

*Self and Sense in a Natural World*¹

JOSEP E. CORBI
University of Valencia

A subject is a being who has a life to lead. In this paper, I explore the array of resources that are available to us (i.e., Westerners at the turn of the millennium) to articulate and assess our lives. Specifically, I shall reflect on the impact that such matters may have on our naturalist conviction that the world ultimately consists of a causal network where notions such as sense and value have no direct bearing. Some tend to assume that an implication of our naturalist world-view is that the notions of sense and value are inevitably relative to the subject's desires and inclinations. This is, however, a line of reasoning that I would like to resist. For I am convinced that this approach unnecessarily restricts the number of resources to which we can legitimately appeal in order to lead our lives. This restriction will turn out to be quite serious because, as we shall see, it dramatically distorts our perception of the relevance that social ties may have in the life of a subject, as well as the conditions under which a human life may escape the absurd.

A subject is a being who has a life to lead. It is an essential ingredient of this fact that there are several ways in which a subject may lead her life. Thus, a subject is forced to discern and articulate her existence through a range of chances and alternatives. It sounds reasonable then to explore and determine the array of resources that are available to us (i.e., Westerners at the turn of the millennium)²

¹ This paper draws materials from two recent papers of mine published in Spanish, namely: "Subjetividad y valor en un mundo natural", *Teorema*, 17 (1998), 25-44, and "Naturalismo y absurdo", *XII Congrés Valencià de Filosofia*, València, Societat de Filosofia del País Valencià, 1998, 49-62. I should also point out that part of the research for this paper has been financed by the Ministry of Science and Technology of the Spanish Government via the Research Project "Realism, Deliberation and Truth" (BFF2000-1073-C04-03).

² To be more precise, I could say that, in this paper, the term "us" is meant to include those who share a naturalist outlook. However, the relevance of this definition is derived from the fact that it operates as the presumed outlook at the present stage of the Western tradition. This fact becomes apparent as one reflects on the nature of the explanations and predictions of phenomena that can be publicly offered without making qualifications about the peculiar convictions of the people who raise them. For instance, a religious explanation of an epidemic would require such previous qualifications, while they would surely be superfluous for an explanation in naturalist terms. If an aircraft crashes and most people survive, it comes as quite obvious that some religious thanksgiving ritual should take place. This is the default value. But, in that very ritual, one will surely ask for conscientious a research about the (natural) causes of that crash in order to prevent further misfortunes.

in order to carry out that constitutive quest. Such resources will comprise the fundamental elements to which a subject may appeal to orient and shape her life and, consequently, the terms in which she can assess the value and sense of any project or activity in which she may engage. The list of such resources, as well as their specific organization, will surely vary from one culture to another, and for different periods within a single tradition. We may say that each of those cultural variations represents a specific *conception of the self*, and that the task of this paper is to elucidate *our* conception of the self, that is, the array of resources on the basis of which we may articulate and assess our lives.

In particular, I would like to reflect on the impact that our naturalist convictions have had on the kind of material that may play such a role in our lives. An element of this naturalist perspective is the belief that the world as it is in itself, independent of our wishes and inclinations, consists of a complex causal network where the notions of value or sense have no room. It is true, however, that we experience our activities and engagements as valuable or empty, as making sense or being absurd; that certain activities are experienced by some as exciting and plentiful, while others will view them as ridiculous and absurd. However, experiences like these cannot form a part of the natural fabric of the world. They must be secluded within the domain of our subjectivity, which have to do with the attitudes and inclinations of each one, so that the value of things and activities cannot be but a projection of the subject's attitudes and inclinations. This line of reasoning tends to assume that there is a domain of the subjective where the notions of sense and intrinsic value find their site, while the rest of the world (including the social world) appears as a mere instrument, or hurdle, for leading a valuable, meaningful life.

This is, however, a line of argument that I would like to resist. For I am convinced that this approach unnecessarily reduces the number of resources to which we can appeal to lead our lives and, therefore, constitutes an inadequate elucidation of our conception of the self.³ Moreover, we will see, in due course, how dramatic this distortion may turn out to be, since it affects our perception of the relevance that social ties may have in the life of a subject, as well as the conditions under which a human life may escape the absurd.

To carry out this challenge I will proceed as follows. Firstly, I will outline the materials that the emergence of naturalism have rendered unavailable to us. Those materials will have to do with certain transcendent legends which tend to indicate the means by which a subject may reach, typically in a subsequent life, a culminating stage where she will miss nothing and her highest demands will be accomplished. Yet, our naturalism prevents us from taking any such legend seriously and organizing our lives around it. At a second stage, I intend to put

³ Our conception of the self is, in my view, ultimately constituted by our practices, by our actual responses to certain circumstances or scenarios. How much reflection is involved in these practices, and how the actual responses relate to the legitimate and the intelligible ones, are questions which I will not systematically address. I shall proceed, instead, by focusing on some rather elementary experiences and, only then, make some relatively general remarks and draw some conceptual distinctions, which may serve to improve our perspective on our conception of the self.

forward a certain picture of the materials that may square with a naturalist stance. Within that picture, choice, desire-satisfaction, and pleasure will appear as exclusive, or sometimes co-operative, candidates to define the basic elements in terms of which we may articulate and assess our lives. I will examine various versions of this picture, and then focus my challenge on the most promising ones. For, in my view, even the most attractive presentations of that picture are seriously distorted, since they leave out important resources which are associated with some of our most basic experiences. The paper will close with a positive outline of how our conception of the self is articulated.

1. *Transcendent Legends and The Natural World*

"The formula is hidden in the banjo. When the 1000th string is broken, the box in the banjo will open, and the secret will come to light, and its magic will restore my sight." This is the legend, which inspired Chen Kaige's film *Life on a string* (1993). These words are sung at the beginning of the film by a ten-year old child at his master's death. The child, like his master, is blind, and the legend describes the means by which he may recover his sight. The child, driven by that wish, wanders from village to village playing his banjo, thus earning his living as well as advancing toward the 1000th string. As the child grows and ages, he gets closer and closer to his goal. By the age of sixty, he has only a few more strings to go, and is regarded by the people as a saint. He is now accompanied by a young man, named Shidou, who is also blind and is nervously waiting for the moment when the Saint will break his last string. But Shidou is not totally under the spell of the legend; he wants it to be true, but needs to check whether the magic actually takes place before engaging in a life of banjo-playing.

The Saint has also his doubts. As he goes for his last string, he becomes anxious and poignantly realizes that all his life depends on a formula in his banjo, and wonders if this formula is really worth it. Two fears are expressed by this question: he is afraid that the secret may not work, but he is also apprehensive that, if he recovers his sight, the world that he will be able to see might not coincide with the world that he has imagined. But, at this stage, there is no return: he wants to see.

The 1000th string is broken, and now the Saint is entitled to bring the prescription in his banjo to the pharmacist. The prescription is a blank piece of paper and the pharmacist laughs in the Saint's face. The Saint is appalled, his life rested on a single project, on a single string: the recovery of his sight by the magic of his banjo; and this has turned out to be a delusion. The Saint has some outbursts of anger and realizes that he has been a fool. However, the film ends with two scenes. In one, the Saint is singing among a crowd in his old style with words of trust and confidence. The lyrics insist that we will see, and hear, but now these words have a mere figurative sense. In the last scene, the Saint dies, and the villagers expect Shidou to follow his master's path. They try to acclaim that Shidou is the new Saint, but the latter rejects this and walks away: thereby initiating a different route.

We are convinced that the development of natural sciences, together with other elements, places us in a situation similar to Shidou's. We somewhat envy the people who were allowed to believe in a legend that promised paradise, that is, a culminating stage where all our cravings will be satisfied, and our present pains and efforts rewarded. A legend that would appear as the most enticing project of one's life, given that it indicates the tools by which one may gain access to that paradise. The history of humanity is crowded with legends of this guise. The most robust ones tend to locate paradise beyond the boundaries of a subject's present life, and appeal to some divinity as the designer and guarantor of the plan that will eventually lead to that promising land. For ages, people have had their lives shaped by one of these transcendent legends. To these people the question of whether one is faithful or not to the divine plan was central. Any other considerations such as pleasure or desire-satisfaction played a secondary role, at least in this life. The different possibilities that life may bring to them were, therefore, ranked in accordance to that fundamental question. We may then say that this attitude expresses a *transcendent conception* of the self, that is, a conception where faithfulness to the transcendent plan defines the fundamental dimension in terms of which one must shape and assess her life.⁴ It is quite clear, however, that this conception of the self is at odds with essential features of our naturalist world-view.

Physics represents the world as a sort of mechanism whose transformations are governed by a system of strict physical laws⁵ and, relatedly, assumes the causal closure of its domain: every physical event e has a complete physical explanation or, more specifically, there is a set of physical conditions which, in combination with a number of strict physical laws, necessitates the event e in question.⁶ Causal closure is a feature that only the properties stipulated by physics possess and, in this sense, they are ontologically more basic than any

⁴ The Judaeo-Christian tradition has supplied the transcendent legend on the basis of which Western people have articulated their own lives for centuries. In fact, I am convinced that most religious experiences are inspired, in a more or less obscure way, in some transcendent legend. I should emphasize, though, that this claim neither implies that the relevance that religious experiences may have for our lives is reduced to that of a transcendent legend; nor discards the possibility of religious experiences that seek to avert the consolations of a transcendent legend. The latter is the possibility that seems to animate Simone Weil as she uncovers certain self-deceptive ways of filling up the void:

"We must have on one side the beliefs which fill up voids and sweeten what is bitter. The belief in immortality. The belief in the utility of sin: etiam peccata. The belief in the providential ordering of events—in short the consolations which are ordinarily sought in religion." (Weil [1987], 13)

So, I just wish to oppose those (cf., for instance, Winch [1987c], 66-7 and Sánchez Durá [1993]) who seem to sustain that we necessarily misunderstand the nature of a religious experience if we interpret it as committed to a transcendent legend.

