know them to be our actions or experiences, we have a responsibility to and for them that we could not otherwise have. The Lockean insight thus seems to rest on the special relation we have to experiences while we are conscious of them. According to the psychological continuity theory, however, there are many

experiences – even whole life phases – that are counted as mine even though I no longer have any consciousness of them at all. They are no more connected to my present consciousness than they would be by a sameness of substance view. The original appeal of Locke’s theory is thus lost on this view. (Schechtman 2005: p. 16)

Locke could explain our responsibility through consciousness, she contended: ‘because we can know them to be our actions’ by having a direct phenomenological link to them, we can take responsibility for them. The PCT has no such explanation to offer. Overlapping psychological connections that provide an indirect link back to an action would account at best for *causal* responsibility – not the *moral* responsibility that really matters. The difference is between ‘it came about because of you’ and ‘it is your *fault*’, of the kind recognised in the law.²

The PCT can cope with these charges as well. My response to them (Beck 2013 a, b and c) was to argue for the loosening of the connection between responsibility and identity that Parfit and Locke may be seen to imply, and to argue that the requirement that Schechtman’s demand of the PCT – that it explain why you are responsible for all and only your actions - is not a legitimate one. It is simply false that you are responsible for all of your actions – actions that were not autonomous or that had unconscious causes are obvious cases: they are your actions, but you may well not be responsible for them. And one person can be responsible for the actions of others – Jesus taking responsibility (in the sense of actually becoming responsible rather than just paying the penalty) for others’ sins being a pertinent example. You may not believe the story, but it is not incoherent and is accepted by many.

What these points show is that personal identity does not necessarily coincide with moral responsibility, and thus there cannot be a requirement on a theory of identity that it go even further and *explain* responsibility in the sense of what it is that makes you responsible. The most that could be asked of such a theory is that it explain why it is *you* that is responsible when you are in fact responsible, and that is precisely what the PCT does: it offers³ an account of the persistence of an entity that is the appropriate subject of judgements of moral responsibility. It does not distinguish between autonomous and other actions, but nor should it – that is

² In the law of delict, for instance, the ‘but-for’ test is used to determine causal responsibility, whereas the ‘reasonable person’ test determines *fault*.

³ As I suggested in Beck 2013a.

a matter for a theory of responsibility, not one of personal identity. It acknowledges that there is a relationship between moral responsibility and personal identity, but (rightly) does not require that to be any sort of necessary connection.

2. Schechtman's new distinctions and new complaints

Come 2014 and at first glance you might think Schechtman is coming around to accepting a version of the PCT along the lines that I advocate. In the early chapters of *Staying Alive*, she draws a distinction between a person seen as a 'forensic unit' and the 'moral self'. Questions of literal identity concern the first, whereas more metaphorical ones concerning which actions are truly yours (and so on) concern the second.

There are two different ways in which we can think of personal identity in forensic terms. One is to set the limits of a single person as the limits within which questions about responsibility and self-interest are appropriately raised. Here the person is considered as a "forensic unit" – a suitable target about which particular forensic questions can be raised and judgments made. The other way to think of a person in forensic terms is to see the limits of a single person as set by the very actions and experiences for which she is in fact held rightly accountable ... I will call this the conception of *person* as "moral self." The forensic unit as I construe it here is envisioned as a kind of entity that stands ready to act and can sometimes rightly be rewarded or punished for its actions. The moral self, on the other hand, is construed more as a characterization of the true and fundamental moral nature of an entity. (Schechtman 2014: pp. 14-15)

Related to this distinction are two distinct models for what a theory of personal identity should provide. On the 'co-incidence' model, the forensic unit and moral self are one and the same – the limits of the person extend only so far as moral responsibility and forward-looking self-interest extend. On the 'dependence' model, a theory of personal identity provides only an account of the forensic unit – of an appropriate target of judgments of responsibility and self-interest – a unit whose existence is prior to particular judgments. As she puts it, on this model 'identity is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for these judgments' (2014: p. 41).

