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2.1

I said at the beginning of section 1.5 that the naturalist reduction which would exclude frameworks altogether from consideration cannot be carried through, and that to see why this is so is to understand something important about the place of frameworks in our lives. Having seen a little better what these frameworks consist in, I want now to pursue this point.

In sections 1.4 and 1. 5 I have been talking about these qualitative distinctions in their relation to the issue of the meaning of life. But it is plain that distinctions of this kind play a role in all three dimensions of moral assessment that I identified above. The sense that human beings are capable of some kind of higher life forms part of the background for our belief that they are fit objects of respect, that their life and integrity is sacred or enjoys immunity, and is not to be attacked. As a consequence, we can see our conception of what this immunity consists in evolving with the development of new frameworks. Thus the fact that we now place such importance on expressive power means that our contemporary notions of what it is to respect people's integrity includes that of protecting their expressive freedom to express and develop their own opinions, to define their own life concep­ tions, to draw up their own life-plans.

At the same time, the third dimension too involves distinctions of this kind. The dignity of the warrior, the citizen, the householder, and so on repose on the background understanding that some special value attaches to these forms of life or to the rank or station that these people have attained within them.

Indeed, one of the examples above, the honour ethic, has plainly been the background for a very widespread understanding of dignity, which attaches to the free citizen or warrior-citizen and to an even higher degree to someone who plays a major role in public life. This goes on being an important dimension of our life in modern society, and the fierce competition for this kind of dignity is part of what animates democratic politics.

These distinctions, which I have been calling frameworks, are thus woven

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in different ways into the three dimensions of our moral life. And this means, of course, that they are of differential importance. I want to explore here a little further just how they interweave through our moral existence.

The first way is the one that I have already discussed. Frameworks provide the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgements, intuitions, or reactions in any of the three dimensions. To articulate a framework is to explicatewhat makes sense ofourmoral responses. That is, when we try to spell out what it is that we presuppose when we judge that a certain form of life is truly worthwhile, or place our dignity in a certain achievement or status, or define our moral obligations in a certain manner, we find ourselves articulating inter alia what I have been calling here 'frameworks'.

In a sense, this might be thought to offer a sufficient answer to the naturalist attempt to sideline frameworks. We might just reply to whoever propounds this reductive thesis with the ad hominem point that they also make judgements about what is worthwhile, have a sense of dignity, and so on, and that they cannot simply reject the preconditions of these beliefs and attitudes making sense.

But the ad hominem argument doesn't seem to go deep enough. We might think that although almost all the protagonists of naturalist reduction can themselves be caught making the kind of distinctions which presuppose what they are rejecting, this doesn't dispose of the question whether we could in principle do without frameworks altogether-whether, in short, adopting them is ultimately to be seen as an optional stance for human beings, however difficult it in fact has been to avoid them throughout most of previous human history.

What tends to lend credence to the view that they are so optional is just the developing 'disenchantment' of modern culture, which I discussed in section 1.4 and which has undermined so many traditional frameworks and, indeed, created the situation in which our old horizons have been swept away and all frameworks may appear problematical-the situation in which the problem of meaning arises for us. In earlier ages, the reasoning might run, when the major definition of our existential predicament was one in which we feared above all condemnation, where an unchallengeable framework made imperious demands on us, it is understandable that people saw their frameworks as enjoying the same ontological solidity as the very structure of the universe. But the very fact that what was once so solid has in many cases melted into air shows that we are dealing not with something grounded in the nature of being, but rather with changeable human interpretations. Why is it impossible, then, to conceive a person or even a culture which might so understand this predicament as to do altogether without frameworks, that is, without these qualitative discriminations of the incomparably higher? The

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fact that we may always be able to catch our contemporaries still clinging to

some such in their actual lives and judgements does nothing to show that they are grounded on anything beyond ultimately dispensable interpretation.

So runs a currently persuasive argument in favour of the reductive thesis. And this is precisely the thesis I oppose. I want to defend the strong thesis that doing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us; otherwise put, that the horizons within which we live our lives and which make sense of them have

to include these strong qualitative discriminations. Moreover, this is not meant just as a contingently true psychological fact about human beings, which could perhaps turn out one day not to hold for some exceptional

individual or new type, some superman of disengaged objectification. Rather the claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood.

Perhaps the best way to see this is to focus on the issue that we usually describe today as the question of identity. We speak of it in these terms because the que�tion is often spontaneously phrased by people in the form: Who am I? But this can't necessarily be answered by giving name and genealogy. What does answer this question for us is an understanding of what is of crucial importance to us. To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.

People may see their identity as defined partly by some moral or spiritual commitment, say as a Catholic, or an anarchist. Or they may define it in part by the nation or tradition they belong to, as an Armenian, say, or a Quebecois. What they are saying by this is not just that they are strongly

attached to this spiritual view or background; rather it is that this provides the frame within which they can determine where they stand on questions of

what is good, or worthwhile, or admirable, or of value. Put counterfactually,

they are saying that were they to lose this commitment or identification, they

would be at sea, as it were; they wouldn't know anymore, for an important range of questions, what the significance of things was for them.

And this situation does, of course, arise for some people. It's what we call an 'identity crisis', an acute form of disorientation, which people often express in terms of not knowing who they are, but which can also be seen as a radical uncertainty of where they stand. They lack a frame or horizon within which things can take on a stable significance, within which some life





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possibilities can be seen as good or meaningful, others as bad or trivial. The meaning of all these possibilities is unfixed, labile, or undetermined. This is a painful and frightening experience.

What this brings to light is the essential link between identity and a kind of orientation. To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary. I feel myself drawn here to use a spatial metaphor; but I believe this to be more than personal predilection. There are signs that the link with spatial orientation lies very deep in the human psyche. In some very extreme cases of what are described as "narcissistic personality disorders", which take the form of a radical uncertainty about oneself and about what is of value to one, patients show signs of spatial disorientation as well at moments of acute crisis. The disorientation and uncertainty about where one stands as a person seems to spill over into a loss of grip on one's stance in physical space. 1

Why this link between identity and orientation ? Or perhaps we could put the question this way: What induces us to talk about moral orientation in terms of the question, Who are we? This second formulation points us towards the fact that we haven't always done so. Talk about 'identity' in the modern sense would have been incomprehensible to our forebears of a couple of centuries ago. Erikson2 has made a perceptive study of Luther's crisis of faith and reads it in the light of contemporary identity crises, but Luther himself, of course, would have found this description reprehensible if not utterly incomprehensible. Underlying our modern talk of identity is the notion that questions of moral orientation cannot all be solved in simply universal terms. And this is connected to our post-Romantic understanding of individual differences as well as to the importance we give to expression in each person's discovery of his or her moral horizon. For someone in Luther's

age, the issue of the basic moral frame orienting one's action could *only* be

put in universal terms. Nothing else made sense. This is linked, of course, with the crisis for Luther turning around the acute sense of condemnation and irremediable exile, rather than around a modern sense of meaningless­ ness, or lack of purpose, or emptiness.