⁵ This claim is not undermined by the irreducible statistical laws of quantum mechanics. For a law can be both statistical and strict.

⁶ Here, I rather confine myself to put forward a picture of the physical domain, even if I do not subscribe to it myself. I would object, for instance, to the very notion of "a complete causal explanation", since I think it is inconsistent with some of our most fundamental

other set of properties that a theory might stipulate. The exact implications of this ontological primacy are, nevertheless, unclear.

Some argue, for instance, that our metaphysical intuitions about the ontological primacy of physics are consistent with the causal relevance (and, therefore, the existence) of properties posited by special sciences, like biology, chemistry or even psychology. So, we may not need to confine the properties of the world to the properties that a fully developed physics would posit. This approach surely gives rise to a multi-layered model of reality, wherein the physical structure of the world would lie at its bottom. Within this model, properties and entities at higher-levels, which sciences like chemistry and biology provide, will be recognized as metaphysically respectable, as part of the furniture of the universe, insofar as they bear the appropriate connections with bottom-level (i.e., physical) properties and entities.

Others doubt, however, that this multi-layer model will ultimately succeed, since important arguments have been put forward to the effect that this model cannot but lead to the causal inertness of higher-level properties. For it favors the understanding that the actual job, the real pushing and pulling is done by the physical properties and mechanisms which necessarily underlie any higher-level process that one might individuate.⁷ Moreover, the problems increase as we focus on the kind of process that define the subject matter of psychology. For, as the current debate on mental causation and free will stresses, the naturalist stance may actually clash with the conviction that the content of our thoughts actually makes a difference in the world and, even more dramatically, with the fact that we have conscious experiences and that things matter to us.⁸

Be it as it may, all sides in this debate agree that physics singles out the basic causal network of the world, and grant that the furniture of the universe is constituted by the properties and entities stipulated by physics, as well as all the properties and entities that bear the appropriate connection to those of physics. This, therefore, imposes a physicalist constraint on the kind of property and entity that may be acknowledged to exist in the world, independently of our wishes and inclinations.⁹ The exact strength of this constraint will depend on a proper elucidation of how the different levels of properties and entities are constituted, and what should count as "an appropriate connection" between them. This is where the different parties diverge.

The transcendent conception presupposes that the universe is arranged in accordance with a certain plan which, designed by a divinity, ensures a promis-

intuitions about causation (cf. Corbí and Prades [2000], ch. 5 and 6). Yet, the alternative characterization I would propose, although it is crucial to retain the causal relevance of mental contents, does not affect the role that transcendent legends may play in our lives.

⁷ Cf., for instance, Block [1990], Kim [1992], [1993].

⁸ Cf. Block [1980], Rosenthal [1991], Heil and Mele [1993], Block et al. [1996] for an overall review of this debate.

⁹ Cf. Nagel [1979a], [1986], Williams [1978], [1981e], [1985] for the idea of an absolute conception of the world, independent of our wishes and inclinations; and Putnam [1992] for a challenge to them.

ing outcome for those who keep faithful to it. The problem is that, no matter which interpretation of the naturalist constraint one prefers, there is no room in the world for such a plan. The world is a sequence of causal transitions which are subject to certain laws, but not the result of any plan or purpose because, among other things, godly designers are not listed in the inventory of the world. Furthermore, the very idea of a transcendent paradise, of a subject living a heavenly life is equally at odds with the naturalist perspective. If that life were supposed to be the life of an immaterial soul, then we would breach the physicalist constraint according to which, for any higher-level process, there must be some underlying physical mechanism.¹⁰ If, on the contrary, one conceives the heavenly existence as an embodied, spatial one, then the idea of a region of the universe where all one's wishes and projects could be fully accomplished during an infinite period of time, seems to go beyond the boundaries of what should count as a living body and, therefore, a person. Hence, no matter how cherished the idea of a paradise may be to us, it seems clear, then, that the transcendent conception can no longer be adopted without paying the price of inconsistency or self-deception.¹¹ This is partly the sense in which we may claim that the transcendent conception is unavailable to us.¹²

The multi-layer model of reality is inconsistent with the transcendent conception of the self, but the impact of this model on our conception of the self may go far beyond that challenge. For, as we have seen, it is unclear whether that model is ultimately consistent with some general features of our subjectivity, like the existence of conscious experiences, or the causal relevance of the content of our thoughts. Nevertheless, the pressure that this uncertainty exercises on our conception of the self is less radical than one might expect. For it does not really seem to modify the array of resources that are available to us in the process of shaping our lives.

The conflict between the naturalist constraint and the transcendent conception has led to discredit the latter as a guide for life that no one can rationally adopt. Yet, the tension between the naturalist constraint and the view of ourselves as subjects who entertain thoughts, who perform actions and for whom things matter, has not produced a similar upshot. We can detect the tension between both elements in our world-view, but are unable to dispense with any of them. Whatever conflict we may have with our naturalist convictions we cannot conceive ourselves as seriously considering that we do not have certain experiences or thoughts.¹³ In other words, we have no idea of how one could articulate

¹⁰ There are indeed powerful, standard arguments against the possibility of a person being an immaterial soul, which are independent of our physicalist convictions. They have to do with the impossibility of providing criteria of numerical identity for nonspatial entities.

¹¹ Consistency and lucidity with regard to the central aspects of our beliefs are hardly dispensable values for a subject, since a minimal degree of integration and lucidity appears to be a necessary condition for the very existence of a subject. However, it is just a minimal degree, and this leaves plenty of room for negotiation.

¹² Cf. James [1982] for the related notions of "living hypothesis" and "genuine option".

¹³ Cf. Anscombe [1981], Winch [1987a], 89.

her life on the denial of such facts. Our conception of the self seems, then, to inevitably repose on the recognition of the above-mentioned features of our subjectivity: their denial is unavailable to us and cannot shape a subject's life.¹⁴

This line of reasoning is not meant to challenge the plausibility of an eliminativist stance with regard to our mental contents and conscious states. For an eliminativist would typically reply that myths are incapable of apprehending how the world would look once one has got rid of a particular myth. Therefore, our current incapacity to imagine an alternative in no way guarantees the metaphysical plausibility of our present convictions. I may doubt the ultimate intelligibility of this move, but my point at this stage is more modest: I am simply claiming that we do not know how a subject could seriously assume an eliminativist view in the articulation of her life and, consequently, in the determination of the resources that are available to her. This is why I do not think that the possibility of eliminativism affects our conception of the self. So, let us now go on and explore what that conception may turn out to be.

2. *The Composite Thesis and The Means-End Thesis*

The idea of a divine designer whose plan would take care of our deepest needs appears as so attractive and rewarding that a subject cannot but succumb to it, organizing and assessing her life in the light of her faithfulness to that plan. Such a possibility is now unavailable to us, but we still have a life to lead. Thereby the question as to how one should live poignantly arises. We cannot turn to the external world where no room for value exists; it is only within the domain of the subjective that values may emerge. Yet, the perception of this fact permeates our experience with a sense of arbitrariness. It sounds as if it were up to each subject to embrace one or the other dimension as the pillar of her life. Further, as a result, any such commitment that a subject may adopt becomes in some important sense tentative and, thereby, debilitated in its capacity to generate sense. In any case, our response to this seeming arbitrariness may go in several directions. Some may accept it as inescapable and insist on the concept of choice: leading a life is making choices, and the value and sense of one's life

¹⁴ We are now in a position to state more precisely the sense in which the transcendent conception is unavailable to us. The root notion of availability may be stated like this: a resource R is available to a subject S iff S can take R seriously, that is, can employ R in the shaping and assessment of her life. Then we may go on and specify some conditions under which R cannot be taken seriously by S and, therefore, R becomes unavailable to her: S cannot take R seriously if (a) S knows that R disagrees with some fundamental feature of her world-view, and (b) R is dispensable for S, that is, S knows how she could lead a life without relying on R. A consequence of this is that those who believe in the existence of the relevant conflict between R and their world-view, know how to dispense with R, and still stick to R, will rather be individuated as victims of self-deception.

So, we may rehearse the discussion in the previous paragraphs by saying that transcendent legends meet conditions (a) and (b) with regard to our naturalist outlook and are, therefore, unavailable to us. In contrast, the possible conflict between some general features of our subjectivity and our naturalism does not lead to the unavailability of the former because condition (b) remains unsatisfied.

is relative to her choices, since nothing has any value but insofar as it has been chosen. This is a mark of existentialism.¹⁵ However, some other people think that it is not so much up to us what may add value to our lives. To see their point we may consider the idea of a paradise, as a situation where all (or, at least, the most important of) our desires and needs are satisfied. What these people claim is that, even if there is no paradise, the fundamental dimension of a subject's life must be that of maximizing the satisfaction of her desires and needs. In other words, getting as close as possible to the paradise. This approach may sound attractive insofar as it exploits the sense in which the paradise may still be accessible to us, despite the naturalist disenchantment of the world. Yet, not all agree on this picture of paradise;¹⁶ some do not envisage it as essentially associated with the satisfaction of desires and needs, but with the idea of pleasure. Living in paradise is being in a continuous state of pleasure, irrespective of how this state is achieved. In a subject's life, the satisfaction of her desires or needs may be the most helpful means to promote her pleasure; but it is only the state itself of pleasure, not the means by which it is attained, that define the fundamental dimension in terms of which the life of a subject must be appraised.¹⁷

Here we have three different pictures of the resources which a subject may count on to shape her life. In what follows, I will seek to elaborate and discuss a number of theses that such pictures suggest, but reserve my challenge to the most promising of them for the final sections of this paper.