The PCT as I have defended it would thus follow the dependence model, since it denies that matters of identity and responsibility co-incide, while accepting that there is still an important connection between practical matters and personal identity. And Schechtman now thinks that Locke (while on the face of things following the co-incidence line) can be read as suggesting a theory along the lines of the dependence model (2014: p. 15), something which also seems to bring her closer in line with my thinking (Beck 2013a).

Schechtman goes on to endorse the dependence model. But she does not endorse the PCT. And her reasons for doing so are that it is committed to the co-incidence model or confuses the models and, partly because of this, it cannot provide an adequate response to the Extreme Claim.

Her criticisms of the PCT and its supposed inability to explain the importance we attach to identity echo some of the arguments above, but provide some new emphases. The starting point is familiar: the reductionist PCT says that all that identity amounts to is relations of psychological continuity and connectedness ('relation R'), but these are not enough to justify claims of moral responsibility or of rational self-concern.

All it provides is formal relations between different moments of consciousness that amount roughly to a requirement of similarity of psychological makeup. (2014: p. 35)

My relation to my future self, on this view, is like my relation to someone very like me psychologically, a kind of super psychological twin. Just as my psychological likeness to a twin does not make it legitimate to hold me responsible for the actions of my past self, the argument goes, psychological continuity and connectedness does not make it legitimate to hold me responsible for the actions of my past self if that is all that her being me amounts to. (2014: p. 36)

My old objections that this ignores the role that the PCT ascribes to *causal* relations between psychological states in the continuity immediately spring to mind, but she goes on to point to further aspects of the problem that this appeal will not solve. Consider Parfit's own example of the Teletransporter and its complication, the Branch-Line Case (Parfit 1984: pp. 199-201 and p. 287). The

Teletransporter is the machine that makes a blueprint of the exact state of all of the cells of someone on Earth and beams this information to Mars where a body is created out of new matter to fit this blueprint, as the original is destroyed on Earth. The person on Mars is psychologically continuous with the original, and their psychological states are causally grounded in those of the original. The PCT thus suggests that this is a case of survival. But in the Branch-Line Case, instead of the original body being destroyed, it is just fatally damaged such that it will survive (with its psychology) for a few more days, after which that person will die. In the meantime, they are able to communicate with their replica on Mars. Although there is psychological continuity and connectedness between the dying person on Earth and the person on Mars, says Schechtman, the relation between them will not seem like survival to the Earth-person.

This suggests that there is a deep connection between the person who steps into the Teletransportation booth on Earth and the dying Earthling that does not exist between that person and the replica on Mars, and that absent this deeper connection there does not seem to be a basis for the person on Earth to feel egoistic concern for the future of the replica, nor for the replica to be held responsible for what the original traveler has done. (2014: p. 36)

Schechtman sees no way that the PCT can capture the deep connection that is required to explain our practical concerns, and sees this as an inevitable consequence of its reductionism. It has, along with Locke, rejected material substance or the continuity of the brain as being fundamental to identity in the way that it sees psychological continuity being. But she thinks Locke, unlike the PCT, has a response available. He can place the fundamental unity – the deeper connection – required by our practical concerns in his ‘sameness of consciousness’. This is what defines the forensic unit for him. The dying Earthling, says Schechtman’s Locke, has the same consciousness as the original who entered the booth, whereas the Mars person merely has one like the original. What makes it the same consciousness is not any phenomenological or other psychological feature or connection (including the memories that he is often read as demanding), it seems, it just *is* the same consciousness.

So, the PCT is not offering an adequate dependence account, since it is not defining a forensic unit of the kind Schechtman thinks is needed. The relations it uses to define identity are the same relations that it uses to answer practical questions:

The very idea of a real unity is undermined by reductionism. On a reductionist account, there can be no deep metaphysical fact about whether or not someone is or is not the same person, all the facts that matter are determined by the individual connections. (2014: p. 34)

Any theory that is to be able to avoid the extreme claim, then, needs to provide an account of a forensic unit with a real unity about which practical questions can be asked.

3. The PLV and the forensic unit

Schechtman presents the PLV as her new account of personal identity that will overcome the problems faced by the PCT as well as offering other advantages. The core of the view is this.