So one part of the answer to our question is historical; certain develop­ ments in our self-understanding are a precondition of our putting the issue in terms of identity. Seeing this will also prevent us from exaggerating our differences with earlier ages. For most of us, certain fundamental moral questions are still put in universal terms: those, for instance, which we stated in section 1.1, dealing with people's rights to life and integrity. What differentiates us from our forebears is just that we don't see all such questions as framed in these terms as a matter of course. But this also means that our identities, as defined by whatever gives us our fundamental orientation, are in

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fact complex and many-tiered. We are all framed by what we see as universally valid commitments (being a Catholic or an anarchist, in my example above) and also by what we understand as particular identifications (being an Armenian or a Quebecois). We often declare our identity as defined

by only one of these, because this is what is salient in our lives, or what is put in question. But in fact our identity is deeper and more many-sided than any

of our possible articulations of it.

But the second facet of the question above is not historical. It is rather: Why do we think of fundamental orientation in terms of the question, Who? The question Who? is asked to place someone as a potiential interlocutor in a society of interlocutors. Who is this speaking? we say over the phone. Or who is that? pointing to some person across the room. The answer comes in the form of a name: 'I'm Joe Smith', often accompanied by a statement of relationship: 'I'm Mary's brother-in-law', or by a statement of social role: 'It's the repair man', or 'the man you're pointing to is the President'. The slightly more aggressive form: 'Who (the hell) do you think you are?' calls for the latter type of answer. To be someone who qualifies as a potential object of this question is to be such an interlocutor among others, someone with one's own standpoint or one's own role, who can speak for himlherself. Of course, I can ask the question, Who?-pointing to someone lying over there in an irreversible coma. But this is obviously a derivative case: beings of whom one can ask this question are normally either actually or potentially capable of answering for themselves.

But to be able to answer for oneself is to know where one stands, what

one wants to answer. And that is why we naturally tend to talk of our fundamental orientation in terms of who we are. To lose this orientation, or not to have found it, is not to know who one is. And this orientation, once attained, defines where you answer from, hence your identity.

But then what emerges from all this is that we think of this fundamental moral orientation as essential to being a human interlocutor, capable of answering for oneself. But to speak of orientation is to presuppose a

space-analogue within which one finds one's way. To understand our

predicament in terms of finding or losing orientation in moral space is to take the space which our frameworks seek to define as ontologically basic. The issue is, through what framework-definition can I find my bearings in it? In

other words, we take as basic that the human agent exists in a space of

questions. And these are the questions to which our framework-definitions are answers, providing the horizon within which we know where we stand,

and what meanings things have for us.

That this is so, that the space in question is one which must be mapped by strong evaluations or qualitative distinctions, emerges from the above discussion. It is not just that the commitments and identifications by which



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we in fact define our identity involve such strong evaluations, as the above examples make clear, or just that the issue of identity is invariably for us a matter itself of strongly valued good-an identity is something that one ought to be true to, can fail to uphold, can surrender when one ought to. More fundamentally, we can see that it only plays the role of orienting us, of providing the frame within which things have meaning for us, by virtue of the qualitative distinctions it incorporates. Even more, it is difficult to see how anything could play this role which didn't incorporate such distinctions. Our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not. It is what makes possible these discriminations, including those which turn on strong evaluations. It hence couldn't be entirely without such evaluations. The notion of an identity defined by some mere de facto, not strongly valued preference is incoherent. And what is more, how could the absence of some such preference be felt as a disorienting lack? The condition of there being such a thing as an identity crisis is precisely that our identities define the space of qualitative distinctions within which we live and choose.

But if this is so, then the naturalist supposition that we might be able to do without frameworks altogether is wildly wrong. This is based on a quite different picture, that of human agency where one could answer the question, Who? without accepting any qualitative distinctions, just on the basis of desires and aversions, likes and dislikes. On this picture, frameworks are things we invent, not answers to questions which inescapably pre-exist for us, independent of our answer or inability to answer. To see frameworks as orientations, however, does cast them in this latter light. One orients oneself in a space which exists independently of one's success or failure in finding one's bearings, which, moreover, makes the task of finding these bearings inescapable. Within this picture, the notion of inventing a qualitative distinction out of whole cloth makes no sense. For one can only adopt such distinctions as make sense to one within one's basic orientation.

The distinction between the two views can perhaps be put this way: the idea that we invent distinctions out of whole cloth is equivalent to the notion that we invent the questions as well as the answers. We all think of some issues as factitious in this sense. To take a trivial example: if we see a dispute in some society about what is the fashionable way to wear a bowler hat, flat or at a rakish angle, we would all agree that this whole issue might easily not have existed. It would have sufficed that no one have invented the bowler hat. On a more serious level, some atheists take this view towards the dispute among different religions over what one might call the shape of the supernatural-whether we speak in terms of the God of Abraham, or of Brahman, or of Nirvana, and so on. The whole issue area in which these answers make sense didn't need to arise, these atheists believe, and one day might totally disappear from human concern. By contrast, our orientation in

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space is not the answer to a factitious, dispensable issue. We couldn't conceive of a human life formwhere one day people came to reflect that, since they were spatial beings, they ought after all to develop a sense of up and down, right and left, and find landmarks which would enable them to get around-reflections which might be disputed by others. We can't conceive of a form in which this question is not always already there, demanding an answer. We can't distance ourselves from the issue of spatial orientation or fail to stumble on it-as with the right angle for bowler hats-or repudiate it, as the atheists imagine we can for religion.

The naturalist view would relegate the issue of what framework to adopt to the former category, as an ultimately factitious question. But our discussion of identity indicates rather that it belongs to the class of the inescapable, i.e., that it belongs to human agency to exist in a space of questions about strongly valued goods, prior to all choice or adventitious cultural change. This discussion thus throws up a strong challenge to the naturalist picture. In the light of our understanding of identity, the portrait of an agent free from all frameworks rather spells for us a person in the grip of an appalling identity crisis. Such a person wouldn't know where he stood on issues of fundamental importance, would have no orientation in these issues whatever, wouldn't be able to answer for himself on them. If one wants to add to the portrait by saying that the person doesn't suffer this absence of frameworks as a lack, isn't in other words in a crisis at all, then one rather has a picture of frightening dissociation. In practice, we should see such a person as deeply disturbed. He has gone way beyond the fringes of what we think as shallowness: people we judge as shallow do have a sense of what is incomparably important, only we think their commitments trivial, or merely conventional, or not deeply thought out or chosen. But a person without a framework altogether would be outside our space of interlocution; he wouldn't have a stand in the space where the rest of us are. We would see this as pathological.