Consider the following case. John is a bright student and an excellent soccer player as well. He is quite seduced by the idea of becoming a good mathematician, but he has just been offered a very attractive contract from a big team, say Milan. The problem is that he is convinced that he cannot have it both ways.

¹⁵ In this sense two quotes from Sartre [1957] may serve to illustrate this point: "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of existentialism" (15) and "... For it implies that they [all leaders] envisage a number of possibilities, and when they choose one, they realize that it has value because it is chosen" (21). Cf. Murdoch [1986] and Taylor [1982] for two attractive challenges to this viewpoint.

¹⁶ An interesting advantage of the transcendent conception is that one need not to have a clear idea of what the paradise may consist of to engage in the exacting endeavour of pursuing it. It is the task of the divine architect to work out the details, while one can live with the reassuring conviction that the Almighty will do her task well.

¹⁷ Thus, Bentham [1996] claims: "Now, pleasure is in *itself* a good: nay, even setting aside immunity from pain, the only good: pain is in itself an evil; and, indeed, without exception, the only evil; or else the words good and evil have no meaning. This is true of every sort of pain, and of every sort of pleasure. It follows, therefore, immediately and incontestably, that *there is no such thing as any sort of motive that is in itself a bad one.*" (100). And, similarly, J. St. Mill [1931] asserts "... that pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for pleasure inherent in themselves or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain." (6) The word "pleasure" may certainly be interpreted in various ways. Insofar as it designates a certain sensation, the claim that human beings aim at pleasure retains a precise content but becomes quite implausible. The problem is that if, on the contrary, one promotes a more sophisticated understanding of such a term, then it is no longer quite clear what the exact content of such a claim is or, in other words, how that claim relates to other claims about the goal of human life.

Playing for Milan will require full concentration and by the time he hangs his boots he will be too old to really have any chance of becoming a good, creative mathematician. He keeps weighing the pros and cons of each option, but he finds himself at an impasse: there is little reason to pick out one alternative instead of the other. John feels that any decision that he makes will therefore be arbitrary, so that the matter is just up to him.

This is, indeed, the preferred scenario for those who insist on the notion of choice.¹⁸ They would stress that John is destined to shape his life by making his own choices and that, no matter what he decides, his life should be assessed in terms of the values that John establishes as his own by choosing to act in some ways rather than others. Let us call this the Choice Thesis.

There are, however, some experiences that this thesis may have trouble to accommodate. Suppose that John finally decides to join Milan, thereby renouncing his possible life as a brilliant mathematician. According to the choice thesis, a life as a Milan player becomes, by the mere act of John's choice, more valuable to him than his possible career as a mathematician. By making this choice, John is surely assuming some risks, since he may fail to achieve what he has chosen to pursue and, therefore, established as a valuable end for him. Many circumstances may prevent him from succeeding as a soccer player: an unfortunate injury, or the limitations of his own skills. Let us grant, however, that, despite the pressure and rivalry existing within the Milan team, John luckily becomes an indisputable leader in this team, playing almost every game and easily gaining the confidence of each new coach. Furthermore, during the time he was there, Milan performs quite well, winning several Italian Leagues and European Cups. This being the case, it sounds as if John's life should be plentiful since he has achieved what he has chosen to and, therefore, what holds most value for him.

This story may be incomplete, though. Suppose that John was very happy when he joined Milan, enjoying every aspect of his activities with the team; but that, little by little, his enthusiasm begins to cool down and, after a few years, he finds more and more of his activities as a professional player tedious, if not disgusting. Despite all his triumphs, John's life has become obscure and sad. At the time of his initial decision, he expected that a successful career as a soccer player would be accompanied by a more favorable mood, but it has not turned out this way, and this seems to importantly diminish the value and sense of his life. The problem is, however, that this situation seems to contradict the picture that the choice thesis promotes: If John has got all he has chosen, how could he miss anything at all? How could any other factor deteriorate the value of his life? Nonetheless, this is what actually happens, and I do not see how the choice thesis can really account for this fact.¹⁹

¹⁸ Strictly speaking, the kind of dilemmas that represent the preferred scenario involves a more explicit moral concern (cf. Sartre [1957]).

¹⁹ One might try to accommodate this experience within the Choice Thesis by redefining the initial choice. One would then say that John's actual choice was not only to become a successful soccer player, but a successful and happy soccer player. It is unclear, however, what choosing to be happy may mean other than choosing the activities that one thinks are

This kind of reflection may intimate two kinds of response. Some may suspect that John's gloomy mood is due to some kind of frustration, to the fact that some of his deepest desires have not been satisfied. This line of reasoning rests on the plausible assumption that the frustration of a subject's desires and inclinations typically diminishes her qualitative well-being.²⁰ It follows that a subject's deepest desires and inclinations impose some restrictions upon the choices that the subject may meaningfully make. A subject may surely choose to violate those restrictions, but not without a certain cost with respect to the meaning and value of her life. All this encourages a revision of the choice thesis that would incorporate further components of our subjectivity: not only choice, but the subject's desires and inclinations, as well as the nature of her qualitative states. Let us then speak of the Composite Thesis which could be characterized as follows: the resources on which a subject may base the orientation and assessment of her life, comprise not only her decisions, but her desires, inclinations, and qualitative states as well.²¹

Some may be reluctant to admit that the composite thesis is the right conclusion that can be derived from John's case. For the idea of pleasure, of qualitative well-being,²² may play a more fundamental role than the composite thesis attributes to it. In fact, John's story seems to bring to light that it is only pleasure that matters. For John's initial choice and the achievement of the goals that he had chosen to pursue appear to come to nothing if they fail to engender happiness within him. Moreover, if a subject has to carefully respect her deepest desires in her choices, it is just because her activities would be overcast with sadness and pain otherwise. All this encourages the thought that the ultimate value of a subject's life may be reduced to the attainment of pleasure; while desires and choices play a mere instrumental role: they are just some of the means according to which pleasure is obtained. We may speak of the Pleasure Thesis in this case, which we could state like this: pleasure is the fundamental dimension in terms of which a subject is bound to orient and assess her life.

However, serious objections have been raised against this thesis. To begin, some may point to situations where a subject sacrifices her pleasure for the sake of satisfying a certain desire. A cyclist may prefer to spend several hours on her bike, riding in the sun, giving up the pleasure of refreshing shade, a cool beer,

more likely to conduce one's happiness. So, attaining happiness may have been one of the reasons behind John's choice, but may not form a part of the content of his choice.

²⁰ In fact, the connection between the frustration of a subject's desires and her qualitative states is not merely causal. For the individuation of a subject's desires (and, specially, of her deepest desires) is not independent of the qualitative states that accompany the subject when they are satisfied.

²¹ In my view, Parfit [1984], 493-502 sustains a qualified version of the Composite Thesis.

²² For the sake of simplicity, I will tend to use "pleasure" to designate those qualitative states whose possession is acknowledged as valuable. A more sophisticated understanding of the word "pleasure" would surely render the Pleasure Thesis more plausible but quite indistinguishable from the Composite one.

and an appealing swimming pool. This may not sound, though, like a very pressing consideration. For one could always reply in defense of the pleasure thesis that either there is some sense of pleasure in cycling, such that the cyclist is experiencing more pleasure riding than she would have swimming and sitting in the shade. Alternatively, that the present effort is being made in the hope of a later compensation. It is unclear to me how that "sense of pleasure" could be individuated so that the pleasure thesis could both retain some content and be true. There is, however, a more forceful and simple objection, which goes like this: the pleasure that a subject derives from the satisfaction of a desire *D* presupposes that its satisfaction matters to her intrinsically, that is, irrespective of its capacity to bring about some pleasure.²³ To follow up the previous example, we can say that if the cyclist is able to derive some pleasure from her exhausting activity, it is because cycling matters to her; if pleasure were all that mattered to her, she would have found her exhausting cycling almost unbearable and, therefore, would have derived no pleasure from it. This situation seems to represent a more serious challenge to the Pleasure Thesis. For, even in those scenarios that supposedly favor this thesis, some systematic elements may be detected that manifestly conflict with the claim that pleasure is all that ultimately matters to the subject. This upshot will be reinforced in the two next sections by the introduction of notions such as attachment and significance. But let us now go back to the Composite Thesis which is, so far, the only survivor.

The Composite Thesis is supposed to set out the criteria that determine the value which a given activity or goal may have for a certain subject. Some people may, therefore, construe the composite thesis as supplying a principled way to distinguish those activities or situations that have an *intrinsic* value, that are ends in themselves, from those whose value is merely *extrinsic*, that is, whose value is derived from its capacity to serve as means or as instruments to achieve what is intrinsically valuable. Thus, they say that those situations which fulfill the adequate blend of choice, desire-satisfaction, and pleasure have intrinsic value, while the rest of the circumstances and endeavours appear as mere means or hurdles for the flourishing of those intrinsically valuable situations. Dusting the furniture in my room may lack any intrinsic value to me, but it is still an efficient means of preventing my autumn asthmatic reactions and, therefore, it has an extrinsic, instrumental value for me, which is indeed relative to my wish to avert asthmatic attacks.