To be a person is to live a ‘person life’; persons are individuated by individuating person lives; and the duration of a single person is determined by the duration of a single person life. (2014: p. 110)

The initial idea is that a person life is the sort of life lived by an enculturated human being. It follows a typical development from dependent infant, through the development of physical and psychological attributes which would at some stage include the attributes featuring in the PCT and which might also at some stage be lost. It accepts that humans can live very different sorts of lives, but points to a very general shared form of development.

Importantly, the PLV also emphasises that a person life is lived in a culture and in interaction with other persons. Part of being a person is being engaged in characteristic interactions with other persons and against a background of social and cultural institutions; Schechtman talks of this as having a place in ‘person-space’ (2010: p. 279; 2014: p. 114). This social aspect of personhood is one which was gestured at in her earlier theories, but comes to the fore in this version.

Schechtman suggests that *person life* should be seen as a cluster concept. It is a cluster of biological, psychological and social functions which work together, but – unlike on the PCT or Olson’s animalism – none is necessary and sufficient by itself for living a person life. While all three functions are usually coincident, they can

come apart, and someone can still live a person life in the absence of any particular one.

Instead of assuming some one of these as the relation that constitutes our identity, we should think of identity as constituted instead by their interactions with one another. On the standard approach the fact that biological, psychological and social continuities are intertwined is seen as a complication which makes it difficult to determine which relation constitutes continuation. On the cluster concept model the integrated functioning is the true nature of the relation that constitutes the conditions of our continuation. The existence of the individual types of continuity in their 'pure' form is in fact a degenerate case of the more basic relation that contains all three. (Schechtman 2014: p. 150)

The picture as presented in this quote is a slightly disingenuous description of the PLV, however. The details of her discussion suggest that social continuities are *always* required for the continuation of a person life, while either of the other two may be missing. She writes, for instance,

it is essential to the judgment that a person survives a “whole-body transplant” that the transplant product is able to pick up the thread of the life of the person who enters surgery. This can happen only if the transplant product is accorded the appropriate place in person-space; that is, if she is treated as ... the continuation of the original locus of concern. (Schechtman 2014: p. 152, my italics)

The requirement is two of the continuities, one of which is that the individual is able to 'occupy the same place in person-space' in that they are treated by others as the same person. By acknowledging the three inter-related functions, and not denying the role played by the others (as do the PCT and animalism), Schechtman is confident that her account provides an adequate forensic unit for an account of personal identity.

The Branch-Line Case is an indication of this. The PLV is able to explain the intuition that it is the dying Earthling and not the Mars-person who is identical to the original and why the dying Earthling would not see continuation as the Mars-person as survival. This is because it is the dying Earthling that continues the person life of the would-be traveler – psychological, biological and social continuities go that way - whereas the Mars-person offers only psychological continuity.

Similar success marks the case of the Transplant. In this case, a cancer sufferer's undamaged cerebrum is transplanted into a healthy but 'decerebrated' body. Since the original cancerous body still continues to function in hospital, an animalist like Olson (who sees biological continuity as necessary for your survival (Olson 1997)) is committed to that being the original. But our intuitions go the other way – they say the cancer sufferer survives along with their cerebrum, and so need to be explained away by the animalist. No such troublesome explanation is required of the PLV, however. Although there is no (or not sufficient) biological continuity, the cerebrum recipient has psychological continuity and social continuity and thus takes up the person life of the original cancer patient. The successful handling of this case is further indication that the PLV has captured the required forensic unit. The animalist also describes a fundamental unit about which practical questions can be raised, but that unit does not match our moral practices, as indicated by the counterintuitive reading animalism provides of the Transplant. The PLV, according to Schechtman, gets both the Transplant and the Branch-Line Case right.