What is, of course, easily understandable as a human type is a person who decided that he ought not to accept the traditional frameworks distin­ guishing higher and lower ends, that what he ought to do is calculate rationally about happiness, that this form of life is more admirable, or reflects a higher moral benevolence, than fo�lowing the traditional definitions of virtue, piety, and the like. This is even a familiar picture. It is the utilitarian ideologue, who has played such a role in our culture. But this person doesn't lack a framework. On the contrary, he has a strong commitment to a certain ideal of rationality and benevolence. He admires people who live up to this ideal, condemns those who fail or who are too confused even to accept it, feels wrong when he himself falls below it. The utilitarian lives within a moral horizon which cannot be explicated by his own moral theory. This is one of

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the great weaknesses of utilitarianism. But because this horizon can be easily forgotten in favour of the facts and situations one deals with within it, this framework can be disregarded, and the picture is accredited of a framework­ less agent. But once one becomes aware of how human agents are inescapably in a space of such moral questions, it springs to light that the utilitarian is very much one of us, and the imagined agent of naturalist theory is a monster. But the naturalist might protest: Why do I have to accept what emerges from this phenomenological account of identity? For so he might want to describe it, and he wouldn't be entirely wrong. The answer is that this is not only a phenomenological account but an exploration of the limits of the conceivable in human life, an account of its "transcendental conditions". It may be wrong in detail, of course; and the challenge is always there to provide a better one. But if it's correct, the objection that arises for naturalism is decisive. For the aim of this account is to examine how we actually make sense of our lives, and to draw the limits of the conceivable from our knowledge of what we actually do when we do so. But what description of human possibilities, drawn from some questionable epistemological theories, ought to trump what we can descry from within our practice itself as the limits of our possible ways of making sense of our lives ? After all, the ultimate basis for accepting any of these theories is precisely that they make better sense of us than do their rivals. If any view takes us right across the boundary and defines as normal or possible a human life which we would find incomprehensible and pathological, it can't be right. It is on these grounds that I oppose the naturalist thesis and say that the horizons in which we live

*must* include strong qualitative discriminations.

2.2

I recognize that there is a crucial argument here which I have stated all too briefly. I will return to it below, in the next chapter. But for the moment, I want to pursue something else, viz., the connection that came to light in the above discussion between identity and the good.

We talk about a human being as a 'sel£'. The word is used in all sorts of ways; and we shall see in Part II that this whole language is historically conditioned. But there is a sense of the term where we speak of people as selves, meaning that they are beings of the requisite depth and complexity to have an identity in the above sense (or to be struggling to find one). We have to distinguish this from all sorts of other uses which have cropped up in psychology and sociology. I remember an experiment designed to show that chimps too have 'a sense of self': an animal with paint marks on its face, seeing itself in the mirror, reached with its paws to its own face to clean it. It somehow recognized that this mirror image was of its own body.3 Obviously,



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this involves a very different sense of the term from the one I wish to invoke. Nor is it sufficient to be a self in the sense that one can steer one's action strategically in the light of certain factors, including one's own desires, capacities, etc. This is part of what is meant by having (or being) an Ego in the Freudian sense, and in related uses. This strategic capacity requires some

kind of reflective awareness. But there is an important difference. It is not essential to the Ego that it orient itself in a space of questions about the good, that it stand somewhere on these questions. Rather the reverse. The Freudian Ego is at its freest, is most capable of exercising control, when it has the maximal margin of manoeuvre in relation to the imperious demands of the Superego as well as in the face of the urgings of the Id. The ideally free Ego would be a lucid calculator of pay-offs.

The Ego or Self also enters psychology and sociology in another way, in connection with the observation that people have a 'self-image' which matters to them; that they strive to appear in a good light in the eyes of those they come in contact with as well as in their own. Here there is indeed a sense of self which goes beyond neutral self-observation and calculations of benefits. But in the way this is usually conceived, the importance of image bears no connection to identity. It is seen as a fact about human beings that they care that their image matches up to certain standards, generally socially induced. But this is not seen as something which is essential to human personhood. On the contrary, what is usually studied under this head is what we can identify, outside the sterilized, "value-free" language of social science, as the all-too-human weakness of "ego" and "image" in the everyday sense of these terms (themselves, of course, incorporated into the vernacular from social science). The ideally strong character would be maximally free of them, would not be deterred by the adverse opinions of others, and would be able to face unflinchingly the truth about himself or herself.4

By contrast, the notion of self which connects it to our need for identity is meant to pick out this crucial feature of human agency, that we cannot do without some orientation to the good, that we each essentially are (i.e., define ourselves at least inter alia by) where we stand on this. What it is to be a self or person of this kind is difficult to conceive for certain strands of modern philosophy and above all for those which have become enshrined in mainstream psychology and social science. The self, even in this sense, ought to be an object of study like any other. But there are certain things which are

generally held true of objects of scientific study which don't hold of the self. To see the conceptual obstacles here, it would help to enumerate four of these.

I. The object of study is to be taken "absolutely", that is, not in its meaning for us or any other subject, but as it is on its own ("objectively").

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##### 1.. The object is what it is independent of any descriptions or interpreta­ tions offered of it by any subjects.

3. The object can in principle be captured in explicit description.

4. The object can in principle be described without reference to its surroundings.

The first two features correspond to a central feature of the great seventeenth-century revolution in natural science, that we should cease trying to explain the world around us in subjective, anthropocentric, or "secondary" properties. I have discussed this elsewhere.5 But, of course, neither of these features holds of the self. We are selves only in that certain issues matter for us. What I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me. And as has been widely discussed, these things have significance for me, and the issue of my identity is worked out, only through a language of interpretation which I have come to accept as a valid articulation of these issues.6 To ask what a person is, in abstraction from his or her self-interpretations, is to ask a fundamentally misguided question, one to which there couldn't in principle be an answer.

So one crucial fact about a self or person that emerges from all this is that it is not like an object in the usually understood sense. We are not selves in the way that we are organisms, or we don't have selves in the way we have hearts and livers. We are living beings with these organs quite independently of our self-understandings or -interpretations, or the meanings things have for us. But we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation to the good.7

That the self will fail to exhibit the third feature of the classical object of study is already implicit in its failure on the second. The self is partly constituted by its self-interpretations; this is what made it fail to match the second feature. But the self's interpretations can never be fully explicit. Full articulacy is an impossibility. The language we have come to accept articulates the issues of the good for us. But we cannot have fully articulated what we are taking as given, what we are simply counting with, in using this language. We can, of course, try to increase our understanding of what is implicit in our moral and evaluative languages. This can even be an ideal, one which, for instance, Socrates imposed on his unwilling and frustrated interlocutors in Athens, until they shut him up once and for all. But articulation can by its very nature never be completed. We clarify one language with another, which in turn can be further unpacked, and so on. Wittgenstein has made this point familiar.

But why is this a point specifically about the self? Doesn't it apply to any language, even that of the scientific description of objects? Yes, of course. But it is in the case of the self that the language which can never be made fully explicit is part of, internal to, or constitutive of the "object" studied. To study

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persons is to study beings who only exist in, or are partly constituted by, a

certain language.8

This brings us to the fourth feature. A language only exists and is maintained within a language community. And this indicates another crucial feature of a self. One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it.

This has become an important point to make, because not only the

philosophico-scientific tradition but also a powerful modern aspiration to freedom and individuality have conspired to produce an identity which seems to be a negation of this. Just how this happened is a central theme that I will trace in Part II. But I would like to show here how this modern independence of the self is no negation of the fact that a self only exists among other selves. This point is already implicit in the very notion of 'identity', as we saw above. My self-definition is understood as an answer to the question Who I am. And this question finds its original sense in the interchange of speakers. I define who I am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation within which my most important defining relations are

lived out.