²³ Cf. Feinberg [1978], 464 and Wiggins [1987], 104-5. This retort holds except, of course, for the limited range of cases where the object of the desire is just to bring about pleasure, like when one lies on a sandy beach and feels the tender rays of the god Sun on her skin.

One may attempt to preserve some aspects of the Pleasure Thesis by claiming that, even if pleasure is not all that matters, the pursuit of pleasure is the ultimate motivation behind the acquisition and preservation of all our dispositions. Apart from the risk of emptiness that this manoeuvre obviously involves, it seems to me that the line of reasoning that was proposed for particular actions, holds for dispositions too. Part of the pleasure that we derive from some of our attitudes and dispositions requires that the pursuit of such pleasure is not the unique ultimate motivation for their acquisition and preservation. This point may become clearer in the next section when I introduce the notion of attachment.

In light of this, some may assume that there are only two senses in which an activity may be valuable: either intrinsically or extrinsically.²⁴ Correspondingly, some claim that leading a life consists of developing a number of activities that serve as mere means to the attainment of certain goals or situations that, according to the Composite Thesis, are of intrinsic value to the subject in question. Let us refer to this claim as the Means-End Thesis.

Some may see this thesis as a mere corollary of the Composite Thesis, failing to understand how one could endorse the latter without accepting the former. Yet, the transition from the Composite Thesis to the Means-End Thesis requires an additional assumption that I mentioned above. Namely, the value of an activity or situation must be either intrinsic or instrumental. However, before discussing this assumption, let us explore how the adoption of the Means-End Thesis may affect some crucial aspects of our lives, that is, the value of social and personal ties, as well as the ultimate absurdity of human life.

We are social animals. We bear personal links with other members of our species. We also belong to a family, and form a part of different sorts of social settings, such as cities, tribes, nations, institutions, and so forth. The life of each individual includes a web of such connections. But what is the relevance of such ties in a subject's life? More specifically, what is, according to the Means-End Thesis, the value that all these bonds may have in the life of a subject? Are they intrinsically or instrumentally valuable? It has been argued that, according to the Means-End Thesis,²⁵ those social and personal bonds are only valuable insofar as they serve to fulfil the subject's purposes and inclinations. Therefore, their value cannot but be merely extrinsic or instrumental. The social world appears then as "nothing more than an arena in which individuals seek to secure what is useful or agreeable to them".²⁶ This claim about the nature of the social world thus emerges as an upshot which ultimately derives (via the Composite Thesis and a seemingly trivial assumption) from the disenchantment of the universe that our naturalist convictions impose. So, it sounds as if we are bound to consider our social life from this perspective, which is, in fact, the dominant approach in the technological developed societies of our planet. Nevertheless, this perspective may be excluding, as I shall try to argue, an important range of social possibilities that are actually open to us. In that case, one should ask why those possibilities tend to be concealed, as well as denounce those

²⁴ This assumption seems to inspire the Saint's story, and certainly permeates most transcendent legends, so that keeping faithful to the divine plan has a mere instrumental value, since only life in the paradise would actually be of intrinsic value.

²⁵ MacIntyre [1981] is mainly concerned with emotivism (i.e., "Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgements and more specifically all moral judgements are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character" (11-2)), which ultimately is the linguistic version of the Composite Thesis. He insists that emotivism is bound to envisage all social relations as manipulative, that is, as relations where "each person treats the other primarily as a means to his or her ends." (23).

²⁶ MacIntyre [1981], 236.

social practices and policies that rely on that limited understanding of our social life for their legitimization.

In fact, I will try to show the restrictions that a instrumental treatment of the social world imposes cannot be based on our naturalist stance. To this purpose, I will, firstly, argue that this instrumental treatment does not even follow from the Means-End Thesis and, secondly, propose some examples that may be used to call into question the Means-End Thesis itself and, relatedly, enlarge the space of our social experience. Thus, the dominant perception of the role that social activities and engagements may have in a subject's life will appear as inadequate, that is, as neglecting some of our most meaningful options.

Let us now shift to the second sequel of the means-end that I wished to present. Our naturalist convictions, together with the intrinsic vs. extrinsic approach to value, seem to entail the ultimate absurdity of our lives. As Nagel puts it,²⁷ the experience of the absurd arises from the conflict between two perspectives, which are available to us. We may adopt, on the one hand, an internal perspective and apprehend the value of our activities and engagements in the light of our choices, desires and moods. From this perspective, the value of our lives would vary in accordance with our capacity to fit our psychological demands, but there is no sense in which human life is necessarily absurd. There is, however, an external perspective, which consists in the perception of the idea of nature as a purposeless sequence of events, and with regard to which our ends and purposes are dispossessed of any intrinsic value. This encourages the thought that all our concerns are ultimately futile. For it would not even help, in this respect, to inscribe one's life in the context of a much larger plan, either social or divine, since, from this external perspective, every plan is inevitably empty and pointless.

The availability of this external perspective is constitutive of a naturalist outlook. We therefore seem to be inescapably trapped between two conflicting perspectives. On the one hand, we cannot but take seriously our own desires and interests, and pursue them intensely, and, on the other, all these concerns appear as vain to us: "These two inescapable viewpoints collide in us, and that is what makes life absurd".²⁸ But this sounds like a rather radical implication of naturalism for our conception of the self. For, instead of suggesting an alternative dimension in terms of which we can articulate and assess our lives, it invites us to conceive our lives as ultimately valueless and absurd.

However, how do I want to react to all this? What is my position with regard to the theses and implications that have survived through this section? To begin, I think that the Composite Thesis is severely incomplete, since it leaves

²⁷ Nagel's [1979b] line of reasoning is apparently more general than the one I intend to display here, since it sometimes sounds as if he were not committed to the intrinsic vs. extrinsic approach to value. Yet, I prefer to assume that approach in the exposition of the argument to make it more compelling. For, as we shall see by the end of the paper, once the intrinsic vs. extrinsic approach is dropped, some possibilities are opened that cast doubt on the argument in question.

²⁸ Nagel [1979b], 153.

some substantial elements which are actually available to us as resources that can be used to shape and assess our lives out of the picture. To bring these important elements to light, I shall discuss the Means-End Thesis, which some may mistakenly view as a mere corollary of the Composite one. My discussion of the Means-End Thesis will follow a rather crooked path which, I hope, will finally shed some light on the main purpose of this paper: to emphasize the narrowness of certain elucidations of our conception of the self.

The path will proceed like this. Firstly, I will cast doubt on the instrumental treatment of the social world which, according to some, follows from the Means-End Thesis. This will permit me to introduce the notion of integrity as one of the components of our conception of the self. Secondly, I intend to revise the intrinsic vs. extrinsic approach to value, and this process will lead me to the notion of significance, which will emerge as an additional element in terms of which we may shape or assess our lives. The notion of significance will finally serve to challenge the argument for the absurd. In the last section, I will assemble all these materials to introduce some general remarks about our conception of the self.

3. *Attachments*

The social world is, according to some, an arena where subjects strive to find means that serve to accomplish their respective desires, purposes, and inclinations. This is the perception of the social domain that seems to be derived from the Means-End Thesis. I suspect, however, that this perception falsifies the role that social activities and commitments may play in the life of a subject. To motivate this suspicion, I will, firstly, argue that, contrary to what some claim, the Means-End Thesis does not entail an instrumental treatment of the social domain; and, secondly, I will explore the two different senses in which the value of a social tie may not be merely instrumental. One of these senses will represent a challenge for the Composite Thesis and, therefore, for the Means-End Thesis as well.

Those who claim that the Means-End Thesis entails an instrumental treatment of the social world disregard the fact that cultivation of some social or personal ties may constitute the object of a subject's desires. In John's case, for instance, we find that he has desires and the objects of these desires were clearly social: he wanted to join Milan, he wanted to be respected by his teammates and the coach, he wanted to play every important game, and so forth. So, we could say that, according to the Means-End Thesis, some portions of John's social activity may not have had a mere instrumental value to him, but an intrinsic one.²⁹ It follows that the Means-End Thesis need not reduce a subject's

²⁹ Strictly speaking, the satisfaction of desire does not have intrinsic value according to the Means-End Thesis unless it were appropriately accompanied by other psychological factors, such as pleasure and choice. These additional factors are not given in John's story, but another story, which I have skipped for the sake of simplicity, could be told where they were accomplished.

social links to mere means, since those links may be intrinsically valuable to a subject insofar as they are the object of her desires. It is surely true that, according to the Means-End Thesis, the value of a social tie is relative to the subject's desires and purposes. Moreover, this relativization is fully compatible with the fact that a social tie should be the object of a desire and, therefore, that the value of that social tie should be intrinsic and not instrumental for the subject in question.³⁰

This defines a first sense in which a social link may not be reduced to a mere instrumental value, namely, by becoming the object of a subject's desire. There is, however, a second sense which has to do with the notion of integrity and I intend to explore in the coming paragraphs. This second sense, as opposed to the first, will bring out the inadequacy of the Composite Thesis (and, therefore, of the Means-End Thesis). In particular, we shall see in what sense the Means-End Thesis does ultimately entail an instrumental treatment of the social world.