On top of these successes, Schechtman stresses a further advantage over the PCT, in that severely cognitively disabled individuals – excluded from personhood by the PCT - are included in her view. Although the existence of person-space requires that there be people with sophisticated psychological capacities, it includes other humans who do not share them, like someone in the late stages of senile dementia or a hydrocephalic child. Our moral practices extend far beyond ascribing of responsibility and prudential concern, she points out. A hydrocephalic child will never develop Lockean capacities, nor even more basic human psychological ones, but is nevertheless capable of interpersonal interactions in being played with and cared for, as well as being dressed, sung to, shown things and so on. Schechtman suggests that this taking part in 'person-specific practices' gives such a child a legitimate place in person-space and she is included by the PLV (2010: p. 281). The continuation of her person-life will not involve psychological continuity, but is determined by the biological and social continuities that create the required forensic unit.

4. Why we should stick to the PCT

The PLV thus appears to provide the needed answer to the Extreme Problem where the PCT supposedly failed so miserably. I wish to argue, though, that both the success of the PLV and the failure of the PCT are merely apparent.

I only intend to respond to the specific new charges with regard to the Extreme Claim that Schechtman has raised against the PCT. I argued above (against her earlier charges) that it does have the resources to explain all that it should when it comes to responsibility and self-interested concern. The new charges centre around the problems revealed by the Branch-Line Case. It emerged there that the account I had provided which distinguished the limits of the person from the limits of the moral self was not capturing the right sort of forensic unit needed to respond to the Extreme Claim because the ‘moments of consciousness’ it connects did not have *fundamental unity* – it had no way of explaining the deep connection between the dying Earthling and the would-be traveller that does not exist between the Mars-person and the traveller.

The charge that there is such a deep connection that the PCT fails to explain is based on Schechtman’s point (acknowledged by Parfit (1984: p. 201)) that the dying Earthling will not see themselves surviving as the Mars-person. Presumably (though Schechtman does not stress this), it also gets support from the intuition that the dying Earthling *is* the original, whereas the Mars-person is only a copy.

There is a serious problem with the core of Schechtman’s case, however. It is understandable that the dying Earthling will not see themselves surviving as the Mars-person, but the PCT is by no means committed to the relation between the two being one of survival. Despite how Schechtman describes things, the Mars-person is *not* psychologically continuous with the dying Earthling. They will be very similar (like Schechtman’s supertwins), but they are distinct individuals between whose mental states there are no direct causal psychological connections. The states of the one do not develop from the states of the other in the way that psychologically continuous states do – the experiences of the Earthling do not affect the beliefs of the Mars-person unless the Mars-person is told of them, and then they will only affect them like those of a twin might. Those direct causal connections are central to the picture of persistence that the PCT paints – or can

paint, when Parfit fancifully suggests the two are the same person (1984: p. 288).⁴ The Mars-person and dying Earthling share a common psychological ancestor and this explains their likeness, but it does not make them psychologically continuous with each other. Schechtman's continued misdescription of the PCT undermines this aspect of her case.

But what of the intuition, widely shared, that the dying Earthling *is* the original when the Teletransporter fails to destroy the original body, and the Mars-person just an exact copy? Well, for one thing, Schechtman is wary of putting any weight on intuitions like this. Our judgements concerning survival in these cases are, she insists, 'provisional' (2014: p. 154) – such a judgement is 'only a prediction' (p.154) which may well be very wrong. It would all depend on how society actually treated the resulting people. I have taken issue with this attitude to thought-experiments elsewhere.⁵ For the sake of argument here, however, I will accept the force of the intuition. It does raise an issue for the PCT – both persons are psychologically continuous with the original. Technically then, according to it, neither is the original (since identity requires uniqueness⁶), though both have the relation to the original that matters, if all that matters is psychological connectedness and continuity.

But I don't think this is a problem large enough to justify rejection of the theory. It is still crucial to the intuition that the dying Earthling *is* the original that they are psychologically continuous with the original. What the case suggests is that this is not always sufficient. The PCT does not deny that physical or biological continuity matters – it just does not matter nearly as much as the psychological variety. In peculiar cases like the Branch-Line one, it can be what makes the difference. So Schechtman may well be correct that there is something of the cluster concept to our concepts of person and of personal continuity. But all we have evidence for here is that we need to add other continuities in that cluster – not that the psychological one is not the most crucial.

