

THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF THE SELF- UNDERSTANDING VIEW

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ABSTRACT: Marya Schechtman has argued that contemporary attempts to save Locke's account of personal identity suffer the same faults that are to be found in Locke, among which is an inability to capture the role our unconscious states play. To avoid these problems, she advocates giving up the mainstream Psychological View and adopting a narrative account like her 'Self-Understanding' View that, she claims, has the further virtue of maintaining important insights from Locke. My paper argues that it is misleading to understand the Psychological View as sharing Locke's commitments and that (partly as a result) Schechtman has not isolated a problem that needs fixing or any reason for going narrative. It further argues that the Self-Understanding View is a great deal more at odds with Locke's view than Schechtman cares to acknowledge.

KEYWORDS: personal identity, narrative theory, psychological continuity theory, Locke, Parfit, Schechtman.

THERE ARE TWO currently popular but quite different ways of answering the question of what constitutes personal identity: the one is usually called the psychological continuity theory (or Psychological View) and the other the narrative theory.¹ Despite their differences, they do both claim to be providing an account—the correct account—of what makes someone the same person over time. Marya Schechtman has presented an

important argument in this journal (Schechtman 2005) for a version of the narrative view (the 'Self-Understanding View') over the psychological one, an argument which has received an overwhelmingly positive response from commentators (Gillett 2005; Heinmaa 2005; Phillips 2006). I wish to argue that this response is understandable but misguided, and that the case Schechtman offered is anything but conclusive.

I set out some background to the debate before I set out the details of her case against the Psychological View. One thing this does is to establish the need for the argument that Schechtman offers, in that a narrative theory like her 'Self-Understanding View' has no *prima facie* advantage over its opposition—it needs to show why the mainstream theory does not work before it has some purchase. Her strategy is to set up the Psychological View as a contemporary attempt to save John Locke's theory of personal identity and to argue that it is both too weak and too strong in ways analogous to Locke's theory. Her theory, on the other hand, can retain the insights of Locke's view while avoiding its pitfalls. I argue that it is misleading to present the Psychological View as sharing Locke's commitments and that (partly as a result) Schechtman has not isolated a problem that needs fixing or any reason for going narrative. I explain how the

Psychological View is quite capable of dealing with the problems she raises regarding the importance of unconscious states to identity. Finally, I argue that Schechtman's Self-Understanding View is a great deal more at odds with Locke's view than she cares to acknowledge and that its points of overlap with Locke's view do not recommend it over the Psychological View.

BACKGROUND: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW AND THE NARRATIVE VIEW

The answer to the question of what makes a person the same person over time provided by the Psychological View is that it is a (unique) relation of psychological continuity. Derek Parfit provides the details:

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. (1984, 206)

The connections to which he refers are links of memory (or, rather, apparent memory), continued beliefs, desires, projects, emotions, and so on. It is important that such direct links are not required over a whole life; they may only be short term. It is the continuity that overlapping links provide that constitutes someone's persistence.

The narrative view's answer is that to be the same person is to have a particular self-understanding or 'sense of self.' This sense of self involves seeing experiences and actions as part of an intelligible whole. Sometimes, this is expressed as having the capacity to tell a coherent story about ourselves—thus the label of 'narrative.'

We will get on to the differences later; at this stage, it is significant to note that the two views share a great deal when it comes to the basic concept of *person*. Both are happy to give a nod to Locke's definition:

Person stands for . . . a thinking, intelligent being that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places. (1975, 334)

To be more specific, they agree on (and make a great deal of) the following three features, which

I quote from Anthony Rudd. A person is

- a. a temporal being
- b. a being possessed of self-consciousness
- c. an agent. (2009, 61)

Narrative theorists often suggest that these features lead us straight into narrative territory and that makes a convenient point to begin the discussion.

FIRST STEPS TOWARD NARRATIVE

A common structure can be observed in the steps of reasoning from the agreed constraints on the concept of person to a narrative theory.² The usual suggestion is that the constraints, once properly understood, reflect a much richer account than a superficial glance might suggest. Along this line, Anthony Rudd starts with the notion that persons are agents. That means, he says, that they must be beings that act for reasons (Rudd 2009, 61). The story does not stop there. Following MacIntyre (1981, 195), actions need to be understood; intelligible actions are those that can be represented as episodes in a narrative.