This obviously cannot be just a contingent matter. There is no way we could be inducted into personhood except by being initiated into a language. We first learn our languages of moral and spiritual discernment by being brought into an ongoing conversation by those who bring us up. The meanings that the key words first had for me are the meanings they have for us, that is, for me and my conversation partners together. Here a crucial feature of conversation is relevant, that in talking about something you and I make it an object for us together, that is, not just an object for me which happens also to be one for you, even if we add that I know that it's an object for you, and you know, etc. The object is for us in a strong sense, which I have tried to describe elsewhere9 with the notion of 'public' or 'common space'. The various uses of language set up, institute, focus, or activate such common spaces, just as it would appear the very first acquisition of language depends on a proto-variant of it, as seems indicated in the pioneering work of Jerome Bruner.tO

So I can only learn what anger, love, anxiety, the aspiration to wholeness,

etc.

, are through my and others' experience of these being objects for us, in some common space. This is the truth behind Wittgenstein's dictum that agreement in meanings involves agreement in judgements. I t Later, I may innovate. I may deVelop an original way of understanding myself and human life, at least one which is in sharp disagreement with my family and background. But the innovation can only take place from the base in our



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common language. Even as the most independent adult, there are moments when I cannot clarify what I feel until I talk about it with certain special partner(s), who know me, or have wisdom, or with whom I have an affinity. This incapacity is a mere shadow of the one the child experiences. For him, everything would be confusion, there would be no language of discernment at all, without the conversations which fix this language for him.

This is the sense in which one cannot be a self on one's own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding-and, of course, these classes may overlap. A self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution',u

It is this original situation which gives its sense to our concept of 'identity', offering an answer to the question of who I am through a definition of where I am speaking from and to whom. 13 The full definition of someone's identity thus usually involves not only his stand on moral and spiritual matters but also some reference to a defining community. These two dimensions were reflected in the examples which quite naturally came to mind in my discussion above, where I spoke of identifying oneself as a Catholic or an anarchist, or as an Armenian or a Quebecois. Normally, however, one dimension would not be exclusive of the other. Thus it might be essential to the self-definition of A that he is a Catholic and a Quebecois; of B that he is an Armenian and an anarchist. (And these descriptions might not exhaust the identity of either.)

What I have been trying to suggest in this discussion is that these two dimensions of identity-definition reflect the original situation out of which the whole issue of identity arises.

But this second definition tends to become occluded. Modern culture has developed conceptions of individualism which picture the human person as, at least potentially, finding his or her own bearings within, declaring independence from the webs of interlocution which have originally formed himlher, or at least neutralizing them. It's as though the dimension of interlocution were of significance only for the genesis of individuality, like the training wheels of nursery school, to be left behind and to play no part in the finished person. What has given currency to these views ?

In a sense, this will be one of the major themes of later parts, where I will trace some of the history of the modern identity. But I need to say a word about it here in order to overcome a common confusion.

First, it is clear that the most important spiritual traditions of our civilization have encouraged, even demanded, a detachment from the second dimension of identity as this is normally lived, that is, from particular, historic communities, from the given webs of birth and history. If we

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transpose this discussion out of the modern language of identity, which would be anachronistic in talking about the ancients, and talk instead of how they found their spiritual bearings, then it is plain that the ideal of detachment comes to us from both sides of our heritage. In the writings of the prophets and the Psalms, we are addressed by people who stood out against

the almost unanimous obloquy of their communities in order to deliver God's message. In a parallel development, Plato describes a Socrates who was firmly

rooted enough in philosophical reason to be able to stand in im.perious independence of Athenian opinion.

But it is important to see how this stance, which has become a powerful ideal for us, however little we may live up to it in practice, transforms our position within, but by no means takes us out of, what I have called the original situation of identity-formation. It goes on being true of such heroes that they define themselves not just genetically but as they are today, in conversation with others. They are still in a web, but the one they define themselves by is no longer the given historical community. It is the saving remnant, or the community of like-minded souls, or the company of philosophers, or the small group of wise men in the mass of fools, as the Stoics saw it, or the close circle of friends that played such a role in Epicurean

thought.14 Taking the heroic stance doesn't allow one to leap out of the human condition, and it remains true that one can elaborate one's new language only through conversation in a broad sense, that is, through some kind of interchange with others with whom one has some common under­ standing about what is at stake in the enterprise. A human being can always be original, can step beyond the limits of thought and vision of contempo­ raries, can even be quite misunderstood by them. But the drive to original vision will be hampered, will ultimately be lost in inner confusion, unless it can be placed in some way in relation to the language and vision of others.

Even where I believe that I see a truth about the human condition that no

one else has seen-a condition that Nietzsche seems to have approached sometimes-it still must be on the basis of my reading of others' thought and language. I see the 'genealogy' underlying their morality, and therefore hold them too to be (unwitting and unwilling) witnesses to my insight. Somehow I have to meet the challenge: Do I know what I'm saying? Do I really grasp what I'm talking about? And this challenge I can only meet by confronting my thOUght and language with the thought and reactions of others.

Of course, there is a big difference between the situation, on one hand, where I work out where I stand in conversation only with my immediate

historic community and where I don't feel confirmed in what I believe unless We see eye to eye, and the case, on the other hand, where I rely mainly on a community of the like-minded, and where confirmation can take the form of

my being satisfied that they give unwitting testimony to my views, that their



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thought and language bespeak contact with the same reality, which I see clearer than they. The gap gets even bigger when we reflect that in the latter case, the 'conversation' will no longer be exclusively with living contempo­ raries, but will include, e.g., prophets, thinkers, writers who are dead. What is the point of my insisting that the thesis about interlocution holds in spite of this gap?

The point is to insist on what I might call this 'transcendental' condition of our having a grasp on our own language, that we in some fashion confront it or relate it to the language of others. This is not just a recommended policy of the kind that suggests if you check your beliefs against others' you'll avoid some falsehoods. In speaking of a 'transcendental' condition here, I am pointing to the way in which the very confidence that we know what we mean, and hence our having our own original language, depends on this relating. The original and (ontogenetically) inescapable context of such relating is the face-to-face one in which we actually agree. We are inducted into language by being brought to see things as our tutors do. Later, and only for part of our language, we can deviate, and this thanks to our relating to absent partners as well and to our confronting our thought with any partner in this new, indirect way, through a reading of the disagreement. And even here, not *all* the confronting can be through dissent.

I stress the continuity between the later, higher, more independent stance and the earlier, more "primitive" form of immersion in community not just because the second is necessarily ontogenetically prior, and not even just because the first stance can never be adopted across the whole range of thought and language, so that our independent positions remain embedded, as it were, in relations of immersion. I also want to point out how through language we remain related to partners of discourse, either in real, live exchanges, or in indirect confrontations. The nature of our language and the fundamental dependence of our thought on language makes interlocution in one or other of these forms inescapable for us. 15

The reason why this is an important point to make is that the development of certain modern character forms, of a highly independent individualism, has brought along with it, understandably if mistakenly, certain views of selfhood and language which have denied it or lost it utterly from sight. For instance, the early modern theories of language, from Hobbes through Locke to Condillac, presented it as an instrument potentially inventable by individ­ uals. A private language was a real possibility on these views. 16 This idea continues to bewitch us in this age. We have only to think of the sense of fresh insight we gain, or alternatively, of the resistance and disbelief we feel, when

we first read Wittgenstein's celebrated arguments against the possibility of a private language. Both are testimony to the hold of certain deeply entrenched modes of thought in modern culture. Again, a common picture of the self, as

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(at least potentially and ideally) drawing its purposes, goals, and life-plans

out of itself, seeking "relationships" only insofar as they are "fulfilling", is largely based on ignoring our embedding in webs of interlocution.