Since Schechtman has offered us a ready-made cluster-concept theory with a psychological strand, should we not accept it? We should not, because there is

⁴ Parfit's suggestion may not be that fanciful. Following Daniel Kolak (2008) and others, there is a case to be made that fission does not destroy identity and that the two are actually identical.

⁵ Beck 2014

⁶ This commonplace claim is open to debate, as I point out in footnote 4.

good reason to question whether it offers us the value she claims. Its central advantage over the PCT was that it captured a deep connection. The psychological+ theory developing in the previous paragraph will not do this. But neither, really, does the PLV do this. Schechtman blames the failures she saw in the PCT's reductionism – but the PLV is also reductionist in her sense of the term. The forensic unit that the PLV outlines fails to have the non-reductive uniqueness she suggested was necessary to beat the Extreme Claim.

This becomes clear from the Transplant case. Though, as I have mentioned, Schechtman is wary of placing too much emphasis on such cases, we can (following her 'new method') consider whether what a theory implies, given a sufficiently detailed 'back story', is plausible.⁷ And she acknowledges that there can be two different back stories – one in which the cerebrum recipient takes up the original person life, and one in which the individual in a vegetative state is not just treated as a husk of the original, but is subject to many more person-related concerns in the way in which a patient in the late stages of dementia might be treated (and who, according to the PLV on cases of dementia is a forensic unit, continuing a person-life). We could push this further (as in my 2014) and have only the vegetative state individual as subject to person-related concerns while the cerebrum recipient is socially rejected from continuing the person-life. Schechtman discusses what to say about the first two versions, and accepts that there is an element of conventionalism in what the PLV must say (2014: p. 156ff). But that is all that seems to bother her. What she does not acknowledge is the crucial point to our discussion – the fact that treatment by society can have such different outcomes, where the identity of the survivor is concerned, means that there is no non-reductive deep fact of the case according to the PLV. And in terms of her argument against the PCT, that would mean that the PLV has not captured a forensic unit after all.

This point can be made with reference to the Branch-Line Case as well. By way of a back story, consider a society in which Teletransportation has become common, and is considered by all to be a normal form of international and interplanetary travel. As 'flights' become cheaper, everyone gets used to regular malfunctions with the less reliable companies and ceases to care only about the equivalents of the

⁷ 'The real question is not so much "would the person survive in the case described?" but rather "is the case described coherent and plausible?"' (Schechtman 2014: p. 153).

dying Earthling - easing their last few days, while treating the Mars-person equivalents as successful travellers. According to the PLV, then, the person life of the individual who entered the machine is continued by the Mars-person. But there is also the concern offered to the dying Earthling to be considered, concern which was, originally, enough to make it *the* person life. It seems then, once again, that there is no deeper fact about the case: 'the' person life is determined by the whims of the society, despite everything that once made the other life the person life still being present. True, it is not a case of society being free to choose which person continues the life (Schechtman's response to the threat of conventionalism), but there is no deep fact that determines the identity of the persons concerned. And since there is no deep unity in the sense appealed to in her case against the PCT, the PLV cannot be seen as capturing a forensic unit in her terms.

So the PLV does not have the sort of advantage over the PCT+ with regard to the Extreme Claim that Schechtman claimed for it. That does not make it any the worse off, though. And her point that it includes individuals excluded by the PCT – the severely cognitively disabled – might still persuade you to change sides. But I think this would be hasty, and the reason can be illustrated through the examples we have been considering.

My alternative descriptions of the Branch-Line Case and the Transplant, where social continuities go with the Mars-person and the vegetative individual, indicate how the PLV allows that identities are ultimately determined by those social factors rather than psychological ones. This is where the PCT+ and the PLV ultimately come apart. On the PCT+, in the new Branch-Line Case, the dying Earthling is still technically the original, but there is not much in that identity. They will not be survived by the Mars-person, but their joint ancestor from whom they recently emerged will be. That the society makes a mistake, briefly, in regarding the Mars-person as the original is a really just a technical error, since the Mars-person will be the original once the Earthling dies. Identity, remember, is not what matters.