Something similar applies in the case of the self-consciousness condition. Being self-conscious involves being aware of myself as acting in a certain way to bring about certain results (Rudd 2009, 62). This awareness also requires understanding—making sense of myself, the world, and the other people I interact with. All those things make sense to me because I can locate them in a narrative (2009, 62). "The existence of that self-conception gives meaning to what I am doing now" (2009, 63).

Schechtman follows a similar route from the self-consciousness condition. To be self-conscious is to have a self-conception. That is not simply a matter of thinking of past experiences as yours. A person "must see her life as unfolding according to an intelligible trajectory, where present states follow meaningfully from past ones, and the future is anticipated to bear certain predictable relations to the past" (Schechtman 2005, 18). The crucial difference is that they follow *meaningfully*—that is, in their inherent interconnectedness. The self-consciousness essential to personal identity requires a sense of a stable self (2005, 19). This

involves constant self-monitoring: being “interested in the character of our experience, and also in what we should do and what kind of person we should be” (2005, 18). This is only a sketch of sort of reasoning involved, but it illustrates both the narrative angle and that the case is suggestive rather than conclusive.

So we have two answers to the question, ‘What constitutes personal identity?’ One says that narrative or self-understanding in narrative terms is essential to personal identity and the other says that it is not. At some level, the two theories are in competition, and so we need to make a decision against at least one of them (or offer some other resolution). What we have seen so far in this section seems to be a criticism of the mainstream view, but it may amount to no more than a statement of, and insistence on, an alternative. It only represents a serious challenge if the move from the shared conditions to narrativity is indeed unavoidable, or if there are serious shortcomings in the mainstream view that this move will solve. Let us consider the first option.

DOES AGENCY COMMIT US TO NARRATIVE IDENTITY?

The question that both theories claim to be answering is about personal identity or persistence—the question of what makes me the same person over time. Locke’s account of personhood that I alluded to, and from which the shared claims are taken, arose in that context—discussing the different identity conditions for the different sorts of things that persist over time. Locke makes the point that different kinds of things may have differing identity conditions—kinds with distinctive features may well have distinctive identity conditions. However, it does not follow that all aspects of a kind—even all distinctive ones—will feature in the relevant identity conditions.

We should accept that persons are agents. They do indeed act for reasons, as Rudd suggests, and that is what makes them morally significant. That means to be a person you must be something that is capable of acting for reasons. The difference between acting *for reasons* and merely behaving or acting, but not for reasons, is whether or not you

have a desire and/or belief with content relevant to the behavior. There is good reason to believe that many of our actions fit into the category of acting without a reason. Actions that we undertake automatically, without any form of prior deliberation, still count as actions but allowing that they are automatic amounts to ruling out a role for reasons in their production. In other cases, although the agents may point to supposed reasons, there is evidence that those reasons played no role in the action. A case in point is the study by Nisbett and Ross (1980, 207) in which subjects are asked to compare items in terms of their quality. The subjects overwhelmingly rate certain items as better simply based on their position—the items are identical. At the same time, the subjects insist that there is no direction bias influencing their choice, but only a judgment as to quality. Richard Holton suggests that this is a case of a choice—an action—preceding judgment; in other words it is not an action *for* a reason. He further suggests that this pattern may be a general one in our behavior (Holton 2009, 64–8). To insist that such actions as well as automatic ones *are* nevertheless done for reasons is to use ‘reasons’ in such a loose way as to rob the term of any serious significance. The cases I am pointing to are cases in which you do not consciously have any relevant belief or desire. Your actions may not be autonomous, but they are still your actions. And in all these cases, you remain a person and the same person.

If we demand acting-for-reasons in a strong enough sense to introduce it and narrative as a requirement in identity conditions, then an individual will sometimes be the same person and sometimes not, depending on whether or not they are acting for reasons. That will also apply to those who are sometimes self-deluded and think they are acting for reasons when they are not—and that is all of us. The simple conceptual requirement that persons are agents requires only that they sometimes have beliefs and/or desires with content relevant to behavior and are able to deliberate about their behavior. It is a hopeless enthymeme to move straight from that to a narrative account.