It seems somehow easy to read the step to an independent stance as a stepping altogether outside the transcendental condition of interlocution-or else as showing that we were never within it and only needed the courage to

make dear our basic, ontological independence. Bringing out the transcen­ dental condition is a way of heading this confusion off. And this allows the change to appear in its true light. We may sharply shift the balance in our definition of identity, dethrone the given, historic community as a pole of identity, and relate only to the community defined by adherence to the good (of the saved, or the true believers, or the wise). But this doesn't sever our dependence on webs of interlocution. It only changes the webs, and the nature of our dependence.

Indeed, we can go even further and define ourselves explicitly in relation to no web at all. Certain Romantic views of the self, drawing its sustenance from nature within and the great world of nature without, tend in this direction, as do their debased derivatives in modern culture. And a dose cousin to Romanticism is the self of the American Transcendentalists, in a sense contajning the universe, but bypassing any necessary relatjon to other humans. But these grandiose aspirations do nothing to lift the transcendental conditions.

This kind of individualism, and the illusions which go with it, is peculiarly powerful in American culture. As Robert Bellah and his co-authors point out,t7 Americans have built on the earlier Puritan tradition of "leaving home". In early Connecticut, for instance, all young persons had to go through their own, individual conversion, had to establish their own relation to God, to be allowed full membership in the church. And this has grown into the American tradition of leaving home: the young person has to go out, to leave the parental background, to make his or her own way in the world. In contemporary conditions, this can transpose even into abandoning the political or religious convictions of the parents. And yet we can talk without paradox of an American 'tradition' of leaving home. The young person learns the independent stance, but this stance is also something expected of him or her. Moreover, what an independent stance involves is defined by the culture, n a continuing conversation into which that young person is inducted (and

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�n which the meaning of independence can also alter with time). Nothing l lustrates better the transcendental embedding of independence in interlocu­

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tIOn. Each young person may take up a stance which is authentically his or

her own; but the very possibility of this is enframed in a social understanding of great temporal depth, in fact, in a "tradition".

It would be to forget the distinction between the transcendental conditions



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and our actual stance to think that this enframing in tradition simply makes a mockery of the emphasis on independent, self-reliant individuals. Of course the independence can become a very shallow affair, in which masses of people each try to express their individuality in stereotyped fashion. It is a critique that has often been made of modern consumer society that it tends to breed a herd of conformist individuals. This is indeed a mockery of the pretensions of the culture. But just for that reason we can't conclude that the existence of a traditional culture of independence itself empties individuality of its meaning.

In order to see that the cultural shift to the ideal of self-reliance makes a difference, even in its debased form, we have only to compare it with a quite different culture. It matters that American young people are expected to be independent of their elders, even if this itself is one of the demands of the elders. Because what each young person is working out is an identity which is meant to be hislher own in the special sense that it could be sustained even against parental and social opposition. This identity is worked out in conversations with parents and consociates, but the nature of the con­ versation is defined by this notion of what an identity is. Compare this with Sudhir Kakar's account of the upbringing of young Indians: "The yearning for the confirming presence of the loved person . . . is the dominant modality of social relations in India, especially within the extended family. This 'modality' is expressed variously but consistently, as in a person's feeling of helplessness when family members are absent or his difficulty in making decisions alone. In short, Indians characteristically rely on the support of others to go through life and to deal with the exigencies imposed by the outside world."18

This is plainly a different pattern from the one encouraged in our societies in the West. The fact that both are elaborated in cultural traditions does nothing to lessen the difference. The Indian pattern, on this view anyway, tends to encourage a kind of identity in which it is difficult for me to know what I want and where I stand on an important range of subjects if I am out of phase or not in communication with the people close to me. The Western pattern tries to encourage just the opposite.

From within each, the other looks strange and inferior. As Kakar points out, Western scholars have tended to read the Indian pattern as a kind of "weakness". Indians might read the Western one as unfeeling. But these judgements are ethnocentric and fail to appreciate the nature of the cultural gap.19 Ethnocentrism, of course, is also a consequence of collapsing the distinction between the transcendental conditions and the actual content of a culture, because it makes it seem as though what we are "really" is separated individuals, and hence that this is the proper way to be.20



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2.3

I have been trying, in the previous section, to trace the connections between our sense of the good and our sense of self. We saw that these are closely interwoven and that they connect too with the way we are agents who share a language with other agents. Now I want to extend this picture, to show it relates to our sense of our life as a whole and the direction it is taking as we lead it. To set the context for this, I return to my argument about the good, to sum up where I think it stands at this point.

In my introductory remarks I began by declaring that my aim was to explore the background picture which underlies our moral intuitions. And later (section 1. 2.), I redefined this target as the moral ontology which lies behind and makes sense of these intuitions and responses. As the discussion has proceeded, I have come to describe my goal in different terms again: we can now see it as exploring the frameworks which articulate our sense of orientation in the space of questions about the good. These qualitative distinctions, which define the frameworks, I saw first as background assump­ tions to our moral reactions and judgements, then as contexts which give these reactions their sense. So I still see them. But these descriptions of their role do not capture how indispensable they are to us. Even the second fails to do this: for though a context which makes sense of a particular range of judgements is indeed indispensable to those judgements, the option might still seem open of not making such valuations at all. As long as the naturalist picture, by which having a moral outlook is an optional extra, continues as plausible, the place of these frameworks in our lives will be obscured. Seeing these qualitative distinctions as defining orientations has altered all this. We can now see that they are contestable answers to inescapable questions.

But the image of spatial orientation which I have been using as an analogy brings out another facet of our life as agents. Orientation has two aspects; there are two ways that we can fail to have it. I can be ignorant of the lie of the land around me-not know the important locations which make it up or how they relate to each other. This ignorance can be cured by a good map. But then I can be lost in another way if I don't know how to place myself on this map. If I am a traveller from abroad and I ask where Mont Tremblant is,

you don't help me by taking me blindfolded up in a plane, then ripping the blindfold off and shouting, "There it is!" as we overfly the wooded hill. I know now (if I trust you) that I'm at Mont Tremblant. But in a meaningful

sense, I still don't know where I am because I can't place Tremblant in relation to other places in the known world.

In contrast, a native of the region might get lost on a trek in Mont Tremblant Park. She presumably knows well how the mountain relates to the



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Riviere Diable, St. Jovite, Lac Carre. But she has ceased to be able to place herself in this well-known terrain as she stumbles around the unfamiliar forest. The traveller in the plane has a good description of where he is but lacks the map which would give it an orienting sense for him; the trekker has the map but lacks knowledge of where she is on it.

By analogy, our orientation in relation to the good requires notonly some framework(s) which defines the shape of the qualitatively higher but also a sense of where we stand in relation to this. Nor is this question a potentially neutral one, to which we could be indifferent, taking any answer which effectively oriented us as satisfactory, no matter how distant it placed us from the good. On the contrary, we come here to one of the most basic aspirations of human beings, the need to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see as good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value. And how could it be otherwise, once we see that this orientation in relation to the good is essential to being a functional human agent? The fact that we have to place ourselves in a space which is defined by these qualitative distinctions cannot but mean that where we stand in relation to them must matter to us. Not being able to function without orientation in the space of the ultimately important means not being able to stop caring where we sit in it.