Charles, a truck driver, runs over a child.³¹ The driver is so shocked that he faints. When he gains consciousness at the hospital, he asks: "How is the child? Did I kill her? Is she badly hurt?" Suppose the doctor's answer is: "No, she is at home and well, just a few scratches". The driver feels, at first, relieved, but then he begins to worry. He thinks he perceived something weird in the doctor's words, maybe in his voice, maybe in his gestures: it sounds as if he had not been as reassuring as he should have been. The driver suspects that he is being deceived; that they want to keep the real facts from him to facilitate his recovery, since, after all, he is not to blame. The child just ran in front his truck. The next day he raises the same question again to the doctors and inquires among the nurses and his family. He always gets the same answer, but their replies are still peculiar. He asks to see the child, but they comment that this is not advisable, that it would be bad for the child to revive the situation and that her parents for this reason want to keep her away from him. After a few days, Charles stops asking questions and, finally, accepts that the child is all right. Unfortunately, Charles has been deluded, the child was crippled as a result of the accident and has to sit in a wheelchair for the rest of her life.

It is true that Charles's intensive questioning expresses a concern for the child's well-being, but what kind of concern is this? It could be that Charles's interest was almost entirely instrumental: he might just have been worried about the economic and juridical implications of the accident. After all, if something

³⁰ On some occasions, a social situation may be of intrinsic value to a subject because, to use Williams's [1973b], 260-5 terms, such a situation is the object of a non-I desire, that is, a desire whose propositional content does not require the introduction of "I" or any related expression ("my", "me"). This is so, for instance, as John desires Mary's welfare, even when he can neither contribute to nor know about it. Furthermore, it seems that human beings are constituted in such a way that they cannot but have I-desires whose content is essentially social. Consider our need for social recognition, which gives rise to desires in whose propositional content I-related expressions must figure, but a social relation too. What the subject desires in such cases is that the other bears a certain relation to her (cf. Todorov [1995]).

³¹ This case represents a rather free adaptation of a well-known example proposed by Williams [1981b], 28-29, although for fairly different purposes.

wrong had actually happened to the child, the family might sue him, and they might convince the judge that it was somewhat his fault, and this would bring him some trouble. So, some may claim that his insistent questioning in the hospital should be construed as merely serving this instrumental preoccupation. Nevertheless, we may find ourselves reluctant to accept this claim, to acknowledge that Charles's interest in the child's condition was entirely instrumental. Consider, for instance, that Charles was offered two equally satisfactory solutions to his economic and juridical worries, one implying the recovery of the child and the other her continued crippled existence, and that he was indifferent to either solution. This would appear as distressingly odd to us, since we may feel that a systematic indifference in this and related scenarios brings us to the verge of insanity.³² Nobody doubts that Charles's interest in the child's condition might be *predominantly* instrumental and, still, the problem is that we experience some trouble in understanding how it could be *exclusively* instrumental. We would need to search for a specific explanation whenever that exclusivity may appear to show up. Thereby we are assuming that a condition for the intelligibility of the situation, as it is described prior to the explanation, is that at least a minimal noninstrumental aspect should be present in Charles's concern.

The weight of this noninstrumental aspect in a subject's concern will be determined by the way she actually responds to the situation at stake. Thus, Charles's activities and comments about the child's state may express that the nature of his interest in her well-being was predominantly instrumental and, thus, reducing the noninstrumental aspect to a minimum. But Charles could have responded differently. Suppose, for instance, that he had been rather active in preserving his economic and juridical interests. However, once they were ensured, he undertook the necessary actions to guarantee that the crippled child was duly attended and that she would get some sort of compensation. We would surely interpret this response as expressing a concern where the non-instrumental aspects bear a more important role than in the first version of Charles's case.

But what is the nature of this noninstrumental aspect of Charles's concern? Doesn't it reduce to the fact that the child's well-being is the object of one of Charles's desires? To ground a negative answer to the latter question, let us step back from the obvious and ask: why is it that Charles has become interested in this particular child? What is special about her? It seems clear that Charles need not have found anything extraordinary about this child to be specially interested in her: the intrinsic features of the child in question may have been much less remarkable from Charles's viewpoint than those of other children in his own city or country. So, the child's intrinsic features can hardly explain Charles's special preoccupation with her. Where can we then look for an answer? The existent relation between Charles and the child sounds like an obvious candidate; in fact, Charles is connected to the child in a rather special way:

³² A preference for the child to be crippled would appear as a kind of perversion which, unless some specific motivation would mediate, may represent another form of madness.

Charles may have caused her irreparable damage. Moreover, it is this relation that prompts a certain response on Charles's part: a response that involves the emergence of a concern.

There is an important sense in which Charles's response is not the result of a choice or decision, but rather has been *imposed* upon him by his location in that particular scenario. The fact that it is imposed does not imply that Charles could not have eventually chosen to withdraw from it. In this case, the idea of imposition is meant to convey that Charles could only have avoided that response by assuming a certain kind of cost. The experience of this cost is internally connected with the notion of integrity. In fact, we may explain that kind of cost by appealing to Charles's integrity. We could, thus, point out that Charles's failure to give an appropriate response would have damaged his self-image, since he would appear to himself as a subject who is incapable of living up to what he most values, and that this is the kind of cost that he would have to pay. But, on the other hand, any attempt to sort out the notion of *integrity*, of what should count as a subject's highest values, will take us back to the experience of a certain kind of cost. Thus, the identification of a subject's highest values will go hand in hand with the identification of situations in which the subject will discover herself as falling short. However, what is this experience of falling short? Falling short has to do with what a subject most values, which differs from what she most desires. The inability to fulfil one's strongest desires may lead to frustration, while falling short of living in accordance with one's highest values is accompanied by a sense of degradation. Degradation is just another name for the cost that Charles would experience if he dropped the demands that he recognizes as imposed upon him by the fact that he has run over child. So, the notions of integrity, highest values, and degradation form a circle of notions that point to a single experience, namely: the experience that cases like Charles's, and especially moral dilemmas, bring to light.³³

At this stage, it may be relevant to indicate that the force of the preceding line of reasoning does not depend on the fact that truck drivers are actually attached to the persons over whom they may run over. Needless to say, this was proposed just as an example. The only point I need to rely upon is that, for any given subject, there will be some scenarios that she will recognize as imposing certain kinds of demands upon her. The particular characteristics of these scenarios and the specific demands that they may impose may be quite variable

³³ The experience of degradation is not necessarily confined to cases where other people are involved. The incapacity to live up to the standards imposed by those projects in which one engages, and are viewed as central to one's life, is certainly another source of degradation. Relatedly, that experience may also arise as a result of failing to engage in certain projects that are perceived as important. In general, the experience of degradation has to do with the perception of the inadequacy of our response to what one sees as the demands that one's life makes on oneself, even when nobody else is directly involved. For a further exploration of the kind of cost I am referring to, cf. Taylor [1982], [1989], ch. 1, [1995], MacIntyre [1981], ch. 15, Williams [1973a], [1981a], [1981c], [1981d], [1985], ch. 10, [1995], Weil [1987], Winch [1987d].

across individuals and cultures.³⁴ The issue is that it should form a part of our concept of sanity; that a human being should recognize some of those scenarios, and their corresponding demands. This is all that is required to introduce the notion of integrity and the related experience of degradation.

On this basis, we can now see the important sense in which the link between Charles and the child is not merely instrumental. From the perspective of the Means-End Thesis, the only way in which a link may not be merely instrumental is by being intrinsic. Intrinsic in this context simply means that this link is the object of a desire. The previous remarks, though, convey a different, deeper sense in which a social link may not be merely instrumental, namely: a social link whose adequate attendance affects the subject's integrity.³⁵ I propose to reserve the word "*attachment*" to designate that kind of social or personal tie.³⁶

However, some may be unwilling to grant that attachments do really possess a noninstrumental value. For, they would argue, the appropriate cultivation of our attachments is just a means to preserve our integrity, which is what in those scenarios ultimately matters to us. Yet, like in the case of the relation between desire and pleasure, we could reply that it is only because the child's condition matters to Charles that neglecting her would have a cost for him. The idea of caring only for one's integrity, like the idea that pleasure is all that matters, is ultimately inconsistent. Indeed, this is not to deny that one may be more self-indulgent and caring, on certain occasions, about retaining one's sense of integrity than about the interests of the people to whom one is attached. The

³⁴ It forms a part of Charles's experience that the demand that the child is making upon him has to do with the way *we* are (though not specifically with the way he is) and, therefore, that it would have been imposed upon *anyone* else placed in a relevantly similar situation. And yet Charles could unproblematically grant that some other people would not perceive that demand and, more interestingly, that in some communities that demand would not have arisen. The latter possibility affects the domain of "we" and "anyone" in complex ways, since Charles is not simply assuming that the existence of the demand is a convention of the community which he recognizes as belonging to. For, among other things, he takes it that, despite some variations in the particular scenarios, all human communities must have a place for that kind of demand.

³⁵ In Charles's case, we sense that his integrity would be resented if he failed to appropriately contribute to the child's well-being. However, there are also situations in which the subject's integrity would suffer because of his failure in destroying or causing harm to someone else. Such is the nature of vendettas, where one cannot rest until the murdered relative is avenged. In such cases, causing harm is seen as the only way to repair some previous harm and re-establish the broken order. A similar notion of order is present in Charles's case, although in this case, harm is balanced with attention. The survival value of the vendetta is indeed unquestionable, but, if my considerations in this section are correct, the value of restoring the order is not merely instrumental, since the failure to recover is experienced as a degradation of that order.