Rudd at one stage seems to acknowledge this. He accepts that an alternative—say, causal—account of action (not that I am insisting on one

in the argument above) would not lead us from agency to narrative. He explains that what he is trying to point out is that the narrative account is not an arbitrary construction; rather, it has a firm place in the hermeneutic approach to understanding people (Rudd 2009, 63). All he has argued, then, is that if you follow the hermeneutic approach, then narrative follows from agency. What is missing is the case for following the hermeneutic approach in the first place. If narrative theories are to establish themselves as the way to go, they must offer more than this.

Schechtman does not follow the route of insisting on a conceptual link alone. Before outlining the view, she argues that some such view is needed because of insurmountable difficulties in the mainstream Psychological View—difficulties that a shift of emphasis to self-understanding will solve.

THE PROBLEM THAT NEEDS FIXING IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW

Schechtman contends that the psychological continuity theory is in some ways too weak and in other ways too strong to account for what constitutes personal identity. She presents it as a descendant of Locke's memory theory (where a person retains their identity in virtue of the 'same consciousness' or—as it is usually understood—as being able to remember their experiences), which she sees as suffering from these deficits. The psychological continuity theory is meant to remedy them, but fails on both counts.

Locke's memory theory was too weak in that simply remembering an experience is not enough to make you the person who had that experience. If a neurosurgeon were somehow to implant the memory of an experience had by her grandmother in my brain that would not make me her grandmother. On the other hand, it seems obvious that we can forget experiences that are ours and that remain ours. In denying this, the theory is too strong.

The psychological continuity theory (as Schechtman presents it) is designed to overcome these problems, while starting from the same basic insight that persons are essentially self-conscious

entities. Rather than allowing a single memory to constitute identity, the psychological theorist contends that there must be 'enough' memory (and other) connections between people to make them the same: some hard to specify quota must be reached. They also contend that simply having memory experiences will not be enough; those experiences must be 'properly caused' by the original experience.

To overcome the failure of the memory theory to provide a necessary criterion for identity, the new psychological theory asserts that a few lost memories will not matter as long as enough other memory connections remain in place. Even so, it seems that someone may forget *all* their memories of some past time and yet we would still want to say they were their experiences. The psychological theorist answers this with the suggestion that it is not direct memory connections that are necessary, but overlapping chains of memory. As long as these are in place, there will be personal identity, even though no memories of that past time remain. And the connections need not be only memory ones; beliefs, desires, values, and so on can also contribute to identity.

Despite these modifications, Schechtman argues that the new version fends no better than the old. Its account remains too weak to constitute identity. How will adding more memories help where one is not enough? Adding other psychological states is no better: "[T]hese give us even less conscious access to the past" (Schechtman 2005, 15). Insisting that memory experiences be properly caused by the original experience to count as that person's simply reintroduces an aspect that Locke's account was expressly avoiding. Schechtman reminds us that Locke was arguing that identity was not a matter of sameness of substance in putting forward his 'sameness of consciousness' account. As far as she can see, the psychological theorist's 'properly caused' requirement is ultimately no more than the demand that the original experience and the memory experience occur in the same body. The account saves the theory, but at the cost of adding sameness of substance—precisely what Locke's account was designed to avoid.

The new psychological account is also in important respects too strong, according to Schecht-

man. This emerges in its response to the question of which experiences count as mine (just as it did with the memory theory). The theory no longer demands that we must remember an experience for it to be ours. As long as we are connected through overlapping psychological chains to a time when we were conscious of the experience, it will count as ours. That goes some way toward including the experiences that contribute to identity, but not far enough:

It seems clear, however, that experiences of which we are not conscious can be part of our psychological lives. To name just two species, dispositional states and repressed states seem as if they can contribute to identity every bit as much as consciously entertained states, but they are ruled out as attributable to the person on this view. (Schechtman 2005, 16)

She pushes the point further as well:

There is an important difference between an experience that is mine because I experienced it in the past but have now forgotten it entirely, and one that is mine because I have repressed it and am still suffering the symptoms of that repression, and there is no clear way to capture this difference in the psychological continuity theory. (Schechtman 2005, 16)

On top of this, there may be unconscious states that were never conscious experiences that may be features of our psychological lives. I pointed to the case of someone being self-deluded in Section 3, and that would count as just such a case. Once again, Schechtman's point is that the Psychological View has no means of attributing such states to a person (2005, 17).