We are back here to what I called the second axis of strong evaluation in section 1.4, which concerns questions about what kind of life is worth living, e.g., what would be a rich, meaningful life, as against an empty one, or what would constitute an honourable life, and the like. What I am arguing here is that our being concerned with some or other issue of this range is not an optional matter for us, in just the way that the orientation which defines our identity is not, and ultimately for the same reason. Of course, the kind of issue which arises along this axis varies from person to person and, much more markedly, from culture to culture. I touched on this in section 1.4, particularly in connection with the saliency in our day of questions about the "meaning" of life. But so, of course, do the goods by which people define their identity vary-indeed, to the point where the very term 'identity' is somewhat anachronistic for premodern cultures-which doesn't mean, of course, that the need for a moral or spiritual orientation is any less absolute, but just that the issue cannot arise in the reflexive, person-related terms that

it does for us. My point is that the goods which define our spiritual orientation are the ones by which we will measure the worth of our lives; the two issues are indissolubly linked because they relate to the same core, and that is why I want to speak of the second issue, about the worth, or weight, or substance of my life, as a question of how I am 'placed' or 'situated' in relation to the good, or whether I am in 'contact' with it.

Typically, for contemporaries, the question can arise of the 'worthwhile-

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ness' or 'meaningfulness' of one's life, of whether it is (or has been) rich and substantial, or empty and trivial. These are expressions commonly used, images frequently evoked. Or: Is my life amounting to something? Does it have weight and substance, or is it just running away into nothing, into

something insubstantial? Another way the question can arise for us (below we will see better why) is whether our lives have unity, or whether one day is just following the next without purpose or sense, the past falling into a kind

of nothingness which is not the prelude, or harbinger, or opening, or early stage of anything, whether it is just 'temps perdu' in the double sense intended in the tide of Proust's celebrated work,21 that is, time which is both wasted and irretrievably lost, beyond recall, in which we pass as if we had never

been.

These are peculiarly modern forms and images, but we recognize the similarity with other forms, some of them also alive today, which go much further back in human history. The modern aspiration for meaning and substance in one's life has obvious affinities with longer-standing aspirations to higher being, to immortality. And the search for this kind of fuller being which is immortality, as John Dunne has shown so vividly,22 has itself taken

a number of forms: the aspiration to fame is to immortality in one form, that one's name be remembered, forever on people's lips. "The whole world is their memorial", as Pericles says of the fallen heroes.23 Eternal life is another. When St. Francis left his companions and family and the life of a rich and popular young man in Assisi, he must have felt in his own terms the insubstantiality of that life and have been looking for something fuller, wholer, to give himself more integrally to God, without stint.

The aspiration to fulness can be met by building something into one's life, some pattern of higher action, or some meaning; or it can be met by connecting one's life up with some greater reality or story. Or it can, of course, be both: these are alternative favoured descriptions, not necessarily

mutually exclusive features. We might think that the second kind of description is more "premodern", that it tends to occur earlier in human history. And in a sense this is true. Certainly earlier formulations of the issue of this second axis invoke some larger reality we should connect with: in some earlier religions, a cosmic reality; in Jewish-Christian monotheism, one transcending the cosmos. In certain early religions, like the Aztec, there was even a notion that the whole world runs down, loses substance or Being, and has to be periodically renewed in sacrificial contact with the gods.

But it would be a mistake to think that this kind of formulation has disappeared even for unbelievers in our world. On what is perhaps a more trivial level, SOme people get a sense of meaning in their lives from having Been There, i.e., having been a witness to big, important events in the world

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of politics, show business, or whatever. On a deeper level, some committed leftists see themselves as part of the socialist Revolution, or the march of human History, and this is what gives meaning, or fuller Being, to their lives.

But whatever favoured description, be it incorporating something in one's life or connecting to something greater outside, I use my images of 'contact' with the good, or 'how we are placed' in relation to the good, as generic terms, overarching this distinction and maintaining the primacy of my spatial metaphor.

Thus within certain religious traditions, 'contact' is understood as a relation to God and may be understood in sacramental terms or in those of prayer or devotion. For those who espouse the honour ethic, the issue concerns their place in the space of fame and infamy. The aspiration is to glory, or at least to avoid shame and dishonour, which would make life unbearable and non-existence seem preferable. For those who define the good as self-mastery through reason, the aspiration is to be able to order their lives, and the unbearable threat is of being engulfed and degraded by the irresistible craving for lower things. For those moved by one of the modern forms of the affirmation of ordinary life, it is above all important to see oneself as moved by and furthering this life, in one's work for instance, and one's family. People for whom meaning is given to life by expression must see themselves as bringing their potential to expression, if not in one of the recognized artistic or intellectual media, then perhaps in the shape of their lives themselves. And so on.

I am suggesting that we see all these diverse aspirations as forms of a craving which is ineradicable from human life. We have to be rightly placed in relation to the good. This may not be very obtrusive in our lives if things go well and if by and large we are satisfied with where we are. The believer in reason whose life is in order, the householder (I am talking of course about someone with a certain moral ideal, not the census category) who senses the fulness and richness of his family life as his children grow up and his life is filled with their nurture and achievement, these may be quite unaware of this aspiration as such, may be impatient or contemptuous of those whose lives are made tempestuous and restless by it. But this is only because the sense of value and meaning is well integrated into what they live. The householder's

sense of the value of what I have been calling ordinary life is woven through

the emotions and concerns of his everyday existence. It is what gives them their richness and depth.

At the other extreme, there are people whose lives are torn apart by this craving. They see themselves, over against the master of himself, as in the grip of lower drives, their lives disordered and soiled by their base attachments. Or they have -a sense of impotence: 'I can't get it together, can't shake that

habit (hold a regular job, etc.)'. Or even a sense of being evil: 'I can't

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somehow help hurting them badly, even though they love me. I want to hold back, but I get so distressed, I can't help lashing out'. Over against the dedicated fighter for a cause, they feel themselves on the outside: 'I can't really throw myself into this great cause/movement/religious life. I feel on the outside, untouched. I know it's great, in a way, but I can't feel moved by it.

I feel unworthy of it somehow'.

Or alternatively, someone might see in the same everyday life which so

enriches the householder only a narrow and smug satisfaction at a pitiable comfort, oblivious to the great issues of life, or the suffering of the masses, or

the sweep of history. In recent decades, we have seen the drama repeated that the ones who often react this way turn out precisely to be the children whose growth the householder so cherished. This is just one example, a peculiarly poignant one in our day, of how this aspiration to connection can motivate some of the most bitter conflicts in human life. It is in fact a fundamental drive, with an immense potential impact in our lives.

This craving for being in contact with or being rightly placed in relation to the good can be more or less satisfied in our lives as we acquire more fame, or introduce more order in our lives, or become more firmly settled in our families. But the issue also arises for us not just as a matter of more or less but as a question of yes or no. And this is the form in which it most deeply affects and challenges us. The yes/no question concerns not how near or far we are from what we see as the good, but rather the direction of our lives, towards or away from it, or the source of our motivations in regard to it.