But the mistake made by that society as viewed from the PCT is nothing on the error that would be made in the third outcome of the Transplant envisaged above and which would have to be endorsed by the PLV. That was the society which views the vegetative individual and not the cerebrum-recipient as the original, granting it the place in person-space as if it were the only relevant individual to be considered,

and rejecting the cerebrum recipient as if they were some impostor. According to the PLV, the cerebrum recipient would not be the original, but a newly created person starting a new (and awful) person-life. Any identity-related discomfort you feel at their expense would simply be misplaced. But that discomfort is not misplaced – there is something wrong about the treatment of the recipient and it involves a mistaken fact about identity – a fact that the PCT captures, but the PLV misses. What the case indicates (though can't be said to prove) is that psychological continuities have a fundamental importance that social ones do not. The two are obviously bound together in all sorts of ways, as Schechtman stresses, but that does not mean that the one is not more fundamental when it comes to personal identity than the other. Psychological continuities cannot simply be ignored in questions of personal survival, even if they do not provide the deep facts that Schechtman would like, whereas social continuities sometimes can be ignored.

5. Conclusion

Schechtman's re-consideration of Locke's account of identity reveals an important distinction between a forensic unit, about which practical questions should be asked, and the moral self. I think she is correct that a theory of personal identity should be a theory of that forensic unit, and not a theory of the moral self. But she is not correct that the neo-Lockean PCT can only be a theory of the moral self or that it must confuse the two. It may well be that Parfit and others are guilty of confusing issues here, but a theory that sees our continuity as a complex psychological continuity need not do that. The view I have argued for is just such a view – the continuity it outlines is precisely of a subject about which practical questions about responsibility and self-concern are to be asked. The answers to questions of personal continuity and responsibility will not always co-incide, and that is because many issues concerning responsibility are not issues of identity at all. When they are, the unit defined by the PCT will provide the relevant answer.

The forensic unit thus defined will not have the deep unity that Schechtman claims is necessary in a response to the Extreme Claim. But that deep unity is not necessary in explaining the relevant issues of responsibility and self-concern, nor is it present in her own PLV.

Schechtman is also in line with those contemporary theories which accept that our concept of personal identity is something of a cluster concept, and with which I am sympathetic. But I am not sympathetic with the cluster that the PLV presents. Biological and social continuities have their places, but both are of lesser importance to the concept than psychological ones. When psychological ones are not sufficient, biological ones can influence our survival values. Social ones are more dependent on psychological ones than this – and where they sway us has more to do with their role in how (thought-experiment) scenarios are described than their constitutive role in personal identity.⁸ Schechtman is influenced by the emotional call of cases like a parent suffering senile dementia or a hydrocephalic child to misread this role. The errors the PLV is led into indicate this, and they indicate that the forensic unit she is after is better provided by the PCT than the PLV.

⁸ I say much more about this in Beck 2014.

References

- Beck, S. 2013a. 'Am I my brother's keeper? On identity and responsibility', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 32(1), pp. 1-9.
- Beck, S. 2013b. 'The misunderstandings of the Self-Understanding View', *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology*, 20(1), pp. 33-42.
- Beck, S. 2013c. 'Understanding ourselves better', *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology*, 20(1), pp. 51-55.
- Beck, S. 2014. 'Transplant thought-experiments: two costly mistakes in discounting them', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 33(2), pp. 189-199.
- Kolak, D. 2008. 'Room for a view: on the metaphysical subject of personal identity', *Synthese* 162, pp. 341-372.
- Locke, J. [1694] 1975. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Olson, E. 1987. *The Human Animal*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Parfit, D. 1984. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Schechtman, M. 1996. *The Constitution of Selves*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Schechtman, M. 2005. Personal Identity and the Past. *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology* 12, no. 1, pp. 9-22.
- Schechtman, M. 2010. 'Personhood and the practical', *Journal of Theoretical Medical Bioethics*, 31, pp. 271-283.
- Schechtman, M. 2013. 'Misunderstandings understood', *Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Psychology* 20, no.1, pp. 47-50.
- Schechtman, M. 2014. *Staying Alive*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.