HOW THE SELF-UNDERSTANDING OR NARRATIVE VIEW COMES TO THE RESCUE

What we need, then, for a theory of what constitutes personal identity is a theory that, first, retains the Lockean insight of the importance of self-consciousness. Second, it must be able to attribute or deny experiences to a person without recourse to substances. Third, it must be able to attribute certain unconscious experiences to a person and to distinguish between experiences that were ours but are now 'dead to us' and those that we have repressed but still play a role in our psychological

lives. Those are the merits that Schechtman claims for her Self-Understanding View.

We have met most of the central claims of the theory already, but it is worth seeing how they apply in solving the problems of the Psychological View. To be a person is to understand yourself as a "persisting being in terms of the demands we make that our lives be intelligible" (Schechtman 2005, 20). This means that you follow the events of your life, understanding how they fit meaningfully together, and concerned that future actions do so as well. This tracking will not always be explicit or conscious (although that would be 'worthy work'). It is this self-conception that constitutes your identity.

The central place in the theory of the sense of yourself as persisting retains Locke's insight regarding self-consciousness. Experiences are to be attributed to a person according to whether or not they see them as their own or whether their existence as part of the person's psychology has to be postulated to make sense of that person's course of life. If it is necessary to make a person's life intelligible that we ascribe an unconscious experience or desire to her, then that unconscious experience or desire is hers. She herself may not recognize this, but that does not mean it is not hers (2005, 20). And so we have a way of attributing experiences without any recourse to substance, as well as a way of acknowledging the role of unconscious aspects of psychology.

WAS THERE ACTUALLY A PROBLEM THAT NEEDED FIXING?

One concern that the psychological theorist might immediately express in the face of Schechtman's challenge is that the theory is set up as an immediate descendant of Locke's memory theory. The initial concern may just be that this is inaccurate, but it does also play an important role in the challenge, and is worth some attention. Psychological continuity theories certainly share Locke's account of persons and agree with a great deal of what he says. But they rarely occur as responses to 'substance' theories as Locke's does, and which is how Schechtman casts them, holding them to this as a commitment. The archetypal psychological

account—Derek Parfit’s—is a response to *nonreductionist* theories of personal identity. Although there is some overlap between the set of those and the set of substance theories, they are certainly not the same. Nor are Parfit’s concerns at all the same as Locke’s.

This becomes relevant almost immediately in Schechtman’s challenge. She charges that the psychological theory cannot deny that the memory of the surgeon’s grandmother’s experience makes the recipient the grandmother on the grounds of its peculiar causal history. This is because that would involve requiring the normal causal history between a memory and a person’s experience, which is to require that experience and memory occur in the same physical substance; and appeal to substances is not allowed. Normal causal routes will feature in the psychological theory,³ although it seems to me more likely that the psychological theorist will deny this counterexample on the other grounds that Schechtman suggests—it is obviously not enough memory to affect identity. But anyway, psychological theorists need feel no guilt that a particular causal route runs through a physical substance. They do not deny that many important causal processes will occur in physical substances; it is the causal process that is doing the work for identity and not that it is in *this particular substance* that it is occurring in that is in any way crucial.⁴

That the psychological theory has a different target—nonreductionism—is also relevant to the other strand of this part of her challenge. Schechtman dismisses any attempt to appeal to more than one memory in denying the significance of the transplanted one for identity. She comments, “there is, of course, a great deal of difficulty in . . . finding a non-arbitrary number of connections to determine identity” (2005, 12) and repeats this comment elsewhere.⁵ The context of the psychological theorist’s debate indicates why this is beside the point. They are taking on theorists who insist that identity is always determinate. The thrust of the reductionist (psychological theorist) case is that this is not always so. That the difference between identity and non-identity can depend on an arbitrary number of connections is only to

be expected, since in the borderline cases where this situation arises, the question of identity is an empty one in the picture the reductionist is painting (Parfit 1995, 22). To suggest that this might be embarrassing is simply to miss the point, and it is an embarrassment the psychological theorist should not feel.