³⁶ We could also use the term "*attachment*" in a more general sense, which would not only be concerned with social links, but with all aspects of a subject's life whose adequate attendance affect her sense of integrity or degradation. Thus, we could reasonably say, under certain conditions, that a given artist is attached to her work, or a craftswomen to the quality of her production. In this paper, though, I usually employ "*attachment*" in the restricted sense, leaving the possibility of drawing more general connections to the reader.

problem is that self-indulgence, like the pursuit of pleasure, is parasitic upon other responses, which do not deserve that description.

We may then conclude that the object of a subject's attachment is not of a mere instrumental value to her. But what is the notion of instrumentality involved here? We have seen that attachments have to do with the preservation of the subject's integrity, and not with the mere satisfaction of her desires. Let us, then, further explore the nature of this contraposition to elaborate the two different senses in which social relations may not have a merely instrumental value.

We may start off with an experience that fits nicely with the Means-End Thesis. Suppose that Peter actually desires Mary's welfare, but let us assume that, given the circumstances (Mary is seriously ill, for instance), the satisfaction of this desire is beginning to conflict with several other desires of his. We may then ask what kind of element could figure in a process of deliberation with regard to whether he should preserve this desire or rather seek to extinguish it. Peter will surely have to think about the relative strength of his desires, the energy required to satisfy them as well as how they are interconnected, the reliability of the means available to him to satisfy those desires, his capacity to extinguish a certain desire, and so forth. However, would Peter be allowed, according to the Means-End Thesis, to include in that deliberation the fact that Mary would lead an extremely miserable life if he extinguished his desire and, therefore, stopped looking after her? The crucial question in Peter's deliberation should be whether a situation where his desire for Mary's welfare is over would be more or less rewarding than the present one. In other words, if Peter rightly concludes that he must engage in the process of extinguishing his desire for Mary's welfare because, under the circumstances, it is scarcely rewarding compared to other desires that Peter might alternatively cultivate, there is no reason within the Means-End Thesis not to do so. Nevertheless, we would surely understand that, if Peter chooses to abolish the desire at stake, Mary may come to see herself as a mere instrument in Peter's life, as a tool that is abandoned as soon as it cannot do its job.

This notion of instrumentality (and, therefore, of noninstrumentality) seems to go beyond the confines of the Means-End Thesis and is closely connected to the experience of attachment. Thus, one could say that Mary's sickness has led her to discover that Peter was not really attached to her, that he did not really care about her, that she has just been useful to him for a while and is dropped as circumstances turn her into a hurdle. Yet, why should we say that the experience of attachment apprehends the notion of instrumentality that Mary is employing?

A subject is attached to another subject X when she recognizes that X makes a demand or claim on her. A criterion of this recognition is that the subject would have to pay a certain kind of cost if she fails to honor it. This is so even when serving the attachment to X inevitably conflicts with other attachments. The subject may certainly try to get rid of the perception of that cost and,

therefore, of that attachment. The subject may seek to do so to avoid both the effort of honoring it and the cost that for her integrity would have to disregard that demand. Seeking to eliminate that perception is, in that case, a peculiar way of not respecting the demand. For engaging in such abolishing procedure is an illegitimate move from the viewpoint of the demand in question: the perception of the demand involves the perception of the illegitimacy of that move. This does not amount to saying that all revisions in one's attachments are illegitimate from the perspective of such attachments. Rather, my point is that attachments impose certain constraints on the conditions under which that revision could be legitimately carried out, while such a notion of legitimacy is absent insofar as only desires are concerned. More specifically, I am claiming that Mary's actual fate would form a part of any deliberation that would legitimize the extinction of Peter's attachment. The circumstances in which we should see Peter's abolishing move as legitimate (even if inevitably accompanied with a sense of loss) would coincide with those in which we would perceive Mary's reproach of being neglected as unwarranted.³⁷

In light of this, we may read two kinds of reproach on Mary's lips. Firstly, she may feel instrumentalized by Peter insofar as the latter was not attached to her and his promotion of Mary's welfare was relative to his desires. This accusation of instrumentality only makes sense in contraposition with some other kind of relation which is viewed as noninstrumental like, for instance, an attachment. Let us then speak of *detached instrumentality* to express the nature of this first reproach.³⁸ Secondly, we may suppose that Peter was really attached to Mary. The criterion of his attachment, and not merely linked to her by his desire, would surely be that he would experience a certain kind of cost if he neglected the claim that Mary is making on him. Suppose that, under the circumstances, Peter actually fails to honor his attachment; in that case, Mary might legitimately feel disregarded, and might retrospectively revise the strength of Peter's attachment or her image of him, but would not be entitled to see herself as having been a mere instrument in Peter's life.

The experience of attachment comes, then, to reinforce our case against the instrumental treatment of the social world, which appears, by now, as too narrow an approach, incapable of taking stock of the various ways in which social life may affect the value of a subject's life. However, this experience also brings to light the inadequacy of the Composite Thesis (and, therefore, of the Means-End

³⁷ There is indeed room for a gap between Mary's perception and a proper perception of the situation. This normative element is also present in Charles's experience as he assumes that his perception of the demand is anyone's perception. The links between an individual's perception, our perception and the correct perception surely constitute an important portion of the fabric of any normative notion and, in the end, of the very idea of rationality. However, this is indeed a fundamental issue upon which I cannot dwell here.

³⁸ I hope it is clear by now why a benevolent disposition, insofar as it is construed as a mere desire to contribute to other people's welfare, still envisages the other instrumentally and does not apprehend the very nature of attachments. I suspect, however, that the ordinary notion of benevolence could hardly be interpreted in terms of mere desire.

Thesis), since the latter has made no room for the notions of integrity and degradation and, relatedly, cannot grasp the normative sense of instrumentality. In the next section, I shall complete my challenge to these theses by discussing the argument for the absurd.

4. *Significance and the Argument for the Absurd*

The absurd was singled out in section 3 as an inescapable consequence of the Means-End Thesis, according to the assumption of naturalism. Those ends that, from an inner perspective, may appear as intrinsically valuable or important, are from a naturalist stance inevitably trivial and irrelevant, since there is no room within this external perspective for the notion of importance or value. However, I am reluctant to accept that this form of the absurd is an unavoidable implication of our naturalist outlook. To support my opposition, I will take a number of steps. Firstly, I will present an example which will allow me to introduce the notion of “constitutive link”, which is meant to apprehend a kind of connection between activities, which is not merely instrumental. This notion will be used, at a second stage, to revise the conditions under which a human life may make sense and, as a result, the argument for the absurd will be challenged.

There is some distance between the nearest news-stand and Carmen’s flat so she has to walk for ten minutes to get her paper. This is the experience I want to focus upon: Carmen’s walk to buy a newspaper. This experience takes place almost every day: sometimes it is nice and sunny, but often the weather is a bit harsh because of the rain, the wind or the heat; still, Carmen likes her almost daily stroll to the news-stand. In fact, she prefers walking rather than getting her newspaper delivered at her door, since this would deprive her of the motivation to get out every morning and breathe the fresh air of a new day.

Carmen’s story refers to an end (buying a newspaper) and some means (walking to the closest news-stand) to accomplish that end. We could then say that the walk is instrumentally related to obtaining the paper, and this much would be true, but we may be underdescribing the experience. For this characterization is unable to differentiate Carmen’s case from that of Michael who, despite his hatred of walking, walks for ten minutes every day to pick up his paper. This is the case of a person who prefers to have his paper delivered at his door but, for some reason, cannot get it. It seems, then, that some additional specifications are required to distinguish the peculiarity of Carmen’s case. Thus, one could say that the real divergence between Carmen and Michael lies in the goals that they pursue; Michael’s objective is just getting the paper, while Carmen’s goal is slightly more complex, namely: walking to get the paper. This is surely a way of expressing the disparity between them, but it hides the nature of their respective experiences of walking to buy the paper, which is the object of our concern. In a sense, we can agree that Carmen and Michael have distinct interests precisely because we detect important differences in their respective walking experiences. It is the structure of these differences that I wish to discern. For starters, we could say that Michael’s relation to the walk is *merely*

instrumental, but Carmen's is not.³⁹ Much of the disparity between Michael and Carmen rests on the adverb "merely" since the latter's walk has an instrumental value too, but not a merely instrumental one.

What do we mean, then, when we say that Michael's walk is just instrumental? Well, we are saying that his walk to the news-stand plays no role in his life apart from allowing him to get the newspaper. The walk is a waste of time for him and possibly a painful moment which is compensated only by the pleasure of reading the paper. Merely instrumental activities seek a compensation, which one expects to obtain from the goal to which they serve. In other words, a merely instrumental activity only makes sense if it is ultimately compensated. Needless to say, merely instrumental activities are quite fragile from the viewpoint of sense, since they decisively depend on success which, in turn, depends on factors quite separate from the subject's control. Furthermore, success can also be instrumentalized: Michael gets the paper and reads it not because he enjoys doing so, but because he thinks he needs it to keep updated; to be able to talk and make witty comments at parties. But, of course, he does not really enjoy parties but, due to his marketing job, he needs to get acquainted with people, and so on. Then is his job the ultimate end. Oh, no, his job is just to make a living, and then one is tempted to ask: but when does he live? All his efforts appear, in this light, as a precise preparation for a time of happiness and joy, but when will this time come, what will it consist of? "An experience of pleasure" one might say, or "having a great time", to use a more common expression. Be it as it may, let us now turn to Carmen's experience and try to work out why we do not see her walk to the news-stand as merely instrumental.