We find this kind of question clearly posed in the religious tradition. The Puritan wondered whether he was saved. The question was whether he was called or not. If called, he was 'justified'. But if justified, he might still be a long way from being 'sanctified': this latter was a continuous process, a road that he could be more or less advanced on. My claim is that this isn't peculiar to Puritan Christianity, but that all frameworks permit of, indeed, place us before an absolute question of this kind, framing the context in which we ask the relative questions about how near or far we are from the good.

This is obviously the case of those secular derivatives of Christianity, which see history in terms of a struggle between good and evil, progress and reaction, socialism and exploitation. The insistent absolute question here is: Which side are you on ? This permits of only two answers, however near or distant we may be from the triumph of the right. But it is also true for other conceptions which are not at all polarized in this way.

The believer in disengaged objectification, who sees the mastery of reason as a kind of rational control over the emotions attained through the distance of scientific scrutiny, the kind of modern of whom Freud is a prototypical example and for whom he is often a model, obviously sees this mastery as attained slowly and step by step. Indeed, it is never complete and is always in



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danger of being undone. And yet behind the more-or-Iess question of mastery achieved lies an absolute question about basic orientation: the disengaged agent has taken a once-for-all stance in favour of objectification; he has broken with religion, superstition, resisted the blandishments of those pleasing and flattering world-views which hide the austere reality of the human condition in a disenchanted universe. He has taken up the scientific attitude. The direction of his life is set, however little mastery he may have actually achieved. And this is a source of deep satisfaction and pride to him. The householder, who sees the meaning of life in the rich joys of family love, in the concerns of providing and caring for wife and children, may feel that he is far from appreciating these joys at their full or from giving himself to these concerns unstintingly. But he senses that his ultimate allegiance is there, that against those who decry or condemn family life or who look on it as a pusillanimous second best, he is deeply committed to building over time a web of relationships which gives fulness and meaning to human life. His

direction is set.

Or again, someone who sees the fulfilment of life in some form of expressive activity may be far from this fulfilment, but she may nevertheless see herself as striving towards it and approaching it, even though she never fully encompasses what she projects for herself. Of course, in this case, the issue may concern not only her basic stance, as with disengaged objectifica­ tion, and not only her deepest motivation, as with the householder, but the objective limits of possibility which frame her life. People bent on an artistic career may feel they have it in them to do something significant; or alternatively, they may come to feel one day that they just haven't got what it takes. Or their despair may spring from a sense that some external limitations stand in the way: that people of their class, or race, or sex, or poverty will never be allowed to develop themselves in the relevant ways. Many women in our day have felt so excluded from careers, which they saw as deeply fulfilling (for a whole host of reasons, to do with recognition as well as with expression and the significant achievements for human welfare that these jobs entailed), by external barriers which had nothing to do with their own authentic desires and attitudes. These barriers helped set the direction of their lives, and their relation to what they identified as crucial goods.

This array of examples puts us on the track of why the absolute question not only can arise but inevitably does arise for us. The issue that recurs in different forms in the above cases is the one I put in terms of the direction of our lives. It concerned our most fundamental motivation, or our basic allegiance, or the outer limits of relevant possibilities for us, and hence the direction our lives were moving in or could move in. Because our lives move. Here we connect with another basic feature of human existence. The issue of

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our condition can never be exhausted for us by what we *are,* because we are always also changing and *becoming.* It is only slowly that we grow through infancy and childhood to be autonomous agents who have something like our own place relative to the good at all. And even then, that place is constantly challenged by the new events of our lives, as well as constantly under potential revision, as we experience more and mature. So the issue for us has to be not only where we *are,* but where we're *going;* and though the first may be a matter of more or less, the latter is a question of towards or away from, an issue of yes or no. That is why an absolute question always frames our relative ones. Since we cannot do without an orientation to the good, and since we cannot be indifferent to our place relative to this good, and since this place is something that must always change and become, the issue of the direction of our lives must arise for us.

Here we connect up with another inescapable feature of human life. I have been arguing that in order to make minimal sense of our lives, in order to have an identity, we need an orientation to the good, which means some sense of qualitative discrimination, of the incomparably higher. Now we see that this sense of the good has to be woven into my understanding of my life as an unfolding story. But this is to state another basic condition of making sense of ourselves, that we grasp our lives in a *narrative.* This has been much discussed recently, and very insightfully.24 It has often been remarked25 that making sense of one's life as a story is also, like orientation to the good, not an optional extra; that our lives exist also in this space of questions, which only a coherent narrative can answer. In order to have a sense of who we are,

we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going. Heidegger, in *Being and Time,26* described the inescapable temporal

structure of being in the world: that from a sense of what we have become, among a range of present possibilities, we project our future being. This is the structure of any situated action, of course, however trivial. From my sense of being at the drugstore, among the possible other destinations, I project to walk home. But it applies also to this crucial issue of my place relative to the good. From my sense of where I am relative to it, and among the different

POssibilities, I project the direction of my life in relation to it. My life always

has this degree of narrative understanding, that I understand my present action in the form of an 'and then': there was A (what I am), and then I do

B (what I project to become).

But narrative must play a bigger role than merely structuring my present. What I am has to be understood as what I have become. This is normally so even for such everyday matters as knowing where I am. I usually know this

panly through my sense of how I have come there. But it is inescapably so for the issue of where I am in moral space. I can't know in a flash that I have

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attained perfection, or am halfway there. Of course, there are experiences in which we are carried away in rapture and may believe ourselves spoken to by angels; or less exaltedly, in which we sense for a minute the incredible fulness and intense meaning of life; or in which we feel a great surge of power and mastery over, the difficulties that usually drag us down. But there is always an issue of what to make of these instants, how much illusion or mere 'tripping' is involved in them, how genuinely they reflect real growth or goodness. We can only answer this kind of question by seeing how they fit into our surrounding life, that is, what part they play in a narrative of this life. We have to move forward and back to make a real assessment.

To the extent that we move back, we determine what we are by what we have become, by the story of how we got there. Orientation in moral space turns out again to be similar to orientation in physical space. We know where we are through a mixture of recognition of landmarks before us and a sense of how we have travelled to get here, as I indicated above. If I leave the local drugstore, and turn the corner to find the Taj Mahal staring me in the face, I am more likely to conclude that the movie industry is once again earning its tax write-offs in Montreal than to believe myself suddenly by the Jumna. This is analogous to my distrust of sudden rapture. Part of my sense of its genuineness will turn on how I got there. And our entire understanding beforehand of states of greater perfection, however defined, is strongly shaped by our striving to attain them. We come to understand in part what really characterizes the moral states we seek through the very effort of trying, and at first failing, to achieve them.

Of course, the immediate experience *could* be strong and convincing

enough on its own. If it really were all there, Taj, Jumna, the city of Agra, bullocks, sky, everything, I would have to accept my new location, however mysterious my translation. Something analogous may exist spiritually. But even here, your past striving and moral experience would alone enable you to understand and identify this rapturous state. You would recognize it only through having striven in a certain direction, and that means again that you know what you are through what you have become.

Thus making sense of my present action, when we are not dealing with such trivial questions as where I shall go in the next five minutes but with the issue of my place relative to the good, requires a narrative understanding of my life, a sense of what I have become which can only be given in a story. And as I project my life forward and endorse the existing direction or give it a new one, I project a future story, not just a state of the momentary future but a bent for my whole life to come. This sense of my life as having a direction towards what I am not yet is what Alasdair MacIntyre captures in his notion quoted above that life is seen as a 'quest,.27



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This of course connects with an important philosophical issue about

the unity of a life, which has once more been brought to the fore by Derek Parfit's interesting book, *R easons and Persons.28* Parfit defends some version

of the view that a human life is not an a priori unity or that personal identity doesn't have to be defined in terms of a whole life. It is perfectly defensible

for me to consider (what I would conventionally call) my earlier, say, pre­ adolescent self as another person and, similarly, to consider what "I" (as

we normally put it) shall be several decades in the future as still another person.

This whole position draws on the Lockean (further developed in the

Humean) understanding of personal identity. Parfit's arguments draw on examples which are of a kind inaugurated by Locke, where because of the

unusual and perplexing relation of mind to body our usual intuitions about the unity of a person are disturbed.29 From my point of view, this whole conception suffers from a fatal flaw. Personal identity is the identity of the self, and the self is understood as an object to be known. It is not on all fours with other objects, true. For Locke it has this peculiarity that it essentially

appears to itself. Its being is inseparable from self-awareness.3o Personal identity is then a matter of self-consciousness.31 But it is not at all what I have

been calling the self, something which can exist only in a space of moral issues. Self-perception is the crucial defining characteristic of the person for Locke.32 It is the vestigial element corresponding to the four features which distinguish the self from an ordinary object that I outlined in section *2.2.* All that remains of the insight that the self is crucially an object of significance to itself is this requirement of self-consciousness. But what has been left out is precisely the *mattering.* The self is defined in neutral terms, outside of any essential framework of questions. In fact, of course, Locke recognizes that we are not indifferent to ourselves; but he has no inkling of the self as a being which essentially is constituted by a certain mode of self-concern-in contrast to the concern we cannot but have about the quality of our experiences as pleasurable or painful. We shall see in Part II how this neutral and

"bleached" sense of the person corresponds to Locke's aspiration to a

disengaged subject of rational control. We have here a paradigm example of what I discussed in the previous section: how the assertion of the modern individual has spawned an erroneous understanding of the self.

This is what I want to call the 'punctual' or 'neutral' self-'punctual' because the self is defined in abstraction from any constitutive concerns and hence from any identity in the sense in which I have been using the term in the previous section. Its only constitutive property is self-awareness. This is the self that Hume set out to find and, predictably, failed to find. And it is basically the same notion of the self that Parfit is working with, one whose





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"identity over time just involves . . . psychological connectedness and/or psychological continuity, with the right kind of cause".33

If we think of the self as neutral, then it does perhaps make sense to hold that it is an ultimately arbitrary question how we count selves. Our picking out of enumerable objects in the world can be thought to depend ultimately on the interests and concerns we bring to them. My car to me is a single thing. To a skilled garage mechanic, it may be an assemblage of discrete functioning units. There is no sense to the question what it "really" is, *an* s;ch, as it were. But if my position here is right, then we can't think of human persons, of selves in the sense that we are selves, in this light at all. They are not neutral, punctual objects; they exist only in a certain space of questions, through certain constitutive concerns. The questions or concerns touch on the nature of the good that I orient myself by and on the way I am placed in relation to it. But then what counts as a unit will be defined by the scope of the concern, by just what is in question. And what is in question is, generally and characteristically, the shape of my life *as a* whole. It is not something up for

arbitrary determination.

We can see this in two dimensions, the past and future "ekstaseis" that Heidegger talks about.34 I don't have a sense of where/what I am, as I argued above, without some understanding of how I have got there or become so. My sense of myself is of a being who is growing and becoming. In the very nature of things this cannot be instantaneous. It is not only that I need time and many incidents to sort out what is relatively fixed and stable in my character, temperament, and desires from what is variable and changing, though that is true. It is also that as a being who grows and becomes I can only know myself through the history of my maturations and regressions, overcomings and defeats. My self-understanding necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative.

But does that mean that I have to consider my whole past life as that of a single person ? Isn't there room for decision here? After all, even what happened before I was born might on one reading be seen as part of the process of my becoming. Isn't birth itself an arbitrary point? There is perhaps an easy answer to this last question. There dearly is a kind of continuity running through my lifetime thl'l.t doesn't extend before it. But the objector seems to have some point here: don't we often want to speak of what we were as children or adolescents in terms like this: 'I was a different person then'?

But it is dear that this image doesn't have the import of a real

counter-example to the thesis I'm defending. And this becomes obvious when we look at another aspect of our essential concern here. We want our lives to have meaning, or weight, or substance, or to grow towards some fulness, or

however the concern is formulated that we have been discussing in this section. But this means our whole lives. If necessary, we want the future to

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"redeem" the past, to make it part of a life story which has sense or purpose,

to take it up in a meaningful unity.35 A famous, perhaps for us modems a paradigm, example of what this can mean is recounted by Proust in his *A* La

*recherche du temps perdu.* In the scene in the Guermantes's library, the narrator recovers the full meaning of his past and thus restores the time which was "lost" in the two senses I mentioned above. The formerly irretrievable

past is recovered in its unity with the life yet to live, and all the "wasted" time

noW has a meaning, as the time of preparation for the work of the writer who will give shape to this unity.36

To repudiate my childhood as unredeemable in this sense is to accept a

kind of mutilation as a person; it is to fail to meet the full challenge involved in making sense of my life. This is the sense in which it is *not* up for arbitrary

determination what the temporal limits of my personhood are.37

If we look towards the future, the case is even clearer. On the basis of what I am I project my future. On what basis could I consider that only, say, the next ten years were "my" future, and that my oid age would be that of another person? Here too we note that a future project will often go beyond my death. I plan the future for my family, my country, my cause. But there is a different sense in which I am responsible for myself (at least in our culture). How could I justify considering myself in my sixties, say, as another person for this purpose? And how would *his* life get its meaning?

It seems clear from all this that there is something like an a priori unity of a human life through its whole extent. Not quite, because one can imagine cultures in which it might be split. Perhaps at some age, say forty, people go through a horrendous ritual passage, in which they go into ecstasy and then emerge as, say, the reincarnated ancestor. That is how they describe things and live them. In that culture there is a sense to treating this whole life cycle as containing two persons. But in the absence of such a cultural understand­ ing, e.g., in our world, the supposition that I could be two temporally

succeeding selves is either an overdramatized image, or quite false. It runs

against the structural features of a self as a being who exists in a space of concerns.38

In the previous section we saw that our being selves is essentially linked to our sense of the good, and that we achieve selfhood among other selves. Here I have been arguing that the issue of how we are placed in relation to this good is of crucial and inescapable concern for us, that we cannot but strive to give our lives meaning or substance, and that this means that we understand ourselves inescapably in narrative.

. My underlying thesis is that there is a close connection between the

�fferent conditions of identity, or of one's life making sense, that I have been diSCUSSing. One could put it this way: because we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and thus determine our place relative to it and hence determine



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the direction of our lives, we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a 'quest'. But one could perhaps start from another point: because we have to determine our place in relation to the good, therefore we cannot be without an orientation to it, and hence must see our life in story. From whichever direction, I see these conditions as connected facets of the same reality, inescapable structural requirements of human agency.