The Psychological View not only gets misrepresented in its origins, but in its content as well. Although Schechtman often suggests an accurate version—that what makes you the same person over time are overlapping chains of psychological connections—she also characterizes the view in a different way:

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. (2005, 15)

There are some psychological theorists (‘four-dimensionalists’) whose theory bears some resemblance to this characterization. But, although even they would object to the details of the description, this does not represent anything like the mainstream position. The standard psychological theorist does not try and reduce a person to a conglomeration of person-stages. They reduce personal identity to (unique) psychological continuity that is, in turn, to be understood in terms of overlapping psychological connections. Those are causal connections between experiences and (apparent) memories, they are continuing beliefs, desires, intentions, and so on that will under certain conditions be causally effective with other beliefs, desires, and experiences and will sometimes be unactivated dispositions. The resulting picture is not that unlike Schechtman’s own—except that it uses causation as its glue rather than meaning and understanding. The self-monitoring that Schechtman sees in self-consciousness is indeed crucial there, as it is in any form of consciousness, but it is a causal process, an internal form of perception which is itself a causal process.⁶

That brings us back to a specific point in Schechtman’s criticism. She insists that the psychological continuity view cannot accommodate psychological states of which we are not conscious—such as dispositional states and repressed

states—and insists that these can be integral to our identity. But this claim has no foundation unless the psychological theorist is committed to a very crude account of the workings of psychology lodged with Locke in the 17th century. There is simply no reason why dispositional states of which we are not conscious, or of which we only become conscious at specific episodes, will not feature as connections making up a continuous psychology. They are precisely the sort of causal connection that the psychological theorist has in mind. A continuing belief is not a picture held up continually in consciousness. It is a dispositional state. It will be realized in physical form, but—once again—that is not to commit the theory to a disguised substantialism. It could be realized at some other time in another substance. *Person* is a functional kind (as conditions b and c on p. 34 reflect), and psychological theorists have read their functionalism in the philosophy of mind.⁷

Insofar as repressed states are causally effective on other psychological states and on behavior, and are causally grounded in (probably traumatic) experiences, they will also feature in the connections that interest the psychological theorist. Indeed, how are they to be better understood than as states that *affect* behavior without the person's being aware of them?

Schechtman's final criticism of the psychological continuity view is that it is unable to capture the difference between an experience "that is mine because I experienced it in the past but have now forgotten it entirely, and one that is mine because I have repressed it and am still suffering the symptoms of that repression" (2005, 16). And yet the difference that the psychological theorist needs is there in her own words. The one is dead to us, that is, it no longer has any causal traces and cannot have any effect on our current experience - it is one of which, in Locke's words, the person "could be made to have no consciousness at all" (1975, 347). The other is one that can indeed, and continues to, have effects—in this case the suffering that Schechtman mentions. The difference is a causal one: just the sort of difference that has a central place in the psychological continuity theory.

FIRST STEPS AWAY FROM NARRATIVE

I have been arguing that Schechtman's objections to the psychological continuity theory are less than conclusive. I argued earlier that we need a convincing case against this view before the claims narrative theorists make about links between identity and narrative become an issue. But even so, it will be worth considering Schechtman's alternative in its own right and whether it is up to performing the rescue task she has set for it in the light of the discussion so far.

As a way in to this section, we can start with the 'important difference' that ended the previous one. I argued that the Psychological View was well placed to distinguish between experiences that were ours but are now forgotten and ones that are repressed but active, and to accommodate both. But it is by no means clear to me that the Self-Understanding View copes nearly as well with the former category of experience. Its criterion for an experience being mine is that it must be postulated to make sense of my course of life. If an experience is, as she describes it, 'dead to me,' then it does not sound at all necessary in making my life intelligible—but then (on her own terms), it does not count as mine, even though she has insisted it is.

This (possibly not very serious) point aside, you might well be tempted to take up my earlier suggestion that the two theories are not all that different. The one will not see the exercise of wondering which experiences to ascribe to a person as nearly as important as the other does (the Psychological View is not that interested in what *sort* of person you are), but in most cases they will ascribe the same experiences to the same people. The psychological theorist might see the narrative theorist as providing an epistemology—an account of how we go about ascribing experiences to people—whereas their interest is in what makes you the same person. However, it seems that they need not see themselves as being in serious opposition.

Nevertheless, the claims of opposition remain and theorists like Schechtman deny that they are just fulfilling this lesser role. And there is indeed a serious difference here, and it is at a point where Schechtman's grounding of her discussion in Locke might prove uncomfortable for her. Schechtman is insistent that persons construct themselves. Her claim is not just that self-understanding or a sense of self is important or even required for something to qualify as a person, but that in self-understanding we construct ourselves as persons—that we “determine our identity” (18). One of the crucial issues between psychological continuity theories and narrative theories is whether or not personal identity is this sort of construct. It is worth noting that the issue in the discussion was originally expressed as finding out what *constitutes* personal identity, not as finding out how it is constructed. In her turn from constitution to construction, Schechtman once again finds her inspiration in Locke:

Locke tells us that we make ourselves selves, and so determine our identity, by forming self-conscious conceptions of ourselves as persisting subjects. (Schechtman 2005, 18)

But Locke tells us no such thing. He tells us that, to be a person, a thinking being must be able to “consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places” (1975, 334). He tells us that a past action of his is “appropriated to me now by this self-consciousness” (1975, 341). But that is a long way from saying that I make myself a self. There is no sense in what he says of something *constructive* on the part of the thinking being going on—the ‘appropriating’ that he mentions just describes a connection, not an activity: the action is mine because I am conscious of it (being conscious of it makes it appropriate to me), not because I appropriate it to myself. It may be that we nowadays want to ascribe a greater role to ourselves in memory, but that is not what is going on in Locke. He does—famously—say that ‘person’ is a forensic term; but that means no more than that it has special significance in a legal context. He elaborates that it, “belongs only to intelligent agents capable of a law” (Locke 1975, 346). Once again, there is no serious claim to be found in Locke of a being ‘making itself’ by un-

derstanding itself. When he says “consciousness . . . makes the same Person” (Locke 1975, 341), that ‘makes’ is not used in the sense of ‘constructs’; in the context it is clear that it is used in the sense in which a soul makes part of a human being—that is, as some sort of constituent or requirement. A self for him is a persisting thing with distinctive conditions of persistence, not identical to a human or immaterial substance (1975, 341). This is not a construct dependent on our interpretation. He may be opposed to substances as the carriers of identity, but he still sees persons as independently existing things: not substances, but not just constructs either.

I insisted earlier that the psychological continuity theory is not best seen as taking up Locke's project or in sharing his commitments, and its proponents rarely talk in the terms of substances and real essences. But in its presenting an account of persons as persisting things that are not constructs, at least, the theory does fall in Locke's tradition. That does not make it right and the narrative view wrong. But if you think that you as a person are a thing whose existence does not depend on how others see you, then you might think twice before adopting a narrative view, even if Schechtman had given you reason to do so.

There is one way in which Schechtman is very close to Locke. It does not help her current case against the Psychological View, but considering it might shed some light on the debate. One of Locke's preoccupations is with personal responsibility. Schechtman points to this, and outlines how Locke's emphasis on consciousness offers an explanation of how responsibility ties to identity: we can be responsible for actions “because we can know them to be our actions” (2005, 16). The Psychological View, in extending the range of psychological connections involved and not requiring direct memory connections for identity, loses this explanation. This forms part of her complaint that the theory is too weak: “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” (2005, 16). In this way, she says, they lose the appeal of Locke's view.

Although Schechtman accepts that Locke's explanation is incorrect (it is 'too strong'), she seeks to retain an explanatory link between identity and responsibility. Her reading of Locke's requirement that a person can "consider it self as it self" in terms of "the demands we make that our lives be intelligible" (2005, 20) is meant to provide that link. The actions that fit meaningfully into our lives are ours and that meaningfulness to us explains our responsibility for them. In maintaining this explanatory link, Schechtman is close to Locke, whereas the psychological continuity view has moved away from him. But I do not think this favors her Self-Understanding View, nor should it be seen as counting against the view she opposes.

As Schechtman points out, on the Psychological View there are experiences and actions that are mine of which I am not (or am no longer) conscious. Because it can offer no explanation of our responsibility for such actions, she suggests it fails. But it is unclear why this counts as a failing—there are many ways in which actions can be ours and yet we lack responsibility for them. The automatic actions and choices without judgments discussed in Section 3 would be examples (as would other actions prompted by unconscious mental states). What the psychological continuity theory does *not* do is distinguish between autonomous and other actions—it marks them all as ours. And that seems to me to be correct—there are ways of not being responsible for actions that do not rely on non-identity, and not being autonomous is an obvious one. The Psychological View can reasonably deny that *it* needs to offer an explanation of responsibility or non-responsibility in all cases: it is up to a theory of autonomy (or a theory that explains other vagaries of responsibility) to perform that task in many instances.

This raises an interesting point. Much of Schechtman's discussion appeals to intuitions about autonomy,⁸ and it may well be that the Self-Understanding View captures a notion of autonomy rather than identity: our actions are autonomous when they fit meaningfully into our lives. Those actions that are forced on us do not. Here we can see a connection with Locke. Gideon Yaffe has pointed out how closely Locke's account

of volition is linked to his account of personal identity. To be a volition, for Locke, a mental act has to be accompanied by self-conscious awareness of the volition itself—the same consciousness that "makes personal identity" (Yaffe 2000, 126). It may be that both Locke and Schechtman are offering theories of self-governance rather than the self.

One obstacle to seeing the Self-Understanding View as a theory of autonomy is Schechtman's discussion of the place of unconscious states that affect our behavior in important ways. In many cases, such as that of the shoppers in Section 3, we would want to deny that the actions caused by such states are autonomous. Yet Schechtman wants to find a place for those states and actions in her theory. In discussing "the parts of ourselves that we are not conscious of," she writes,

Those memories or desires or motivations whose existence as part of the psychological economy must be postulated in order to make sense of a person's experience or the course of her life will be considered her experiences . . . These experiences still affect us along the dimension of pleasure and pain, and are still connected to our capacities for moral agency. (2005, 20)

That seems to bring non-autonomous actions within the compass of self-understanding. At the same time, it is clear that these actions do not fit happily. The actual motivations in question are precisely ones that do *not* fit into the agent's own understanding of herself. Schechtman can only include them indirectly—they only enter into the demand that my life be intelligible in that "we need to allow for the impact of psychological features . . . of which we are not conscious" (2005, 20). It is only in the understanding of me by others that they appear. Schechtman says they are 'still connected' to our moral agency, but it is very unclear how, and the strong explanatory link between identity and responsibility seems to have simply disappeared. In more striking cases of abnormal psychology, self-understanding will be an even worse guide. A happier resolution would be to accept that actions under these conditions are not autonomous ones and limit self-understanding to accounting for autonomy. And that would leave the route to an account of personal identity open to the psychological continuity theory.

NOTES

1. Of course there are more than two currently popular theories—there is also the biological view of Olson (1997), the embodied minds view of McMahan (2003), and the neuroethical view of Gillett (2008), to name but three other worthy contenders. This paper is a response to an argument between the two theories mentioned, thus the narrowness of my focus.

2. This is certainly true of Rudd and Schechtman, as well as other notable narrative theorists like Alasdair MacIntyre.

3. Perhaps this should read: ‘should go the causal route.’ Parfit says some rather odd things on this matter, but Schechtman’s points are enough to show the need for a strong causal aspect to the continuity at stake.

4. This particular argument of Schechtman’s misrepresents Locke as well as the psychological theorist; Locke is not opposed to substances doing causal duty for consciousness. It is the prince’s *soul* that takes his consciousness into the cobbler’s body. But that it is that particular immaterial substance plays no role—as Locke goes on to point out.

5. There is another misrepresentation happening here. Parfit never suggests an arbitrary stipulation of what enough connectedness would be. He writes, “we can claim there is enough connectedness if the number of direct connections, over any day, is *at least half* the number that hold, over every day, in the lives of nearly every actual person” (1984, 206). It is clear from the context that he is *not* offering a necessary condition, but simply suggesting that that would be a case that was clearly sufficient.

6. I do not mean to imply that perception (or self-perception) is a simple causal process, only that perception (on most theories) is to be understood in causal terms. There are numerous complexities to perception and ways in which other features of our psychological makeup affect how we perceive, but those need not be ignored by a theory that understands perception in causal terms.

7. This is only a commitment to a very broad form of functionalism, not any strong reductive form. While saying that, some psychological continuity theorists see a closer link here: Nicholas Agar has argued that the view can be developed out of common-sense functionalism

and that this is a preferable route to the usual grounding in thought-experiments (Agar 2003). I take issue with him—although not on all of that—in Beck (2011).

8. As it did in her book *The Constitution of Selves* (Schechtman 1996)—see especially the examples in Chapter 4.

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