It is clear that Carmen likes walking in the morning, but it seems that she is more motivated if her walk has some particular purpose, say, buying the paper. Of course, this might be so because to the pleasure of walking Carmen adds its instrumental value. However, this description keeps both elements apart and this may not be correct. It may also happen that the very experience of walking is different because it has a certain sort of purpose; after all, we can understand that Carmen is more fond of a walk with that kind of purpose than just walking aimlessly. However, in that case, the end will not be external to the experience of walking, but give rise to a new kind of experience. Thereby, the connection between getting the paper and walking is not just that the latter is an instrument of the former, but also that the former transforms and enriches the latter. For Carmen, walking-to-buy-the-newspaper is a more interesting experience than just walking, and this additional value is not independent of the fact that walking is a means to a certain kind of purpose, like getting the paper. We may then say that in Carmen's case, as opposed to Michael's, the pursuit of a certain end (i.e., buying the paper) is a *constitutive* part of her walking experience.⁴⁰

³⁹ Cf. Korsgaard [1983], 185 for a related remark on the value of a mink coat.

⁴⁰ The notion of constitutive link is not more problematic than a constitutive part of a whole. One might reasonably claim that it is constitutive of this table to be made out of wood. For a table-shaped object that were made of a different stuff could not be this table. Relatedly, one might urge that it is constitutive of this object being of a certain kind (namely,

In general, we could say that an activity or engagement may bear constitutive links with several other activities and engagements, and that the array of constitutive links of a given activity A is defined by all those activities and circumstances of a subject's life which contribute to fix the experience of engaging in that activity A. The existence of a constitutive link between two activities does not preclude the presence of an instrumental connection at all. On the contrary, what Michael's example suggests is that an instrumental connection may be both a requisite for the emergence and preservation of a constitutive link, and also a factor that alters the very experience of walking. In fact, it is partly because of the latter phenomenon that we may claim that buying the paper is constitutively linked to the walking experience.

We may learn from this that the glue which unites the different activities and projects that compose the life of a subject need not be merely instrumental, such that there are other kinds of glue like the one that constitutive links provide. However, the fact that a life may not only be instrumentally but constitutively articulated is of some effect to the notion of sense.

According to the intrinsic vs. extrinsic approach, there are some ends which a subject may envisage as intrinsically valuable, while the rest of activities and concerns appear as mere means (or hurdles) for the attainment of such ends. Carmen's example suggests, however, some articulations of value that are neglected by that approach. Thus, we have seen that some activities may have a noninstrumental value partly because they are proper means to certain ends and that, conversely, the value of the ends is not independent of their capacity to affect those activities that lead to them, so that the latter may become noninstrumentally valuable too. Hence, if we take Carmen's case as an illustration of a more general trend, we could say that the noninstrumental sense of an activity depends on its location in a network of constitutive links, and the value of an

a table) that it has, for instance, a wooden board. For if an object did not have a board, it would not be a table, and if it were not wooden, it would not be this object. If we should agree on this, I could assert that, in general, P is a constitutive part of a particular entity E if and only if E were deprived of P, E would cease to exist; and, on the other hand, P is a constitutive part of E being of class K if and only if E were deprived of P, E would no longer belong to class K.

How does this notion of constitutive parts apply to experiences? If one grants that the numerical identity of experiences is fixed relative to the numerical identity of the subjects (and activities) that bear them, we can legitimately say that the activity of buying a newspaper is constitutively linked to Carmen's walking experience because, hadn't her walk been oriented toward that buying activity, it would have been an experience of a different kind. This is the point that I wanted to stress. However, some elements may not only be constitutive parts of an experience R being of a certain kind K, but of the existence of that particular experience and, more interestingly, of a subject having experiences of a certain kind. For it may be a metaphysical fact about Carmen, about her being the particular subject she is, that she cannot have a certain class of experience but only can engage in certain activities or be in relation with certain people. Such experiences should certainly be more nuclear to her character than the experience of walking to buy the newspaper: they might include, for instance, the sort of attachments that Michael established in his childhood. Cf. MacIntyre [1981], ch. 15, Winch [1987b], and Wiggins [1975-6], [1987] for some related notions of constitutive link.

end will, in turn, be partly relative to its capacity to affect the experience of engaging in certain activities. Let us reserve the word "*significance*" to name this aspect of an activity or end.⁴¹

The network of constitutive links that belongs to a given activity is not, however, something given, but something in need of constant re-creation. The significance that an engagement has for a subject is not gained once and forever, but an aspect of the experience that requires constant care and concern. In this respect, we may assert that Carmen's walk was exciting and appealing to her because she had managed to create and cultivate the adequate constitutive links between her daily walk and other activities; while Michael's walk was dispirited and merely instrumental because it lacked the required constitutive links.

The notion of significance may certainly help to apprehend and articulate the value that certain events, locations, objects, persons, rituals, and gestures may have in the life of a subject (or a community). One can thus make sense, for instance, of the idea that certain experiences or situations may permeate the entire life of a subject and, accordingly, recognize the crucial contribution of childhood to one's identity. Similarly, one can see how the present life of a community is partly constituted by the perception of its history and its relation to other communities. Thus, the significance of architecture in our lives cannot be alien to its special role in the awareness that a community may have of its own history. For the different patterns in the articulation of public and private space are, among other things, like sensible hallmarks of the constitution of a certain way of leading our lives.

The identity of a subject is then partly fixed by her location in a social (and, therefore, historical) space, that is, by the significance that a certain social and historical web may have in her life. Undoubtedly, a subject's attachments are an important ingredient in the articulation of such a location. So, we may go back to Charles's case, and explore the complex ways in which the notion of significance is connected to that of attachment.

To begin, we can say that, as Charles's case brings to light, a subject's integrity is constitutively linked to her attendance—and the actual fate—of the people to whom she is attached; or, to put it another way, that the cultivation of one's attachment has a deep significance in one's life, since it affects one's sense of integrity or degradation. It follows that, in the case of attachments, significance is conditioned by certain normative elements that are rather absent in other experiences of significance. The significance that for a subject's integrity may have a certain response crucially depends on the question of the latter's appropriateness or legitimacy. An illegitimate response would deteriorate the subject's integrity, while, on the contrary, a proper response would enhance it. The role of this normative issue is virtually inexistent, though, in quite trivial

⁴¹ We might also say that a significant engagement is intrinsically valuable. However, I am quite reluctant to employ the word "intrinsic" because this may easily encourage the thought that an activity may have value independently of its connections with other activities. This is precisely what the notion of significance is born to deny.

experiences like walking to buy the newspaper. One could hardly dismiss Michael's shrunk way of buying the paper as illegitimate, even if a rather remote sense of illegitimacy may be present here, insofar as one could feel entitled to object to certain ways of wasting a life. It seems, then, that even if the notion of significance requires the presence of a noninstrumental connection, the latter need not encompass the normative constraint that is present insofar as attachments are concerned.

The experience of significance is involved in attachments in a second, related, but different way. It is specific to attachments to impose certain demands upon us; that they require from us a certain kind of response. Moreover, it may form a part of that demand, as in Charles's case: that the appropriate response should be one that, for instance, the victim (or her relatives) would recognize as an expression of genuine concern. But, of course, a response of this nature is one which has a certain significance for the subject in question; one that cannot be performed in a merely instrumental way. It seems then that our attachments may impose upon us certain demands of significance with respect to our response, and this is a further respect in which the social world does not have a mere instrumental value for us. In fact, someone who never feels the need for that kind of expressive response would appear inhuman to us.

We are now in a position to appraise the argument for the absurd that was mentioned in section 3. This argument assumes that we may consider the value of our lives from two irreconcilable perspectives. There is an inner perspective from which one's engagements may appear as meaningful. However, we can also access an external, naturalist stance wherein all activities and concerns are ultimately vain and valueless. It is hard then to figure out how the subject can integrate these two perspectives into a single, unified experience. This upshot may also be reinforced by some other considerations about the nature of the divide between the objective and the subjective.⁴² This problem cannot be addressed here in full. However, in the following paragraphs I will point out how, in my view, the notion of significance may help to create some space where the idea of a unified experience becomes intelligible, where the internal and external perspectives might merge into a single perception.

The argument for the absurd assumes that the unimportance of our ends to the universe is the criterion of their ultimate futility. This may sound like a reasonable position insofar as, according to the intrinsic vs. extrinsic approach to value, the sense of an activity is derivative upon the importance or intrinsic value of certain ends. In our approach, however, the notion of significance challenges this narrow treatment of sense. In the light of this notion, the perception of the unimportance of our activities to the universe does not necessarily lead to the absurd that might affect the sense of our lives differently. To assess the impact that this perception might have on the significance of our concerns, let us ask how this perception may alter the experience of engaging in certain activities, and check whether it would necessarily deteriorate their significance.

⁴² Cf., for instance, Nagel [1979a], [1986].

The perception of the unimportance to the universe may surely affect the significance of our lives in various ways. One of them is associated with the dismissal of any transcendent legend, which would specify the means by which one could reach a plentiful culminating stage, a paradise. We have already indicated how this dismissal may shake the robustness of our experience of sense, since it deprives us of some resources that are quite useful to reinforce that experience. The idea of a plentiful culmination has played, and keeps playing, that role in the lives of many people. That idea helps them to swallow the hardships of life, their own suffering and that of their beloved persons, the distress that massacres cause, and so on. On some occasions, that belief may really alter their experience, actually transforming their suffering into a significant experience; a capacity that they would lose if they did not have that conviction.⁴³ On other occasions, that belief will act as a promise of redemption, as guaranteeing a future compensation of present efforts. Thereby, the current suffering will be conceived as a mere instrument to reach that state. This dual strategy provides a powerful safety net against the absurd: it helps to increase the significance of any distressing experience, but, even if this fails, at least one retains the promise of a future, generous compensation. Our naturalist outlook forces us to live without this promise, and the recognition of this fact restricts the materials upon which to build a meaningful life. This is an important respect in which our experience is affected by our naturalism.

However, the argument for the absurd that we are discussing presses in a different direction. Its point is that, once we perceive the aimlessness of the universe, our experience is necessarily split into two colliding perspectives: one in terms of which a human life may be meaningful and another in which it is ultimately empty. But why should it be so? Nagel seeks to motivate the inevitability of that division by means of an example. He claims that, once we become aware of the outside perspective, one is like the husband who welcomes his spouse back home after her elopement: our experience, like their relationship, is no longer the same.⁴⁴ I do not see, however, how this analogy serves Nagel's purposes. The fact that the relationship will no longer be the same does not entail that the experience of their relationship will now constantly shift between two perceptions: (a) the perception of their faithful relationship before the elopement, and (b) the perception of the adultery. On the contrary, it sounds perfectly possible that a new, perhaps more profound relationship will gradually emerge out of this conflict. The experience of this new relation will surely be conditioned by the elopement and, therefore, the significance in their lives will certainly differ from their initial experience, but it would not necessarily consist of a constant alternation between two conflicting experiences.

But why shouldn't something like this happen with the initial collision between the internal and external perspective? One might reply, as Nagel seems to

⁴³ This is partly the experience of the Saint in "Life on a string" (cf. sec. 1).

⁴⁴ Cf. Nagel [1979b], 20.

suggest, that the perception of the unimportance of our lives for the universe breeds the experience of irony: "If 'sub specie aeternitatis' there is no reason to believe that anything matters, then that doesn't matter either, and we can approach our absurd lives with irony instead of despair."⁴⁵ One might insist that irony is the kind of attitude of someone who lives divided, who feels both engaged and distant with regard to their goals and activities. Yet I do not see why irony is the only available response. In fact, there are many activities where the perception of their external unimportance does not favor the adoption of a split, ironical attitude. Games and sports seem to constitute an obvious case: one may enthusiastically engage in playing (or watching) a soccer match despite its unimportance from a larger perspective, but rather because of that unimportance. It would sound weird to claim that those who perceive the triviality of soccer can only practice it with a divided attitude. This is not to deny, of course, that the perception of its triviality contributes to fix the significance of engaging in that activity. After all, soccer may be taken too seriously and, for those who do adopt such an attitude, soccer would have a significance quite different from the one it has for those of us who take this activity less dramatically. Still, this reduction in dramatism does not lead to an ironical duality, but to a sort of joyful lightness.⁴⁶

Sexual games may constitute a particularly clear counterexample to Nagel's conclusion that, given that our ends are irrelevant from an external perspective, we are bound to color our activities with irony. The interest that a subject may take in certain sexual games is manifestly relative to her sexual desire: if the subject were deprived of that desire, she would find those games ridiculous and boring. Yet, the knowledge of this fact does not allow the subject to adopt an ironical attitude toward the sexual game when she engages in them as a result of her desire. For as soon as a distant, ironical attitude emerges, the enchantment dispels and the game is over. It seems then that sexual games are constitutively serious, even if it would form a part of certain ways of playing it that one should pretend that they are not, since the mere presence of irony inevitably abolishes the game. So, we get an activity, which is not at all peripheral in human life, where the fact that its value is recognized as relative to the subject's desire cannot lead to the adoption of a distant attitude.

We may then conclude that the perception of the unimportance of an activity, even if it may alter the significance of the latter, does not necessarily lead to the emergence of a split, ironical experience. For there are resources in our practices on the basis of which a different response may be articulated. I have suggested sports and sexual games as part of the materials that one may gather for this purpose, but some of our experiences before science may help too. Consider, for instance, the sense of awe that may accompany the study of astronomy, physics, evolution, and biology. From this perspective, beings and

⁴⁵ Nagel [1979b], 23.

⁴⁶ Cf. Marrades [1997] for an exploration of a closely related idea in the writings of Schiller.

materials in the universe are not apprehended as putative instruments for our satisfaction. Rather, they form with us a web and share with us their smallness and irrelevance. This is hardly the experience of distance and irony.

5. *To Close*

Several elements that may affect the value of our lives have been singled out throughout this paper. The composite thesis mentioned experiences such as desire-satisfaction, pleasure, and choice. The experience of integrity (or degradation), as well as that of significance was then added. All these elements may consequently appear as different *goods* in terms of which the life of a subject is supposed to be shaped and assessed. These goods are not free from conflict and tension, since they actually may be incompatible under some circumstances.⁴⁷ A subject, for instance, may have to renounce the satisfaction of certain desires for the sake of her integrity and, in the end, this frustration may leave some sequels in the significance of her life. It may sound then as if the most that one could do is to search for a certain kind of balance, and it may be true that, under certain conditions, the experience of significance is the ultimate criterion that this balance has been achieved. Although, the particular circumstances that a subject may encounter, the object and strength of her desires, as well as the specific way in which she may envisage her integrity, will definitely condition how difficult it is for that subject to attain her balance.

We are not bound, however, to concede any privileged position to a balanced existence and, therefore, to the experience of significance. One may decide to sacrifice balance for the sake of integrity: even when there is no hope that one finally would be rewarded with a deeper, more robust kind of balance. Similarly, the satisfaction of our strongest desires, or the pursuit of pleasure, may override other goods, including the benefits of equilibrium.⁴⁸ So, we may say that the fundamental dimension in terms of which we are bound to orient and assess our lives consists of a certain articulation of elements such as choice, desire-satisfaction, pleasure, integrity, and significance. It is an essential feature of this fundamental dimension that such goods may conflict and, therefore, there is nothing like an ideal articulation, that each subject is bound to quest for her own form. Such is, we may say, our conception of the self. The sense in which there may be such a quest, as well as the principles that may guide it, is something that we must leave for another occasion. Although, as we have seen, our conception of the self defines the resources that are available to us in such a quest and, therefore, the boundaries within which it must be performed.

⁴⁷ Cf. Berlin [1980], Williams [1981a].

⁴⁸ A subject might seek balance or harmony within an aspect of her life even at the price of leading an overall unbalanced life. A painter, for instance, may be devoted to create sophisticated, harmonious works and, as a result, neglect other important aspects of her life.

References

- Anscombe, G.E.M. [1981], "Times, Beginnings and Causes", in G.E.M. Anscombe, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Vol. II (Oxford: Basil Blackwell).
- Bentham, J. [1996], *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Berlin, I. [1980], *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Block, N. [1990], "Can the Mind Change the World?", in G. Boolos (ed.), *Meaning and Method: Essays in Honor of Hilary Putnam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 137-170.
- Block, N. (ed.) [1980], *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2 vols.
- Block, N., O. Flanagan, and G. Güzeldere (eds.), [1996], *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical and Scientific Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press).
- Corbí, J.E. and J.L. Prades [2000], *Minds, Causes, and Mechanisms: A Case Against Physicalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers).
- Feinberg, J. [1978], *Reason and Responsibility* (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth Publishing Company).
- Heil, J. & A. Mele [1993], *Mental Causation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- James, W. [1982], "The Will to Believe", in H.S. Thayer (ed.), *Pragmatism: The Classic Writings* (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company).
- Kim, J. [1992], "Multiple Realization and the Metaphysics of Reduction", in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 52, 1-26.
- _____ [1993], "Postscripts on Mental Causation", in J. Kim, *Supervenience and Mind: Selected Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Korsgaard, C.M. [1983], "Two Distinctions in Goodness", *The Philosophical Review*, 92, 169-195.
- Lycan, W.G. (ed.) [1990], *Mind and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- MacIntyre, A. [1981], *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press).
- Marrades, J. [1997], "A partir de Schiller: naturaleza, juego y libertad", in J.E. Corbí and C.J. Moya (eds.), *Ensayos sobre Libertad y Necesidad* (Valencia: Pre-textos).
- Mill, J.S. [1931], "Utilitarianism", in J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism, Liberty and Representative Government* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd).
- Murdoch, I. [1986], "The Idea of Perfection", in I. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge), 1-45.
- Nagel, Th. [1979a], "Subjective and Objective", in Th. Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 24-38.
- _____ [1979b], "The Absurd", in Th. Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 24-38.
- _____ [1986], *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Parfit, D. [1984], *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Putnam, H. [1992], *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press).
- Rosenthal, D.M. (ed.) [1991], *The Nature of Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Sanchez Durá, N. [1993], "Una explicación no tranquilizará al enamorado", in V. Sanfélix (ed.), *Acerca de Wittgenstein* (Valencia: Pre-textos).
- Sartre, J.P. [1957], "Existentialism is a Humanism", in J.P. Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Philosophical Library).
- Taylor, Ch. [1982], "Responsibility for Self", in G. Watson (ed.), *Free Will* (Oxford: