Structuring Lives and Stories

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

I address philosophical questions about the relationship between how we structure our own lives over time and how we reflect on how we are structuring our own lives over time. In the first three chapters, I develop an account of the conditions under which an agent counts as structuring her own life. This is the Rational Immersion View: an agent counts as structuring her own life if she has a commitment that manifests across a wide range of circumstances and whose manifestation consists in immersive activity that involves the extensive deployment of her rational capacities for deliberation and planning. The main advantage of this view is that it can account for forms of independence between how we structure our lives and the exercise of our reflective capacities: for instance, it can account for agents who structure their lives around the pursuit of commitments that they do not endorse acting upon. In the final chapter, I argue that the exercise of our reflective capacities, when directed toward our life-structuring commitments, involves the exercise of our story-telling capacities: to acquire full awareness of a life-structuring commitment, as a potential ground for action, one needs to tell a story of one's life structured by the pursuit of that commitment. This proposal allows us to illuminate the respect in which reflection on a commitment involves *stepping back* from the commitment: one acquires critical distance from a commitment when there is ironic distance between one's perspective while reflecting and one's perspective while immersed in the pursuit of that commitment.

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Fields of Study

Major Field: Philosophy

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There is a prominent trend in the moral psychology literature, at least since Harry Frankfurt, of emphasizing the philosophical importance of our reflective capacities. In Frankfurt's early work, it's these capacities that mark off a difference between us and other, lower animals.[1] In Frankfurt's work, though, what is essential to our reflective capacities isn't merely our ability to frame a concept of ourselves and arrive at particular beliefs about which motivational states and beliefs we have. These capacities involve, crucially, the ability to *take a side*: to endorse acting on one motive rather than another, to identify with one rather than another. They also involve the ability to reject acting upon a particular motive – to regard it as an "outlaw" force, as something external to oneself, in some important sense.[2] We see this phenomenon most vividly in the classic example of the unwilling addict. The unwilling addict very strongly desires to use a drug. The motivational force of this desire is so strong that it is going to issue in action – it's going

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[1] Crucially, on Frankfurt's earlier view, we have the capacity for forming higher-order volitions: a higher order desire concerning which among our desires will be our will, or which will be effective in producing our action. See Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 1 (1971): 7–10. It is this capacity, specifically, that is "essential to being a person." Ibid., 10.

[2] The language of 'externality' and 'identification' is most vivid in Harry Frankfurt, "Identification and Externality," in *The Importance of What We Care About* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). We also find similar language, put in terms of "radical separation" of the person from the rejected desire, at Harry Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," in *The Importance of What We Care About* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 170. For the language of "outlaw" forces, see Ibid., 175. The language of identification and endorsement finds a place even in Frankfurt's earlier work. See, e.g., discussion of identifying with a particular desire at Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 16.

to move him to use the drug. He might well have conflicting motivational states. He might also desire to show up to work on time the next morning, believe (justifiably) that his drug use will prevent this, and so have another desire not to use the drug. But the motivational force, generated by these other features of his psychology, pales in comparison to the motivational force of his desire to use the drug.

Importantly, Frankfurt tells us, there is a special feature of this character's psychology. The unwilling addict doesn't merely have any old set of conflicting motivations. There is a conflict between a special sort of higher-order motivational state and his desire to use the drug. He has a decisive higher-order desire that his desire to use the drug not be effective in producing his action.[3] And it's this special higher-order desire that constitutes his rejection of the desire to use the drug.

Many philosophers have criticized Frankfurt's selection of this higher-order desire as the state that constitutes the agent's endorsement or rejection of acting on the basis of some particular motive.[4] They disagree most clearly about the nature of the

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[3] This higher-order desire is a higher-order volition, or a higher-order desire concerning which among his desires will be his will, or the desire that will be effective in producing his action. See discussion at Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 7–10. It is important that the higher-order volition in question be decisive, in the sense that one has no other conflicting volitions of the same or yet higher-order. (One could, for instance, desire that one not act on the basis of some particular first-order desire, but have a yet higher-order desire that this particular second-order volition not be effective in suppressing the action generated by that first-order desire, and so on…) The higher-order volition needs to identify the agent decisively with one of his first-order desires, where this means that there is "no room for questions concerning the pertinence of desires or volitions of higher orders" Ibid., 16. In later work, Frankfurt develops this view of decisive identification in terms of the way such identification "resounds through an unlimited sequence of possible further reconsiderations of his decision" – this occurs when we are certain, or at least very confident, that we would reach the same conclusion (e.g., about which desire to act upon) upon reconsidering the matter anew. See discussion at Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," sec. IV.

[4] Most famously, Watson objects to Frankfurt's emphasis on higher-order volitions: "But why does one necessarily care about one's higher-order volitions? Since second-order volitions are themselves simply desires, to add them to the context of conflict is just to increase the number of contenders; it is not to give a special place to any of those in contention." Gary Watson, "Free Agency," *Journal of Philosophy* 72, no.

relevant psychological mechanism for endorsing or rejecting acting upon a particular motive. These include philosophers such as Michael Bratman, David Velleman, Gary Watson, and Christine Korsgaard, among others.[5] But they agree that such endorsement and rejection has a significant philosophical role to play: an important role within an account of autonomous action, for instance. And they agree that there is an important respect in which the unwilling addict rejects acting on the basis of his desire to use the drug.[6]

It's tempting to characterize this issue in metaphorical terms. Korsgaard gives a very nice description of the compelling metaphor.[7] It's as if we have many different

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April (1975): 218. See also criticisms at J. David Velleman, "What Happens When Someone Acts?," *Mind* 101, no. 403 (1992): sec. IV.

[5] On the old Frankfurt view, an agent rejects a desire when she decisively identifies against it (at least partly) by having a higher-order volition, which "resounds" through her psychology, not to act on the basis of this desire. See discussion at Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 16; Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," sec. IV. On Frankfurt's newer view, this rejection would be related to the way that acting on the basis of this desire would be unthinkable – it would conflict with the "essential character of his will." Harry Frankfurt, "Autonomy, Necessity, and Love," in *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 132. This inability also resounds through the agent's psychology: it is one which it is unthinkable to change. This inability is due to the agent's will. See Harry Frankfurt, "On the Necessity of Ideals," in *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 112. (For an extremely helpful discussion of the evolution of Frankfurt's views, see again J. David Velleman, "Identification and Identity," in *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 331–34.) Of course, in the wake of Frankfurt's seminal work, a number of prominent philosophers have provided their own views on the agent's endorsement- and rejection-constituting attitudes. For just a few examples of work in this vein, see Michael Bratman, "Reflection, Planning, and Temporally Extended Agency," in *Structures of Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 21–46; Watson, "Free Agency"; Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 3; Velleman, "What Happens When Someone Acts?"

[6] Here I'm emphasizing disavowing acting on a particular desire rather than having a particular desire. Frankfurt gives a nice case in which these could come apart. A scientist, curious about the experience of desiring a drug, may very well desire to desire a drug, even though he would not desire to act on the basis of this desire. See Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 9. Rejecting acting on the basis of a particular desire may also not involve a commitment to getting rid of the desire. See discussion at Michael Bratman, "A Desire of One's Own," *Journal of Philosophy* 100, no. 5 (2003): n. 29.

[7] See, for instance, Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4–5; Christine M. Korsgaard, "The Activity of Reason," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 83, no. 2

motives, each pushing us to act one way or the other. One motive moves me to get up and go to work; the other moves me to stay in bed for the next hour. But none of these motives speaks for me, on its own. It's as if I'm there, distinct from the motives, considering each as presenting a potential way of acting. I consider both proposals, and I decide to act on one rather than the other. I'm a diligent person, committed to making progress on work – and, so, I decide to get out of bed and get to work. I endorse one of the potential grounds for action presented by the motives that struck me at the moment.

I agree with many in the literature that such reflective capacities play an important role within moral psychology and the philosophy of action. But, though I am working within the theory of agency, autonomy and autonomous action will not be my focus here. In this dissertation, my main focus will be on the relationship between these capacities for Frankfurtian reflection and another central, familiar aspect of ordinary human agency: our capacity to structure our own lives over time.

The exercise of this capacity is closely connected with the sense in which we think of ourselves as *authors* of our own lives, as giving a shape to our own lives over time. Of course, we don't want to overstate our control over the shape of our lives; many external forces, such as illness and economic forces, give a shape to our lives. A serious bodily illness, for instance, gives a shape to a life, unified by the challenges presented by the disease. But there is a pronounced difference between the shape of our lives acquired in *this* way and the shape of our lives acquired through the pursuit of our own

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(2009): 36. See also Christine M. Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 72.

commitments. When we form and pursue our commitments, our lives take a certain shape, unified by the activity performed in the pursuit of the commitment – and *we* ourselves are giving our life that shape. A professional academic, for instance, structures her own life by forming and pursuing a commitment to great research in her area.[8] There is a pronounced difference between *giving a shape to one's own life* and *having a shape imposed from the outside*, and we possess and routinely exercise the capacity to give a shape to our own lives over time.[9]

The overarching theme of this dissertation is the relationship between the exercise of *this* capacity and the exercise of our capacities for Frankfurtian reflection.[10] In other words, I am interested in the relationship between how we structure our own lives over time and how we exercise our reflective capacities. There are two primary parts to this dissertation, unified by this theme. In the first part of the dissertation, spanning chapters 2 through 4, I examine forms of independence between the exercise of these two capacities. In doing so, I develop an account of the conditions under which an agent counts as structuring her own life: this is the Rational Immersion View. In the second part of the dissertation, I examine the exercise of our reflective capacities, when applied to the conative states that are significantly shaping our activity over time. I will refer to such

[8] Of course, ordinary commitments, such as this, shape only a significant portion of one's life rather than one's entire life. Still, this is enough for such commitments to count as life-structuring, in an important sense: they still provide a recognizable structure to a significant portion of one's life.
[9] It is worth stressing that when I talk of capacities within this dissertation, I do so in a fairly thin sense; I do not mean to suggest that there is a specific, special-purpose mental faculty that is the *reflective* faculty or the *life-structuring* faculty.
[10] Notice that the views considered in this dissertation are not about connections between having one capacity and having another. One could, for instance, think there is an essential connection between having reflective capacities and having the capacity to structure one's life over time.

conative states as ‘life-structuring commitments.’ I argue that *accurate* Frankfurtian reflection on a life-structuring commitment – reflection that involves an accurate understanding of the object of that commitment – involves story-telling: it involves telling a story of one’s life structured by the pursuit of that commitment. Recognizing this fact allows us to illuminate the respect in which Frankfurtian reflection on a life-structuring commitment involves *stepping back* from the commitment.

I. Structured Lives without Reflection: The Rational Immersion View

To start off, we might think, we need to invoke the exercise of our reflective capacities to mark off the contrast between giving a shape to one’s own life and having a shape imposed from the outside. The unwilling addict brings this point into sharp relief. The unwilling addict disavows acting on the basis of his desire to use the drug; if he acts on the basis of this desire, day in and day out, it’s true that his life has a structure, unified by the pursuit of this desire. But the core insight from this example is that the addict’s desire is something akin to an external force. So, the shape to the addict’s life is coming from something akin to an external force, not from the addict himself, and he does not count as structuring his own life.

So, we might think, the crucial contrast between the addict and an agent who structures her own life, like the professional academic, is that the agent who structures her own life *endorses* acting upon the motives that shape her activity over time. Agents, then, exercise their capacity to structure their own lives by exercising their Frankfurtian reflective capacities: namely, their capacities for endorsing acting upon particular

motives. Indeed, it's no accident that we see traces of this within the work of Korsgaard and Bratman on Frankfurtian reflective endorsement. On both of their views, the state that constitutes the agent's reflective endorsement is also suited to play an extensive role in shaping her activity over time – a role that, we might think, makes it the case that the agent's endorsement-constituting attitude is *identical* to the state through which she structures her life.

Bratman's account of reflective endorsement builds off his work on intentions as mental states that play the functional role of settling the agent on a particular course of action at some future time. Of course, we might think that intentions are too specific to play the role of structuring a life. An intention to go to the grocery store on Thursday, for instance, plays too limited a motivational role to structure a life. But Bratman characterizes not only intentions but also policies, which are commitments to perform repeatable actions under certain circumstances. For instance, an agent might have a policy of always buckling her seatbelt while driving or of brushing her teeth twice daily.[11] This sort of mental state is much better suited to play an extensive role in shaping an agent's actions. But the category of policies might seem too broad. When an agent structures her life around the pursuit of a particular commitment, this commitment registers within her deliberation in a special sort of way. Certain considerations seem to count in favor of acting in certain ways. Bratman characterizes a specific kind of policy suited to play this role. These are self-governing policies. A self-governing policy is a policy to treat a certain desire as providing a justifying end within motivationally

[11] See discussion at Bratman, "Reflection, Planning, and Temporally Extended Agency," 27.

effective reasoning.[12] So, for instance, I may have a self-governing policy that I be honest. This means that I have a general policy of taking my desire to be honest to provide a justifying end for performing an action (e.g., an honest action) in motivationally effective practical reasoning: practical reasoning that issues in my action.[13] Self-governing policies, then, may seem to fit perfectly the bill of a life-structuring commitment. They structure an agent's action and deliberation across a wide range of circumstances; they are very general policies, after all. And these policies, on his view, constitute the agent's reflective endorsement of acting on a particular desire: on first gloss, to reflectively endorse acting on a particular desire is to have a self-governing policy that treats that desire as providing a justifying end within motivationally effective practical reasoning.[14]

Korsgaard's proposal, too, suggests a close connection between how an agent structures her life and her exercise of her capacities for reflective endorsement. On Korsgaard's view, to endorse acting on a particular desire is to have a practical identity – a conception under which you value yourself – that treats the desired aim as reason-providing.[15] We might think that practical identities play a life-structuring role: if I see (and value) myself as a parent, this view of myself will structure quite a lot of my action

[12] See initial discussion at Ibid., 33.
[13] See discussion from Ibid., 37–40.
[14] See, e.g., Ibid., 40.There are caveats: the agent needs to be satisfied with the relevant policy, in the sense that she has no conflicting self-governing policies. Ibid., 35. And Bratman also thinks that quasi-policies, like personal ideals, could constitute the agent's reflective endorsement of a desire. Ibid., 42–43. More than this, on Bratman's view, these policies settle where the agent stands *because* of their role in supporting the cross-temporal psychological connections that constitute the agent's identity over time. Ibid., 32; Bratman, "A Desire of One's Own," 150.
[15] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 100–102.

and deliberation over time by determining which desired aims I treat as reason-providing. Additionally, in Korsgaard's other work, it seems that the exercise of our reflective capacities is essential to nearly every element of our agency. Agents like us aren't merely able to evaluate our motives; we need to do so. Unlike the lower animals, we don't act automatically, on the basis of whatever motive strikes us. We can distance ourselves from our individual motives; we create a kind of "reflective distance" between the potential ground for action and the action itself.[16] But we need to cross this distance, and to do so, we need to endorse acting on a particular motive – we need to endorse one of the potential grounds for action presented by a desire.[17] Our reflective capacities both pose a problem and enable us to solve it.

Throughout the first three chapters of the dissertation, I argue that an agent could structure her own life without exercising her capacities for Frankfurtian reflection: specifically, without endorsing acting upon the motives that shape her activity over time. In the course of doing so, I develop an alternative view of what makes it the case that an agent structures her own life over time: this is the Rational Immersion View. On this view, an agent counts as structuring her life if she has a commitment that is manifesting across a wide range of circumstances and whose manifestation consists in immersive activity that involves the extensive deployment of her rational capacities for deliberation and planning. If an agent meets the condition specified by the Rational Immersion View,

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[16] This point applies, also, to the relationship between the potential grounds for belief and belief. Korsgaard, "The Activity of Reason," 31–32; Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 4–5.

[17] See, especially, the following quote: "This means that the space of reflective distance presents us with both the possibility and the necessity of exerting a kind of control over our beliefs and actions that the other animals probably do not have." Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 4.

she need not deploy her capacities for Frankfurtian reflection; I argue that an agent could count as structuring her own life, even if she never endorses acting upon any of the motives that are shaping her activity over time. And, in chapter 4, I argue that an agent could count as structuring her life around the pursuit of a commitment even if she *rejects* acting upon that commitment.

This means not only that we shouldn't appeal to the exercise of an agent's reflective capacities to mark off when she counts as structuring her own life, as opposed to having a structure imposed from the outside. It also means that the views of the endorsement-constituting state, drawn from Bratman and Korsgaard, won't give us an adequate characterization of an agent's *life-structuring commitments*: the commitments that shape the agent's activity in such a way as to make it the case that she's structuring her life over time. On the view developed within the next three chapters, one type of life-structuring commitment is just a commitment that satisfies the condition specified by the Rational Immersion View. One type of life-structuring commitment is a commitment that (i) manifest across a wide range of circumstances and (ii) whose manifestation consists in immersive activity that involves the extensive deployment of the agent's rational capacities. The emphasis on the exercise of the agent's rational capacities places the Rational Immersion View, and the corresponding account of life-structuring commitments, firmly within a rationalist tradition of identifying the agent's role in her actions with her role in the exercise of her rational capacities: specifically, as will emerge throughout the ensuing chapters, the agent counts as being in the role of shaping her own life in virtue of the fact that she's engaged in extensive, sophisticated rational activity –

even if it's extensive, sophisticated rational activity in the pursuit of a commitment that she does not endorse acting upon or even rejects acting upon.

II. Critical Distance as Ironic Distance

Throughout the first three chapters, I will be focused on possible forms of independence between the exercise of our Frankfurtian reflective capacities and our capacity to structure our own lives. The Rational Immersion View, along with the corresponding view of life-structuring commitments, recognizes such forms of independence. In the final chapter, I will shift my focus. It is a familiar fact of life that ordinary human agents do frequently reflect on how they are structuring their lives, and it is a familiar fact that such reflection often takes exactly the form described within the Frankfurtian tradition. Such reflection involves (i) acquiring full awareness of the commitment, as a potential ground for action, and (ii) taking a side with respect to acting on it, by endorsing or rejecting acting on it. In the final chapter, I will be focused on this first aspect of Frankfurtian reflection: this process of acquiring full awareness of the commitment, as a potential ground for action.

Such awareness, we are told, involves a kind of *stepping* back from the commitment. (Think, again, of Korsgaard's compelling metaphor, from the start of this introduction.) But it's not immediately obvious what this stepping back consists in. The goal for the final chapter is to illuminate the mechanism for stepping back from a life-structuring commitment by, first, examining the process of acquiring full awareness of a commitment. This isn't as straightforward as it might seem. There is an interesting sense

in which an agent has full awareness of a motive, as a potential ground for action, only if she has an accurate understanding of the object of her motive: only if she has an accurate understanding of what the world would be like if the motive were satisfied.[18] I argue that an accurate understanding of the object of a life-structuring commitment involves a representation of a sequence of events in which that commitment manifests in immersive activity that involves the extensive deployment of one's rational capacities. More than this, I argue, such a representation portrays the events as sufficiently connected, in the right sort of way, to count as a story. Thus, *accurate reflection* – reflection in which the agent has full awareness of her commitment, in the sense described above – on a life-structuring commitment involves telling a story of one's life structured by the pursuit of that commitment. Recognizing that accurate reflection on a life-structuring commitment involves story-telling allows us to use tools from the literature on narration to illuminate the process of stepping back from such a commitment. On the view developed within this chapter, an agent acquires critical distance from her commitment when there is ironic distance between the perspective of the agent while immersed and the perspective of the agent while reflecting.

Of course, I am not the first philosopher to take an interest in our story-telling capacities. In the well-being literature, some philosophers think that the notion of narrative has an important role to play: understanding how well someone's life is going over time involves understanding the narrative relations between the events within their

[18] In Appendix A, I also argue that there is an interesting sense in which an agent counts as fully aware of a motive, as a potential ground for action, only if she has an accurate understanding of the extent to which the motive would shape her activity over time.

life.[19] We see the topic of narrative within the literature on personal identity: the exercise of a person's capacities for story-telling over time ground her identity over time.[20] The topic of narrative plays a prominent role in the literature on autonomous action, as well. To act autonomously, on such views, is to act in accordance with one's story: acting autonomously is, in part, *living* out one's story.[21]

In chapter 5, I will be working within the theory of agency, but as before, my focus will not be on autonomous action. In other words, I will not be defending any sort of thesis that ordinary human agents *live* their lives as stories. Instead, I will be interested in the way that we *think* about the commitments that are shaping how we live our lives over time. And the claim will be that there is an interesting sense in which full awareness of such commitments takes a certain form: it takes the form of story-telling. By claiming this, I am saying more than just that our thinking about our commitments *can* take a narrative form. This claim figures, for instance, in the work of Peter Goldie. Goldie

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[19] See, canonically, J. David Velleman, "Well-Being and Time," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (1991): 48–77. And for the explicit statement, see Ibid., 143. For additional discussion on this point, see Connie S. Rosati, "The Story of a Life," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 30, no. 1–2 (2013): 21–50.

[20] See, for instance, Schechtman's view, according to which we "constitute ourselves as persons by forming a narrative self-conception according to which we experience and organize our lives," where this self-conception is "largely implicit and automatic": it manifests in how we interpret events not as isolated incidents but as "part of an ongoing story." Marya Schechtman, "Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival: A Refinement and Defense of the Narrative View," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 82, no. 60 (2007): 162. See also criticism of such views at Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity," *Ratio* 17, no. 4 (2004): 428–52.

[21] See, for instance, J. David Velleman, "The Self as Narrator," in *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 203–23. See especially the very end of the article, where Velleman is explicit that the *inner narrator,* or self-narration, is connected with *agential unity,* "in virtue of which a person is self-governed, or autonomous" Ibid., 223. On John Doris' view, agency (and, presumably, autonomous action) is to be understood in terms of self-directed behavior, and self-directed behavior is behavior that is expressive of the agent's values. John M. Doris, *Talking to Our Selves: Reflection, Ignorance, and Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 26. For Doris, an agent's sense of her story (or, as Doris prefers to use the term, her *biography*) – her way of making sense of her life – helps her behave in ways that are expressive of her values. Ibid., 143–44.

proposes that we *can* think about our lives in narrative terms, and that our doing so has an important role to play within accounts of autobiographical thinking, planning, and the nature of our emotional responses (e.g., with regret).[22] Put slightly differently, a central claim within this chapter isn't that our lives are essentially *narratable*: that an accurate story could be told about them.[23] It's that a certain form of reflection – reflection that involves full awareness of our life-structuring commitments – is essentially *narration*. And the fact that this form of reflection involves narration allows us to draw on the tools from the literature on narration to illuminate the respect in which the reflecting agent has stepped back from the commitment on which she is reflecting.

Nonetheless, the claims within this chapter are nowhere near as bold or ambitious as those that we find elsewhere within the literature on narration. For instance, Alasdair MacIntyre claims that all action explanations have a narrative form.[24] I mean to say nothing this bold. I am focused only on one type of reflection: reflection in which the reflecting agent acquires full awareness of a life-structuring commitment, as a potential

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[22] See discussion of autobiographical memory at Peter Goldie, *The Mess Inside* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chap. 2. See discussion of planning and regret at Ibid., 86. And see discussion of grief and self-forgiveness, respectively, at Ibid., chap. 3; ibid., chap. 6. And for additional discussion of the role of narrative in forgiveness and reconciliation, see Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 98–110.

[23] For instance, Kauppinen notes that the life of a rational agent is essentially narratable, in the sense that lives are organized in a way such that an accurate story could be told about them. See discussion at Antti Kauppinen, "Meaningfulness and Time," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 84, no. 2 (2012): 358. I would be inclined to agree with this thesis, even though it is not my focus here. For related discussion, see John J. Davenport, *Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Mortality: From Frankfurt and MacIntyre to Kierkegaard* (New York: Routledge, 2011), chap. 2.2.

[24] See especially the following: "Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions." Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 208. Curiously, MacIntyre also seems to endorse *all* of the above views about the role of narrative within philosophy. MacIntyre says that the good life is a kind of *quest:* the quest of seeking the good life for man, and quests have a narrative unity. See Ibid., 219. And the unity of a person just is the unity of a character within a narrative; see Ibid., 218.

ground for action. The story told within this type of reflection will involve action explanations, but I do not mean to claim anything about action explanations in general. Nor do I mean to claim anything about *reflection*, in general, on a life-structuring commitment. I am focused only on a type of reflection that we can extract from the Frankfurtian tradition, when applied to our life-structuring commitments: reflection on a commitment that involves full awareness of that commitment, as a potential ground for action. Of course, there are other mental processes that might rightly be labeled 'reflection' on a conative state.[25] There might also be other forms of *critical* reflection on a motive that are not instances of Frankfurtian reflection.[26] But I will not focus on those within this dissertation.

[25] For instance, I could think about my motives, wondering to myself how they came to be ingredients within my psychology. It's natural to label this sort of thinking 'reflection,' but it would be strained to see it as an instance of Frankfurtian reflection; there's no obvious sense in which my reflection involves endorsing or rejecting acting on the motive, in light of full awareness of the motive, as a potential ground of action.

[26] In addition to endorsing or rejecting acting on the commitment, one may also make various judgments about the value (of whatever sort) of acting on that commitment. I also set aside the precise nature of such value judgments, as well as their relationship to endorsement- or rejection-constituting attitudes. For a nice discussion of value judgments and their relationship to an agent's reflective endorsement, see Bratman, "A Desire of One's Own," sec. 6.

Chapter 2: Structured Lives without Reflection

We often think of ourselves as the authors of our lives, as giving a certain shape to our lives over time. We form and pursue commitments to careers, political causes, relationships, and so on, and the pursuit of these commitments gives our lives a shape unified by their pursuit. And, as I said in the introduction, when we pursue such commitments, *we* ourselves are giving our lives that shape: *we* ourselves are structuring our lives over time. For instance, a professional academic gives a shape to her own life by forming and pursuing a commitment to producing great academic work in her research area. And this contrasts with other ways that our lives could acquire a certain shape. A serious bodily illness, for instance, can give a shape to a life, unified by the challenges presented by the disease. But such a shape is imposed from the outside. There is a pronounced difference, we think, between *giving a shape to one's own life* and *having a shape imposed from the outside*.

On first gloss, the difference consists in the fact that when we give a shape to our own lives, we're doing so by pursuing motives that figure within our psychology. By contrast, when a shape is imposed on us from the outside, it's coming from forces that are literally *external* to our psychology.[1] However, a cursory glance at the moral psychology

[1] Hence, to set up the most straightforward instance of the contrast, I've focused on bodily illness, rather than *any* illness, including mental illness.

literature reveals that this simple story won't withstand scrutiny. As mentioned in the introduction, there are many cases in which an agent's own motives function like an external force. The classic example of the unwilling addict is a case in point. The unwilling addict strongly desires to use a drug, and the desire is so strong that he's going to use it, no matter what.[2] But he *disavows* acting on this incredibly strong desire. He exercises his Frankfurtian reflective capacities, by reflectively rejecting acting on this very strong desire – and this is what makes the desire akin to an external force.[3] If the unwilling addict uses the drug, day in and day out, it is true that his life would have a certain shape to it. But the unwilling addict would not be shaping or structuring his own life; the shape would be coming from the outside, in an important sense, even though it's coming from within his own psychology.

By contrast, in many ordinary cases, we reflectively *endorse* acting upon the commitments that are shaping our lives. A professional academic, for instance, doesn't merely have a commitment to academic research that happens to be shaping a lot of her activity over time. It's also a commitment that she endorses acting upon. In other words, in the ordinary cases, we reflectively endorse acting upon the motives that are giving a shape to our lives. And that, we might think, is the crucial difference. The respect in which the professional academic, unlike the unwilling addict, is structuring *her* own life (as opposed to having a structure imposed from the outside) is that she reflectively endorses acting upon the commitment that is shaping her activity over time.

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[2] See, again, Frankfurt's description at Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 7–10.
[3] As I said in the introduction, by this I mean that the agent forms a mental state that constitutes his *rejection* of acting upon this desire. The exercise of one's Frankfurtian reflective capacities includes, crucially, *taking a side* with respect to whether to act on a particular motive.

Indeed, prominent accounts of an agent's reflective endorsement extend very neatly to account for this contrast.[4] Bratman's view, for instance, is that an agent's endorsement of acting upon a desire consists roughly in her having a policy of treating that desire as providing a justifying end in motivationally effective reasoning – and such policies *just have as their functional role* shaping the agent's activity and deliberation over time and across circumstances.[5] Even more, such states owe their privileged status as *settling where the agent stands* to the fact that they support cross-temporal psychological ties that constitute the agent's identity over time.[6] Similarly, on Korsgaard's view, we appeal to an agent's practical identity: a conception under which she values herself.[7] An agent reflectively endorses acting on a particular desire if she has a practical identity that treats the desired aim as reason-providing. And many of the obvious candidates for an agent's practical identity – friend, parent, neighbor, and so on – are such as to significantly shape the agent's activity over time, giving a shape to her life.

Bratman and Korsgaard, as well as others working within the literature on reflective endorsement and rejection, developed their views with an eye toward addressing issues surrounding the topics of autonomy and autonomous action.[8] But because their proposals extend very neatly to account for the contrast between shaping

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[4] Here, again, I'm emphasizing the endorsement or rejection of acting on a particular desire rather than of having a particular desire. For additional discussion of this point, see note 6 of chapter 1.

[5] Bratman, "Reflection, Planning, and Temporally Extended Agency," 40. The caveats are that the agent needs to be satisfied with the relevant policy, in the sense that she has no conflicting self-governing policies. Ibid., 35. And Bratman thinks that quasi-policies, like personal ideals, could also constitute the agent's reflective endorsement of acting upon a desire. Ibid., 42–43.

[6] See discussion at Bratman, "Reflection, Planning, and Temporally Extended Agency," 32; Bratman, "A Desire of One's Own," 150.

[7] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 100–102.

[8] For an especially crisp formulation of such problems, see Michael Bratman, "Two Problems about Human Agency," in *Structures of Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 89–105.

one's own life and having a shape imposed from the outside, they give us a reasonable starting point for thinking about this contrast. So, let's take seriously the thought that *reflective endorsement* (however it is spelled out) of acting upon one's commitments is what makes the crucial difference. For an agent to structure her own life, she needs to reflectively endorse acting upon the commitments that are shaping her activity in such a way that gives her life a unified structure. This view reflects a commitment to the following thesis:

> **Endorsement Link:** Necessarily, if an agent structures her life around the pursuit of a commitment, then she reflectively endorses acting upon that commitment.

Endorsement Link, again, is meant to crystalize a consequence of the thought that the agent's reflective endorsement makes the difference between her shaping her own life and her having a shape imposed on her life, from the outside.

In this chapter, I'll argue that Endorsement Link is false. The primary problem with Endorsement Link is that it's too demanding: it requires too much of an agent in order for her to structure her own life. The problem is that an agent could never bother to endorse acting on a particular commitment, yet still structure her own life around it. To make this claim plausible, I will describe such an agent in detail, emphasizing the extensive deployment of her rational capacities that is compatible with being entirely wanton with respect to acting on that commitment. Such an agent extensively deploys her rational capacities while *immersed* in the pursuit of a commitment that is extensively shaping her activity over time and across circumstances. This discussion provides the motivation for the development of an alternative to the view that an agent's reflective

endorsement makes all the difference – this is the **Rational Immersion View.** On this view, the fact that an agent is shaping her own life is grounded in the fact that she is extensively deploying her rational capacities for deliberation and planning while *immersed* in the pursuit of a commitment that is manifesting across a wide range of circumstances in which she actually finds herself.

I. The Traditional View of the Wanton

In appealing to an agent's reflective endorsement, Endorsement Link has the result that a particular creature, familiar from the literature, could not – even in principle – count as structuring its own life. This creature is the *wanton*. The wanton, as Frankfurt characterizes him, is a creature who doesn't care about which first-order desire will move him to act.[9] This is significant, on Frankfurt's view, because it means the wanton does not endorse or reject acting on the basis of any of his desires; he's simply moved by them. However, as before, our concern is not with Frankfurt's particular way of spelling out the psychological mechanisms that constitute the agent's endorsement or rejection. Instead, we want to focus on the rejection and endorsement itself, however one spells it out. So, for our purposes, a wanton is a creature that doesn't endorse or reject acting on the basis of any of his first-order desires. He's simply moved by them.[10]

[9] On the initial presentation, the "essential characteristic of a wanton is that he does not care about his will." Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 11.

[10] We could characterize the wanton either as a creature (i) who lacks the capacity for endorsement or rejection or (ii) who has this capacity but doesn't exercise it (and is *wanton* with respect to the actions where this capacity is not exercised). This contrast should not matter much in the ensuing discussion.

The wanton, as usually portrayed, is not an agent who has *any* recognizable structure to his life. It's not just that *he's* not structuring his life; it's that there's no structure to begin with, at least not from the motives within his psychology. So, as far as this character is concerned, we might think that he poses no problem for Endorsement Link**.** It's true that this agent doesn't reflectively endorse acting upon any commitments that are structuring his life. But this isn't an issue, since he doesn't have any such commitments to begin with. In the literature, it's quite common to poke fun at the wanton. Here, we think, is an odd creature – and thank goodness we aren't like that! For instance, consider the following colorful description from Korsgaard:

> Jeremy, a college student, settles down at his desk one evening to study for an examination. Finding himself a little too restless to concentrate, he decides to take a walk in the fresh air. His walk takes him past a nearby bookstore, where the sight of an enticing title draws him in to look at the book. Before he finds it, however, he meets his friend Neil, who invites him to join some of the other kids at the bar next door for a beer. Jeremy decides he can afford to have just one, and goes with Neil to the bar. While waiting for his beer, however, he finds that the noise gives him a headache, and he decides to return home without ever having the beer. He is now, however, in too much pain to study. So Jeremy doesn't study for his examination, hardly gets a walk, doesn't buy a book, and doesn't drink a beer.[11]

[11] Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 116–17.

Here we see a person flitting from one project to the next, going on whatever whim strikes his fancy at the moment. This is a pitiable existence; this poor creature never accomplishes any of his projects, or sticks to any of his goals, as he moves constantly from one thing to the next. The wanton is fickle. The wanton, as portrayed here, isn't structuring his own life, since there's no structure to begin with. He's too fickle for his life to have any sort of structure, at least not from activity produced by the motives in his psychology. But it's not clear what the connection is between fickleness – in the way nicely illustrated in this passage – and failing to endorse or reject acting on the basis of particular motives. Why couldn't a creature be stably invested in a particular project, yet be wholly unreflective about it?[12]

Perhaps we think the wanton is fickle because we have a particular view about the relevant first-order desires.[13] In the example above, Jeremy is constantly bombarded with new, fleeting desires, moving him from one project to the next. One moves him to act, then the next, then the next, and so on. These desires come and go, quite rapidly; each one also varies over time in terms of its motivational strength, strong at one moment but weak in the next. If we see the relevant first-order desires as whims, coming and going quite rapidly, then this view of the wanton is a natural one. But the wanton's fickleness is

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[12] Korsgaard admits that, of course, that it's possible that this kind of wanton doesn't simply move from one project to the next, to the next, to the next, and so on… but that it's merely a matter of luck if he doesn't. Christine M. Korsgaard, "Self-Constitution in the Ethics of Plato and Kant," in *The Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 117. I suspect that the force of this thought – that it's merely an accident if this doesn't happen – still relies on an underlying view of the nature of the relevant first-order desires as whim-like.

[13] Thanks to Sigrún Svavarsdóttir for suggesting this way of approaching this issue.

now a product of two things: (i) his unreflectiveness and (ii) the nature of his first-order desires as whim-like. But do we need to accept (ii)?

In Gary Watson's early work, we find one way of rejecting (ii). Watson distinguishes between motives in terms of their origins. He proposes a Platonic model of the mind: there are motives that arise "blindly," from Appetite, and there are motives that arise from our reflection, from Reason.[14] This proposal is attractive, in that it allows us to see that the "whim"-like desires are plausibly the ones arising from Appetite. Appetite is not responsive to the agent's judgments about the good; it would be no surprise if it moved the agent from one thing, to another, to yet another, as Jeremy is moved in Korsgaard's example. We need Reason to keep the motives from Appetite in check. Reason, on Watson's view, produces motives of its own – motives that arise from our recognition of a particular course of action as good, or worth performing.[15] Just as one's judgments about the good tend to be stable, so too will be the motives arising from Reason.[16]

This proposal relies on a substantive claim about the nature of the mind. But we don't even need this claim to see that the initial assumption – that the relevant first-order desires are whim-like – is a poor one. Someone could be entirely unreflective about a

[14] Watson, "Free Agency," 207–8. The view is originally described as a Platonic view of the soul. I have used the word 'mind' in place of 'soul' to make especially obvious that this view does not rely on any substantial claims about the existence of souls distinct from bodies or human organisms. (It is clear in Watson's work that this proposal is meant to be one about practical reasoning and human psychology.)

[15] The crucial contrast is in terms of the "source of the want or with its role in the total 'system' of the agent's desires and ends." Ibid., 211. The contrast between Reason and Appetite is spelled out in terms of a contrast between an agent's valuational system and motivational system. See discussion of these systems at Ibid., 215.

[16] Of course, on this view, an agent could have a very stable desire that arises from Appetite. Watson's own work includes discussion of a pervasive and persistent desire arising separately from Reason. See discussion at Watson, "Free Agency," 210.

project, yet stably invested in it. And this stable investment can be quite sophisticated – sophisticated enough for such an agent to count as structuring his own life.

II. The Committed Wanton

To see why, consider a character discussed in some of David Velleman's work.[17] Velleman describes cases of effortless action, defined by complete immersion in one's work, found within the Daoist tradition. A woodworker, for instance, can become completely absorbed within his craft, where this absorption includes forgetting external goals, evaluative judgments, and himself.[18] The woodworker is *immersed* when he's on the job. And he works extremely hard to improve his skill at woodworking: to develop his facility with tools, improve his aesthetic sense (about which woodworks are beautiful and which are not), and improve his judgment about which materials to use for which sorts of projects. He goes to the shop day in and day out, and when he's there, he's immersed. But it would be completely wrong to say that he's *blindly consumed* by his craft. He's not simply choosing tools at random, by impulse; he's thoughtful about what material to use, which step to take next in the construction of a project, and so on. He deliberates and plans. But such deliberation and planning occurs within the context of his immersion. He's not thinking about himself, or whether he's capable of doing the project in front of him, or whether it's a good thing to engage in woodworking, or anything of

[17] Velleman's focus here is the relationship between feeling in touch with one's agency, in a phenomenological sense, and identification with a motive. See his discussion at J. David Velleman, "The Way of the Wanton," in *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Kim Atkins (New York: Routledge, 2008).
[18] For Velleman's discussion of these examples within the Daoist tradition, see Ibid., 182–88.

the sort. He’s focused on his craft, and he’s deploying his rational capacities for deliberation and planning while he’s at work. This agent is **rationally immersed** in his craft: he is immersed in a way that involves the extensive deployment of his rational capacities for deliberation and planning. I will say much more about this type of immersion in the next chapter, but for now, the intuitive idea will suffice.

The woodworker clearly has *some* kind of conative state within his psychology that is grounding his going to shop, day to day, as he immerses himself in woodworking in a way that animates his rational capacities for deliberation and planning. This state is playing a pervasive role within his life, as it shapes how he’s spending his time and effort throughout his life. The woodworker has a strong and stable desire to produce woodworks, and this desire grounds motivational and deliberative dispositions that are manifesting very frequently over time; they manifest when he goes into the shop, every day. It seems natural, even, to describe this strong and stable desire as a *commitment* to woodworking – a point I will return to in the next section. Though Velleman doesn’t explicitly describe this character as having a structure to his life, it’s plain that he does: it’s a structure that is unified by the extremely extensive pursuit of his commitment to woodworking (or to producing great woodworks, or something of the sort).[19]

Now, suppose that the woodworker has simply never bothered, by whatever process, to reflectively endorse acting upon his commitment to woodworking. The endorsement-constituting state would be an extra item within his psychology, and it’s compatible with my description of the case that he simply lacks this additional item

[19] I will discuss the content of this commitment in more depth in the next chapter, as well as in chapter 5.

within his psychology. He might have simply fallen into this way of life – following in his father's footsteps, who followed in his father's footsteps, and so on. Yet, the pursuit of this commitment is giving a recognizable structure to his life over time. There's a unity to his life, even though he's entirely wanton with respect to his commitment to woodworking; he doesn't endorse acting upon it, and he doesn't reject acting upon it, either. The woodworker is a *committed wanton*: an agent who has a commitment that manifests across a wide range of circumstances but who does not reflectively endorse or reject acting upon that commitment.

In the next section, I will discuss in more depth the *way* that the woodworker's commitment to woodworking is structuring his life, despite the fact that he's entirely unreflective about it. I will make the case that the woodworker is structuring *his own life*, when he acts on the basis of this commitment; and, in doing so, I will introduce an alternative view of what accounts for an agent's structuring her own life. This is the **Rational Immersion View**, which will be developed and defended over the course of the following two chapters. On this view, an agent structures her own life if she extensively deploys her rational capacities while immersed in the pursuit of a commitment that manifests across a wide range of circumstances.

III. The Rational Immersion View

I said that the woodworker had a commitment to woodworking, and that this commitment was pervasively shaping his action and deliberation in a way that gave a unified structure to his life. What needs to be true of the woodworker's psychology for

this to be the case? Can I truly claim that the woodworker has a commitment to woodworking, if he's totally unreflective about it? To see why, we need to start by examining in more depth the functional role of this conative state.

Let us presuppose, as a working assumption, a Humean picture of human psychology. Mental states are exhaustively divided into cognitive states — like belief — and conative attitudes. These categories are mutually exclusive: no one state can be both a cognitive state and a conative attitude. These states are typically distinguished in terms of their direction of fit: belief has a "mind-to-world" direction of fit, and conative attitudes have a "world-to-mind" direction of fit.[20] The paradigmatic cognitive state is a belief. Beliefs have propositional content that represents the world as being a certain way, and it's the job of belief to have a propositional content that matches the way the world actually is. The paradigmatic conative state is a desire. By contrast, desires also have a propositional content, but it's the job of desire to motivate the agent to make the world match the way that she desires that it be. And on the standard picture, beliefs and desires combine to move the agent to act: the agent desires that some state of affairs be the case, and she does what she believes will bring about that state of affairs. This is, of course, only a first gloss on the distinction in terms of directions of fit, but it will suffice for our purposes.[21] Like many philosophers, I think that there is good theoretical reason to accept

[20] This distinction is classically owed to Anscombe, at G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). See development at Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1994), chap. 4. See critical discussion at D. Sobel and D. Copp, "Against Direction of Fit Accounts of Belief and Desire," *Analysis* 61, no. 1 (2001): 44–53.
[21] Smith, for instance, gives one way to spell out the metaphor. See Smith, *The Moral Problem*, chap. 4.6.

a view along these lines; but for now, it will simply function as an assumption, one that is widely shared in the literature.

Even on this Humean picture, there is abundant room for making distinctions among conative states. Among the conative attitudes are "whim"-like states: states that are prone to coming and going, fluctuating in their motivational strength across contexts, and so on.[22] There is room, too, for substantial differences among the conative states, in terms of their impact on motivation and deliberation: perhaps some conative states impact deliberation, while others do not. My focus will be on a special type of conative state – one that grounds rational immersion, like the woodworker's. The woodworker immerses himself in his activity, but, again, he's not blindly consumed when he's engaged in it; he deliberates about what to do, in the context of his woodworking (e.g., in the selection of tools). These deliberative dispositions will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

To make the case that this conative state is structuring his life, we need to start by noting the *extent* to which this state is shaping his deliberation and action. On the Humean picture of the mind, we can distinguish between desires that play a pervasive role throughout an agent's life and ones that play a very minor role. Of course, one might insist that an agent has a desire that P at a time T only if the desire is actually influencing the agent's motivation at T. But this view would lack an important kind of theoretical unity and simplicity that we find in dispositional accounts of other mental states. For

[22] These are the sorts of states that naturally come to mind when one hears the word 'desire.' Street, for instance, notes that when we hear the word 'desire,' we naturally think of a craving on a par with the craving for chocolate. See discussion at Sharon Street, "Coming to Terms with Contingency: Humean Constructivism About Practical Reason," in *Constructivism in Practical Philosophy*, ed. Jimmy Lenman and Yonatan Shemmer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

instance, it's clear that an agent could believe that P at a time T even if she's not actively judging that P at that time. One plausible way to account for this fact is to say that an agent believes that P at a time T if she's disposed at T to judge that P if the question arises.[23] So, too, for the conative states: an agent has a conative state at a time T if she has the appropriate motivational and/or deliberative dispositions at T, even if they are not manifesting at that time.

This point allows us to distinguish between conative states, in terms of the range of circumstances in which they manifest.[24] A conative state can ground dispositions that manifest under a rather wide range of circumstances. Consider, again, the woodworker's conative state. This state is pervasive, in the sense that it grounds motivational and deliberative dispositions that manifest across a very wide range of the circumstances in which the woodworker *actually* finds himself – it's *actually* guiding his deliberation and behavior.[25] This is the sense in which the conative state is structuring his activities through time.[26] And, once again, it plays this pervasive role independently of the fact that

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[23] See, for instance, the phenomenal analysis of cognition at Declan Smithies, "The Mental Lives of Zombies," *Philosophical Perspectives* 26, no. 1 (2012): sec. 2.2.

[24] There is an issue about how to individuate between different circumstances. This is a complex issue, but because I'm happy to admit that psychological width comes in degrees (and that we need not be precise in our measurement of these degrees), I hope that the intuitive, somewhat vague idea will suffice.

[25] This contrasts with a counterfactual sense of 'width.' We could consider a motivational state that would manifest across an extremely wide range of circumstances, but the agent who has this state almost never finds himself in those circumstances. In this case, though, it would seem odd to say that this state is structuring this agent's life. It would, if things were a bit different, structure his life, of course. But it isn't actually doing so.

[26] By contrast, consider a desire that manifests only infrequently. I used to have a part-time job as a waiter. In the course of this job, I had a directed-attention desire that I clearly explain the newest specials to anyone who asks. It framed a good deal of my deliberation and action while I was at my job: actions conducive to clearly explaining the specials (like providing a menu containing them, making sure that I had all the details right for the day of the week, etc.) were salient as options in my deliberation and action at my job. Of course, those actions were salient as options only at my job. Once I was off the clock, I didn't care at all to explain the newest specials to anyone who asked — I barely cared about what the specials were, provided I wasn't working. (Perhaps this is why I was a bad waiter.)

he has not reflectively endorsed acting upon it. This desire has a *wide psychological role*, in the sense that it grounds motivational and deliberative dispositions that manifest across a very wide range of the circumstances in which the woodworker finds himself.[27] And, *pace* Watson, the desire plays this role independently of the fact that it wasn't generated by a reasoned judgment about the value of woodworking.

More than this, on the Humean picture, we can distinguish between conative states that are more or less resistant to change over time. The woodworker's desire is resistant to change – it's not one that will very easily fade away, nor is it one that he could easily rid himself of.[28] It would persist upon exposure to a wide variety of experiences, environmental changes, and so on.[29] And, again, this desire could be resistant to change, in this way, even if the agent doesn't reflectively endorse acting upon it, and even if it receives no additional support from other conative states within her psychology (e.g., a desire to preserve that very desire). Some desires are just more resistant to change than others. In this respect, the woodworker's desire has a deep psychological role: it's deeply embedded within his psychology.[30]

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[27] The locutions of 'width' and 'depth' within this chapter are inspired by similar terminology within work by D'Arms and Jacobson on the width and depth of a particular human concern. See discussion at Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson, "Anthropocentric Constraints on Human Value," in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics: Volume 1*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 116.

[28] This point resembles the discussion of counterfactual robustness, in Smith and Sayre-McCord's work. See discussion at Michael Smith and Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "Desires…and Beliefs…of One's Own," in *Rational and Social Agency: The Philosophy of Michael Bratman*, ed. Manuel Vargas and Gideon Yaffe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 141–42. I discuss this work in more depth in chapter 4.

[29] Importantly, in contrast to my understanding of width (as mentioned in note 25), the relevant sense of depth is counterfactual. Thanks to Don Hubin for pushing me on the points in this note and note 25.

[30] The preceding discussion of this woodworker's conative state is inspired by Svavarsdóttir's characterization of valuing at Sigrún Svavarsdóttir, "Having Value and Being Worth Valuing," *Journal of Philosophy* 111, no. 2 (2014): sec. III. Importantly, though, at this stage I haven't yet characterized him as valuing woodworking.

The woodworker, then, has a conative state that is resistant to change and that grounds motivational and deliberative dispositions that are manifesting across an extremely wide range of circumstances in which he finds himself. This state is manifesting in a way that gives a recognizable structure to his life – a structure that was initially characterized in terms of his going into the shop, day in and day out. Again, it's natural to describe this sort of state as a *commitment* to woodworking. But I don't want to get too hung up on terminological issues about how to use the label 'commitment.' What matters most for my purposes is that the woodworker has a conative state that grounds motivational and deliberative dispositions that manifest in such a way as to give a unified structure to his life.

The woodworker, then, has a structure to his life. But, one might worry, this is a structure that is coming from his commitment – not from *him*. And we have a problem for Endorsement Link only if it's plausibly the case that he's structuring his life, as opposed to having a structure imposed from the outside. Here, however, it would be incredibly strained to think that the structure is not coming from him. There is a straightforward sense in which the structure is coming from his agency. It was crucial to my description of the woodworker that he extensively deployed his rational capacities while engaged in the pursuit of his commitment. When he was in the shop, he was making extensive evaluations about how best to approach his next project; he thought a good amount about which tool to use for which job; he made aesthetic appraisals of the merits of a particular design. The woodworker's conative state is not just grounding *any*

old motivational or deliberative dispositions that manifest very frequently. It's grounding motivational and deliberative dispositions of a special kind.

I will discuss these dispositions in more depth in the next chapter. But the basic point is that these are not *blind* motivational dispositions; they are not dispositions whose manifestation consists merely in some kind of urge, or motivational push, to perform a particular action. The woodworker's commitment grounds motivational and deliberative dispositions whose manifestation consists in a kind of immersion that involves the extensive deployment of the woodworker's rational capacities. When the woodworker gets to the shop and dives in, these motivational and deliberative dispositions are manifesting; and their manifestation involves, *inter alia*, the rich, sophisticated, and extensive deployment of the woodworker's rational capacities, in the way described earlier.

I propose that the woodworker counts as structuring his life *because* of the way that these rational capacities are deployed while he's immersed. He has a commitment that is giving a structure to his life, characterized in terms of the state's functional role; and he has a commitment that manifests in such a way as to make it plausible that *he* is structuring his life. These defining features of the woodworker's life suggest the following view of what accounts for his structuring his own life. I label this view the **Rational Immersion View**.

> **Rational Immersion View:** Necessarily, an agent structures her life if (i) she has a commitment that manifests across an extremely wide range of circumstances in which she finds herself and (ii) whose manifestation consists in immersion in

activity that involves the extensive deployment of her rational capacities for deliberation and planning.

We can characterize (i) and (ii) without presupposing that the agent reflectively endorses acting upon the commitment. (i) is a basic fact about the commitment's functional role – a fact we can appreciate by thinking clearly about the rich variety of conative states, even on a Humean theory of mind. And I've characterized (ii), in the case of the woodworker, without reference to the woodworker's endorsement of acting upon the commitment that is shaping his immersive activity.

The Rational Immersion View simply sets out a sufficient condition for an agent to count as structuring her life. For all I've said, an agent could do so in other ways. (Perhaps some possible agents – maybe even the chronic multitaskers among us – live in such a way as to never immerse themselves in an activity, but still seem to be structuring their own lives, perhaps by deploying their rational capacities in other ways.) But as we examine conditions (i) and (ii), we see that it conflicts with Endorsement Link, a view drawn out of the literature on autonomous action, in not requiring that the agent reflectively endorse acting upon the motives that are shaping her activity over time. Specifically, it disagrees with Endorsement Link about whether the woodworker, who is wanton with respect to his commitment to woodworking, is structuring his own life. Endorsement Link says that he isn't; the Rational Immersion View says that he is. And the Rational Immersion View gives the intuitively right result, given the sophistication of the woodworker's activity.

The Rational Immersion View is also an alternative to a view that we could draw out of Watson's earlier work. Perhaps, channeling Watson, we might say that an agent counts as structuring her own life only when her life has a unified structure that is the result of activity flowing from her "evaluational system": the system that produces judgments of the form, "the thing for me to do in these circumstances, all things considered, is *a*."[31] So, on such a view, the woodworker would count as structuring his own life only if he is forming evaluative judgments of this sort about his woodworking. But, as I mentioned earlier, the woodworker might never have formed such a judgment. (Perhaps he simply hasn't thought about it.) As I've described him, he's making evaluative judgments about the aesthetic merits of his projects; but such evaluations are very different from judgments about what, all things considered, is the thing for him to do, in his circumstances.[32] On this descendant of Watson's work, we would have to say that the woodworker would not count as structuring his own life. But, again, this seems to be the wrong result.

The Rational Immersion View is one that emphasizes the importance of the exercise of an agent's rational capacities over time; the respect in which an agent counts as structuring her own life is that she's extensively deploying such capacities while immersed. In this respect, it fits neatly into a rationalist tradition of identifying the agent, or the functional role of the agent, with her rational capacities, especially her capacities

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[31] Watson, "Free Agency," 215. This formulation builds off of Watson's gloss on the free agent, as the one who "has the capacity to translate his values into action; his actions flow from his evaluational system." Ibid., 216. (Notice that I've said this view *draws on* Watson; the view discussed here is *not* a proposal about free action.)

[32] Watson evokes such judgments in his characterization of the agent's valuational system, at Watson, "Free Agency," 215.

for deliberation.[33] What makes it the case that the agent is herself structuring her life is that her rational capacities are animated in the activity that is unified as the pursuit of a particular commitment. This is the fact that, so to speak, brings the agent into the role of structuring or shaping her life. I accept this aspect of the rationalist tradition. However, on my view, the relevant exercise of her rational capacities *isn't* directed toward the evaluation of the commitment that is significantly shaping her action and deliberation. Instead, the life-shaping exercise of her rational capacities is during immersion in activity in the pursuit of the commitment.

That said, I've been explicit that the Rational Immersion View provides only a *sufficient* condition for an agent to count as structuring her own life. The reason I've insisted that this is only a sufficient condition also comes out of the rationalist tradition. The agent is in the role of shaping her own life *if and only if* the shape of her life is the result of the sufficiently extensive exercise of her rational capacities for deliberation and planning. *One* way for an agent to count as sufficiently exercising her rational capacities is for her to do so while immersed. But it's important to stress, again, that this need not be the only way for her to structure her life, because it need not be the only way of sufficiently exercising her rational capacities. I leave open that an agent's life could acquire a unified shape through other ways of exercising her rational capacities over time.

IV. Conclusion

[33] Velleman is the clearest about doing this. See, most explicitly, his discussion at Velleman, "What Happens When Someone Acts?," sec. XII.

In this chapter, I started by marking out an intuitive contrast: the contrast between shaping one's own life and having a shape imposed from the outside. I started off with an initially attractive account of this contrast, drawn from the extensive literature on autonomous action – this was the view that the agent's reflective endorsement of her commitments is what marks out the contrast. This view, however, is committed to Endorsement Link; and Endorsement Link is false because it has the consequence that it would be impossible for a wanton to structure his own life in the pursuit of a commitment. A wanton, however, could do this; my description of the woodworker is a plausible story of what such a creature's psychology would look like. The woodworker counted as structuring his own life *because* he had a commitment that (i) manifested across a wide range of circumstances and (ii) whose manifestation consisted in immersion in activity that involved the extensive deployment of his rational capacities. This provides the basis for an alternative view of the contrast between structuring one's own life and having a structure imposed on one's life. I've labeled this view *the Rational Immersion View*.

The Rational Immersion View places a lot of importance on the exercise of an agent's rational capacities for deliberation and action while immersed; the deployment of these capacities, on this view, is what marks the difference between structuring one's own life and having a structure imposed from the outside. Nonetheless, there might be many different ways of deploying such capacities to an extent sufficient to count as structuring one's own life. The Rational Immersion View is an attempt to characterize *one* such type of deployment: one that is easy to overlook if we focus our attention on

which motivational states the agent has reflectively endorsed acting upon. Hence, the Rational Immersion View provides only a sufficient condition for an agent to count as structuring her own life.

The Rational Immersion View is intended to be an alternative to the view that an agent structures her life when and only when her unified activity is the result of her acting upon motives that she endorses acting upon. And the crux of the view, as an alternative, is the claim that the *extensive, unified* rational activity is the distinguishing element between an agent's structuring her own life and her having a structure imposed from the outside. But we need to proceed with caution. Perhaps it's right to say that the woodworker doesn't need to endorse acting upon his commitment to woodworking. Even if we grant that Endorsement Link is false, however, it may still seem that the woodworker is exercising his Frankfurtian reflective capacities throughout his days. For instance, when he's immersed in his work, he will be making decisions about what to do – and these decisions will be, at least some of the time, decisions to act upon his desires (e.g., a desire to use one material for a tabletop). If he's making these decisions, though, doesn't he reflectively endorse acting upon *those* desires? And if he's doing this, it may seem, his activity is still the result of his acting upon particular motives that he endorses acting upon – and the Rational Immersion View thus doesn't provide an interesting, distinct alternative to the core idea with which we began. I turn to this issue in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Rational Immersion without Endorsement

In the previous chapter, I provided a view about the kind of activity that would be sufficient for an agent to count as structuring her own life. This was the Rational Immersion View. On this proposal, an agent structures her own life if she has a commitment that manifests across a wide range of circumstances, where this manifestation consists in immersive activity that involves the extensive deployment of her rational capacities. This was an alternative to an initially promising view, drawn from the literature on autonomous action: the view that the agent structures her own life only by reflectively endorsing acting upon the commitments that are shaping her activity over time. The problem was that this view has the consequence that it would not be possible for a wanton to structure his own life, and I made the case that this was a counterintuitive consequence by emphasizing the extent to which a wanton could deploy his rational capacities in the pursuit of a commitment, despite being entirely unreflective about it.

This suggested that something *else* – something that could obtain even in the absence of an agent's reflective endorsement of the commitment shaping her activity – could make it the case that she was structuring her own life. And this element was her extensive rational activity that was unified in such a way as to give a structure to her own life. This element formed the basis for the Rational Immersion View. However, if this is the basis of the view, it is not yet settled whether reflective endorsement isn't doing all

the philosophical work, after all. Even if it's true that an agent could engage in extensive rational activity in the pursuit of a commitment that she doesn't reflectively endorse acting upon, it may seem that she nonetheless needs to reflectively endorse acting upon *other* motives, as she's pursuing her commitment.

Spelling out the woodworker's deliberation will help to bring out the challenge. It was vital to my description of the woodworker's activity that he wasn't blindly moved by impulse, like an agent consumed by emotion, as we see in Frankfurt's example of a man consumed by his anger.[1] This means that, as he's in immersed in his craft, he had better not simply be acting on whichever urge (e.g., to use one material rather than another) strikes him at the moment. Say he's starting work on a new table, and he's initially inclined to use walnut for the tabletop. But he doesn't automatically use walnut; he's not a mere automaton when he's on the job. He thinks for a bit, thinks that walnut would be a durable material for the tabletop, and decides to go ahead and use it. He deliberates about what to do, and more than this, he deliberates about whether to act on a particular inclination that strikes him at the moment. The woodworker's activity involves moments of *deliberative pause*, where he considers whether to act as he's initially inclined to act.

Indeed, such moments of deliberative pause are an essential component of Korsgaard's description of rational activity. Consider Korsgaard's description of the exercise of reason, which is essentially reflective:

> What would have been the *cause* of our belief or action, had we still been operating under the control of instinctive or learned responses, now becomes

[1] See discussion of such a character at Frankfurt, "Identification and Externality," 63.

> something experienced as a consideration in favor of a certain belief or action instead, one we can endorse or reject. And when we can endorse the operation of a ground or belief on us *as* a ground, then we take that consideration to be a reason.[2]

This description seems to be a perfect characterization of the woodworker's moment of deliberative pause while he's designing the table. However, if his rational activity is defined by moments of deliberative pause, then it might seem that the Rational Immersion View is drawing on the woodworker's reflective endorsement, after all. Sure enough, the woodworker does not reflectively endorse acting on his commitment to woodworking. But, drawing on Korsgaard, we might think that he's reflectively endorsing acting upon a whole host of other motives, in the pursuit of his craft. He reflectively endorses acting upon inclinations to use one material rather than another, one tool rather than other, and so on; he reflectively endorses acting upon some but not all of the motives that strike him as he works on his craft. Let's label these motives – inclinations to use a particular material, or tool, or design, or so on – his *sub-motives*. He decides whether to act on these motives in the course of his job. And when he decides to act on one of them, we might think, he reflectively endorses acting upon that motive.

If this is right, then we might think that reflective endorsement is still doing all the philosophical work in distinguishing between structuring one's own life and having a structure imposed from the outside. The plausibility of the Rational Immersion View relies on the plausibility of *extensive, unified rational activity* as the item that

[2] Korsgaard, "The Activity of Reason," 32. The emphasis is Korsgaard's.

distinguishes between structuring one's life and having a structure imposed from the outside. However, we've just seen that moments of deliberative pause are vital components of the deployment of an agent's rational capacities. There need to be such moments of deliberative pause to distinguish between the agent's exercise of her rational capacities and her being moved blindly from one motive to the next. And, drawing on Korsgaard, we might think that an agent's exercise of her rational capacities, in those moments of deliberative pause, involves reflectively endorsing acting upon her sub-motives.

But if the woodworker is reflectively endorsing acting upon a whole host of his sub-motives, then it might seem that the only reason he counts as structuring his own life is that he reflectively endorses acting upon those sub-motives. Perhaps, one might think, we should still explain the contrast between structuring one's own life and having a structure imposed on one's life in terms of the agent's reflective endorsement of the motives that are shaping his activity over time. The last chapter showed only that we shouldn't require the agent to reflectively endorse acting upon the single, unified commitment that is shaping his activity over time. But, instead, we could say it's sufficient for the agent just to reflectively endorse acting upon particular motives in the pursuit of her commitment, even if she doesn't reflectively endorse acting on the commitment itself. Still, on this view, the agent's reflective endorsement is making all the difference. Agents nonetheless structure their lives by exercising their capacities for Frankfurtian reflection, by reflectively endorsing acting upon their sub-motives.

In this chapter, I argue that we can account for the woodworker's moments of deliberative pause, as well as his deliberation while immersed, without saying that he reflectively endorses acting upon his sub-motives. This will provide the opportunity to expand on the initial characterization of the Rational Immersion View, from the previous chapter. An agent like the woodworker could have moments of deliberative pause without reflectively endorsing acting upon the sub-motives on which he decides to act. Seeing why requires closer examination of the deliberative dispositions manifested while the agent is immersed in the pursuit of his commitment. This requires us to think about what must be true of the woodworker's psychology for him to engage in these moments of deliberative pause, and it requires us to spell out a plausible account that doesn't require him to reflectively endorse acting upon any of his sub-motives. Doing so will provide an elaboration of the Rational Immersion View, introduced in the previous chapter. Specifically, we will get a better look at the *manifestation* of the commitment: we will get a better view of the immersion in which the manifestation consists. And it will enable us to see that the Rational Immersion View is an interesting, genuine alternative to the view that an agent's reflective endorsement marks the difference between her structuring her own life and her having a structure imposed on her life. It's not just that an agent could structure her own life without reflectively endorsing acting upon any of the commitments that are shaping her activity and deliberation over time; it's that she could structure her own life without reflectively endorsing acting upon *any* of her motives at all, even the sub-motives that she decides to act upon while immersed in the pursuit of her commitments. The Rational Immersion View thus provides an account on

which an agent structures her own life without exercising any capacities for Frankfurtian reflection.

I. Immersion Examined

Throughout the previous chapter, I discussed the respect in which the woodworker's commitment was *shaping* his deliberation and planning: how it was *shaping* the exercise of his rational capacities. To best address the challenge presented at the start of this chapter, we need to spell out in more detail the way that the woodworker's commitment shapes the exercise of his rational capacities. In this chapter, I will be focused on the woodworker's deliberation; this was the feature that seemed to suggest that the woodworker was reflectively endorsing acting upon particular sub-motives. We need to start with two things: (1) an account of the options that the woodworker considers for action and (2) an account of the considerations that figure into the woodworker's deliberation in the pursuit of his craft. We will then be able to articulate the challenge from the start of this chapter in terms of the way that the woodworker *takes* those considerations to *count in favor* of acting upon a particular option. In the course of doing so, we will develop an account of *rational immersion*.

My treatment of the woodworker's commitment will be a development of the literature on directed-attention desires, especially as developed in the work of Thomas Scanlon and Mark Schroeder.[3] The central idea is that such desires direct the agent's

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[3] See discussion at Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 37–41; Mark Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), chap. 8.

attention within deliberation; such desires influence which considerations figure into the agent's deliberation, and in what way. The woodworker's commitment plays the same functional role, in terms of its impact on deliberation, as does a directed-attention desire. Because of this, I will start with a discussion of a simpler directed-attention desire, then build up to a discussion of the woodworker's commitment.

When an agent deliberates about what to do, she is choosing what to do from a range of options presented to her.[4] Directed-attention desires play a role in the presentation of options from which the agent can choose: they pre-select certain options for the agent to consider in deliberation. Suppose, to use a simple example, I have a directed-attention desire that I drink some coffee.[5] I'm thinking, in a not especially sophisticated way, about what to do. I believe that there is some coffee in the lounge and in the shop down the street; I also believe that I could make some coffee by putting some grounds and water in my coffee maker and pressing the 'on' button. In thinking about what to do — and, remember, this is not an especially sophisticated or intellectualized example — this directed-attention desire, combined with my beliefs, makes me consider certain options for action.[6] I consider as options going to the lounge, going to the shop down the street, or making some coffee in my little coffee maker.

[4] It's plausible that the upshot of a decision is the formation of an intention to do the option decided upon. This is a fairly standard view. See, for instance, discussion at Phillip Pettit, "Deliberation and Decision," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Action*, ed. Constantine Sandis and Timothy O'Connor (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010). I assume this in what follows.
[5] This example is similar in structure to one discussed by Schroeder. See Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*, 155.
[6] On my view, directed-attention desires and beliefs combine in a way similar to the way that Korsgaard thinks that beliefs and inclinations combine to form potential grounds for action. See especially Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 3.

Of course, if I'm so inclined, I could then evaluate those options in other terms. For instance, if I also have a directed-attention desire that I not spend much money going out for food and drink, the option to make coffee in my little coffee maker or to go to the lounge would stand out as better options. One characteristic of a directed-attention desire that P is that it presents options to the agent in deliberation — these options are actions that, given the agent's background beliefs, are sufficiently likely to bring about P.[7] And typically deliberation will involve multiple directed-attention desires, each presenting sometimes different, sometimes overlapping options for action. But deliberation need not involve all of one's directed-attention desires. Some directed-attention desires might present options for action only in rare circumstances. To use the terminology from the previous chapter: some directed-attention desires play a wide psychological role, while others play a narrow psychological role.

Return to the woodworker. His commitment to woodworking guides his deliberation, quite pervasively, in his everyday life. He frequently immerses himself in his woodworking. And while immersed, he would consider certain options in the course of working on particular woodworking projects – he'd consider using one material rather

[7] But how likely? Here I could use Schroeder's extremely weak characterization of the promotion relation: an action A promotes P just in case, given the agent's background beliefs, the probability of P given A is greater than the unconditional probability that P. See Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*, 113. But even if this account of the promotion relation will do for other purposes (including the ones to which Schroeder puts it), it won't suffice here. The reason is that our directed-attention desires seem much more discriminatory in the options for action that they present to us in deliberation. I have a neighbor who routinely drinks coffee, and there is some (extremely remote) chance that if I stand outside, he will simply hand me a cup of coffee out of generosity. So the probability that I drink some coffee given that I stand outside and hope for the best is (very slightly) greater than the unconditional probability that I drink some coffee. But this option simply isn't even on the radar, and for good reason: deliberation would be far too cluttered if we had to consider options like this. I suspect the threshold for being "sufficiently likely" is going to vary from context to context, but beyond this, it's hard to say much about the threshold with precision.

than another, selecting certain dimensions for each part of the project, and so on.[8] But this commitment is doing more than simply presenting options within the woodworker's deliberation as he works. Consider again the example from the beginning of this chapter: the woodworker is inclined to use a certain material – say, walnut – for the top of a table he is constructing. He thinks that it's a durable material, so he decides to use it. The woodworker has certain considerations – e.g., that walnut would be a durable material – register within his deliberation.

In addition to presenting options from which the agent can choose, directed-attention desires also play in an important role in determining which considerations figure into the agent's deliberation. Suppose that the output of deliberation is the formation of an intention — when an agent chooses an option, she intends to do that option. When deliberating, an agent takes the consideration that p into account by having a thought with the content that p. To return to our very simple example from earlier, here is an extremely implausible description of the content of an agent's deliberation about getting some coffee:

> "I have a desire that I get some coffee. I believe that putting some grounds into the coffee maker and starting it up is the most efficient means of satisfying that desire. So, I'll do that."

This characterization of deliberation is absurd, not just because it's overintellectualized — using the concept of most efficient means — but because it's implausibly self-

[8] Moreover, this immersion also shapes the woodworker's *emotional* responses: he's pleased with a job well done, distraught when his work falls apart, disappointed when his work is below his standards, and so on. I think that the full story of an agent's life-structuring commitments will include a story about this emotional component, but I bracket it in the discussion that follows.

referential. When agents deliberate about what to do, they don't always take into account the fact that they have some desire or other; instead, that desire influences which considerations the agent takes into account, without (typically) influencing the agent to take into account the consideration that she has that very desire.

We can make this thought more precise, thanks to a distinction that Philip Pettit and Michael Smith make between a desire that operates in the foreground and a desire that operates in the background.[9] A desire operates in the background, according to Pettit and Smith, when it forms part of a rationalizing explanation of the agent's action.[10] An agent's desire that p operates in the foreground only if the *de se* thought that I desire that p figures into the agent's deliberation about what to do. A desire can operate in the background without operating in the foreground. And, in the present context, we need this distinction not only to provide an account of deliberation that isn't implausibly self-referential. We need it to provide an account of deliberation in terms of which the woodworker is plausibly immersed in the pursuit of his commitment. If he's constantly thinking *about* his commitment, and how best to promote it, he's just not immersed.[11] The respect in which the woodworker's deliberative activity is *immersive* deliberative

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[9] Philip Pettit and Michael Smith, "Backgrounding Desire," *Philosophical Review* 99, no. 4 (1990): 565–592.

[10] See also Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," in *Essays on Actions and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). Smith also appeals to the nature of teleological explanation in his account of motivating reasons; see Smith, *The Moral Problem*, chap. 4.7.

[11] Velleman describes a similar phenomenon, in his discussion of being the subject of desire: "Being the subject of a desire usually entails being the subject of various thoughts symptomatic or expressive of the desire." Velleman, "The Way of the Wanton," 178. Being thirsty, for instance, involves "thinking thirsty thoughts" – and these thoughts don't represent *oneself* as a thirsty subject. Ibid.

activity is that his commitment operates only in the background, and not the foreground.[12]

The hallmark of a directed-attention desire is the way in which it accounts for the interplay between the background and the foreground of an agent's deliberation. This interplay provides a way to spell out the metaphor that directed-attention desires "direct" an agent's attention or "guide" the agent's deliberation. Suppose I'm thinking about what to do and that I have a directed-attention desire that I get some coffee. Suppose that I have a background belief that making coffee in my little coffee maker is the best way to get some coffee. I ultimately decide to make coffee in my little coffee maker. I thereby make coffee in my little coffee maker. Sure enough, my directed-attention desire is part of the background, in the sense that it would be part of a rationalizing explanation of my action. But it does more than that — it influences the content of my deliberation. Here is one plausible characterization of my deliberation:

> "Making coffee in my coffee maker would be a quick way to get some coffee, so I'll do that."

Notice that my directed-attention desire that I get some coffee does not itself figure into the foreground, as I don't think the *de se* thought (or anything composed from that thought) that I desire that I get some coffee. But it would be a mistake to think that the desire has no influence on my deliberation. I am explicitly thinking about means (and the efficacy of those means) for getting some coffee. Of course, I need not be thinking of the

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[12] See similar remarks at J. David Velleman, "The Way of the Wanton," in *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Kim Atkins (Routledge, 2008), 180

means *as means*. I need not have any thoughts to the effect that such-and-such action would be efficient means. (I needn't utilize the concept *most efficient means*; that surely would be overintellectualized.) Instead, I need only to have a thought *de re* about the means. So here is one way that a directed-attention desire, operating in the background, influences my deliberation:

> **Means-End:** An agent's directed-attention desire that P makes the proposition that Q — where Q is some proposition about the efficacy of means for bringing about P — occur within the agent's deliberation.[13]

Notice that this feature of a directed-attention desire is not the same as its role in presenting options upon which an agent may choose to act. Earlier I said that directed-attention desires present the agent with options to act: namely, options that, given the agent's background beliefs, would make it sufficiently likely that the agent's desire is satisfied. But those are just candidate options for action from which the agent can choose — it says nothing about their relevant properties or the bases on which the agent will choose one over the other. Now, by contrast, I'm saying that directed-attention desires make the agent focus on certain features of the options presented: for instance, on an option's property *being effective means for the desired state of affairs.*

Of course, thoughts about means are only one kind of thought that the agent might have in virtue of having a particular directed-attention operating in the background. An agent might, in addition, have thoughts about which actions would realize the state of

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[13] Here I'm using 'proposition' rather than 'fact' because a false proposition could influence an agent's deliberation.

affairs she desires. Suppose someone desires that she has a good time and believes that going to the theater is one way to have a good time. She may simply think the following, in the context of deliberating about what to do:

> "Going to the theater would be fun, so I'll do that."

In this case, her deliberation included propositions about which actions would realize the state of affairs desired. So, we can characterize another way that a directed-attention desire, operating in the background, can influence an agent's explicit deliberation:

> **Realization:** An agent's directed-attention desire that P makes the proposition that Q — where Q is some proposition about the realization of P — occur within the agent's deliberation.

Do **Means-End** and **Realization** characterize the only considerations that directed-attention desires bring to the forefront of the agent's deliberation?[14] It'd be nice if they did: propositions about means-end and realization relationships are relatively easy to understand. But I suspect that directed-attention desires permeate our thoughts in other ways. For instance, it seems that a directed-attention desire could make one attend to considerations that bear only some kind of resemblance to the state of affairs desired.

Suppose I have a directed-attention desire that I watch hockey games but I don't have any kind of directed-attention desire that I watch other sorts of games. My friend is trying to get me into soccer. We're out at the bar, and he keeps trying to draw my

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[14] These are the examples that figure most prominently into Schroeder's analysis of desire: "For X to have a desire whose object is *P* is for *X* to be in a psychological state grounding the following disposition: when for some action *a* and proposition *r* believed by *X*, given *X*'s beliefs *r* obviously helps to explain why *X*'s doing *a* promotes *P*, *X* finds *r* salient, and this tends to prompt *X* to do *a*, and *X*'s attention is directed toward considerations like *r*." Schroeder, *Slaves of the Passions*, 156–57. See, however, my concerns about the use of his notion of the promotion relation in this context, at note 7.

attention to the TV. He's emphatically emphasizing each team's fluid and creative play, as well as the fact that the game contains very few stoppages in play. These are features that I also find present in hockey games, and as a result, I seem drawn to them here. I think to myself:

"Soccer looks pretty interesting, so I'll watch it."

What is going on here? One answer would be that I have a directed-attention desire that I watch whatever kinds of games have a certain selection of properties: fluid, creative play with few stoppages. Hockey happened to fit that bill, and now I've learned that soccer does as well. But this explanation seems far too overintellectualized to be plausible. I think a better explanation is that I have a directed-attention desire that causes me to attend to states of affairs (e.g., watching other sorts of games) that bear some kind of resemblance to the state of affairs desired. We can, thus, characterize a third way that a directed-attention desire could influence the content of an agent's deliberation:

> **Resemblance:** An agent's directed-attention desire that P makes the proposition that Q – where Q is some proposition about a state of affairs that resembles P, in some salient way – occur within the agent's deliberation.

The nature of such resemblance, of course, is hard to regiment and formalize, but that doesn't mean it's not a real phenomenon.

In sum, I've discussed three examples of ways in which directed-attention desires influence an agent's explicit deliberation.[15] There might well be other ways for a

[15] Notice that I've said nothing about an agent's treating some property of an action as a justifying property. Contrast with Pettit and Smith, "Backgrounding Desire," 568. But see my discussion in the next section.

directed-attention desire to influence an agent's deliberation. Here is my summary characterization of the way in which directed-attention desires influence deliberation:

> **Direction:** An agent's directed-attention desire that P makes the proposition that Q — where Q is some proposition appropriately related to P — occur within the agent's deliberation.

'Appropriately related' is a placeholder for the kind of relation listed above: the relation whose instances include means-end, realization, and resemblance propositions. This explanation of the interplay between the background and foreground of deliberation should hold for any kind of deliberation properly characterized as involving propositional thoughts: thoughts we can characterize through blurbs like the ones listed above. [16]

Now, let us return to the woodworker. We've said that the woodworker has a commitment to woodworking. Let's spell out the content of this commitment a bit more. When he's at the shop, he's trying to produce woodworks of very high quality. Suppose, then, his commitment is a commitment to produce great woodworks. When he's at the shop, he's having certain considerations figure into his explicit deliberation. Again, return to the example of deliberative pause from the beginning of this chapter. He's building a new table for a client, and it's a table that he expects will be subject to a lot of regular wear and tear. He's inclined to use walnut, and he decides to do so. His deliberation is quite quick. Suppose that he deliberates as follows:

> "Walnut would make for a durable tabletop, so I'll use that."

[16] See, for instance, Pettit and Smith's point that the contrast between background and foreground of deliberation isn't the same as the contrast between the conscious and the unconscious. Ibid.

In this case, it’s plausible that to think that he also has in mind the purposes to which the table would be put. It would be used daily and so, he thinks, it should have a durable material on top. The consideration that figures into the woodworker’s deliberation, then, is one about the effective means for producing a great piece of woodwork.

We have, then, an account of two ways in which the woodworker’s commitment to producing great woodworks shapes his deliberation. *Qua* directed-attention desire, the commitment (i) makes certain options for action salient and (ii) brings certain considerations to the forefront of deliberation. And the treatment of his commitment as a directed-attention desire avails itself of Smith and Pettit’s distinction between a desire’s operating in the background and the foreground, which allows us to account for the sense in which his commitment shapes deliberative activity that involves immersion in the pursuit of his commitment. However, the challenge from the start of the chapter is now in sharper focus. The woodworker seems to take the fact that walnut would make for a durable tabletop to *count in favor of* using it for the tabletop. Suppose, as well, that he antecedently desires to use walnut for the tabletop. Doesn’t this mean he reflectively endorses acting upon that desire?

II. Taking a Consideration to Count in Favor of an Option

However, we need to proceed with caution. We need to think carefully about what is required for an agent to take a certain consideration to *count in favor* of a certain action. Let’s, again, focus on the woodworker’s moment of deliberative pause. He takes

the fact that walnut would be durable to count in favor of using walnut for the tabletop. What needs to be true of the woodworker's psychology for this to be the case?

We can start with the thought that woodworker's deliberation, and his behavior that emerges from such deliberation, is norm-guided. He is following norms that are intimately tied to the content of his commitment: he is following norms closely connected to the production of great woodworks. These norms prescribe that he select a durable material for a tabletop that will be used frequently, that he ensures the supporting structures are sturdy for each project, and so on. As Allan Gibbard notes, when we see behavior guided by a norm, it can be difficult to characterize precisely the norms that the agent is following.[17] But the agent is following such norms, nonetheless, and from the outside, we can attempt to provide the best characterization of them that we can.

More than this, though, the woodworker *internalizes* the norms that are guiding his deliberation and behavior. (His actions are not merely in accordance with them; he's adhering to them in virtue of some appropriately related state of his psychology.) And the woodworker's commitment has played an important role in shaping the norms that he has internalized. Over time, a desire with a wide psychological role, like the woodworker's commitment, will tend to shape the character of the agent's deliberation. Let us consider, first, one norm that the woodworker has plausibly internalized: the norm that he use a durable material when building a tabletop for daily use.[18] This norm is clearly connected to the deliberation discussed in the previous section. The woodworker thinks something

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[17] Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 70.
[18] Perhaps this norm is subservient to a norm that prescribes making one's work durable, in the long-term. I set these questions to the side for now.

like the following: “Walnut is durable, so I’ll use it!” He takes a certain consideration – that walnut is durable – to count in favor of a certain action – the action of using that material for the tabletop. He also has internalized a norm prescribing using a durable material when building a tabletop. The crucial idea is that his taking the fact that walnut is durable to count in favor of using it for the tabletop is grounded in his internalization of a norm prescribing that he use durable material when building a tabletop. His internalization of the norm is a psychological state that is working in the background, influencing the way that certain considerations strike him, as counting for (or against) certain options, in the foreground.

More generally, the woodworker has internalized a whole host of norms, all connected with his woodworking, and these norms prescribe certain actions under certain circumstances. Certain considerations figure into the foreground of his deliberation; these considerations, combined with other background knowledge, constitute his apparent recognition that a certain action is prescribed under the circumstances he is actually in, according to a norm that he has internalized.[19] He takes these considerations to count in favor of some action A if and only if he has internalized a norm prescribing A in the circumstances described by those considerations, combined with his background knowledge. Again, to return to our simple example from earlier, the woodworker has internalized a norm prescribing the use of durable material when building a tabletop for daily use. A certain consideration – that a particular material (walnut) is durable – figures

[19] The inclusion of ‘apparent’ here is meant to emphasize that, of course, an agent could be wrong about the circumstances she is in – she could have false beliefs about her circumstances.

into his explicit deliberation. He takes this consideration to count in favor of using walnut for the tabletop in the sense that he has internalized a norm prescribing that he use such a material when in the circumstances characterized by the considerations that figure into his explicit deliberation, combined with his background knowledge (namely, that he's building a tabletop, that the tabletop will be used frequently, etc.). This is, of course, a simple example, but I am hopeful that it will generalize.

So, on my view, we explain the sense in which the woodworker takes certain considerations to count in favor of certain actions by appealing to the norms that he has internalized, where the norms he has internalized are shaped by the commitments and other conative states that he has. Which norms are internalized by the woodworker is determined, in part, by which commitments he has; his commitment to making great woodworks has determined, in part, which norms guide his deliberation over time and across circumstances.[20] But if he has internalized a norm, doesn't that mean he endorses doing whatever is prescribed by the norm? And if one such norm prescribes acting on the basis of one of his existing desires, one might think, that means he reflectively endorses acting on the basis of that desire.

However, this plainly is not the case. The crucial point is that there are different ways of internalizing a norm, and only one of them is connected with the agent's reflective endorsement of the desires upon which she decides to act. Gibbard helpfully contrasts between *accepting a norm* and *being in the grips of a norm*.[21] The contrast is

[20] Other factors could be at play, too, of course. Social factors could also influence which norms are internalized by an agent.
[21] Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 69.

most vivid in the famous Milgram experiment. In this experiment, subjects were ordered to administer increasingly "painful" electric shocks to another subject. The second subject, of course, was not actually being shocked; this person was working with the experimenter, without the first subject's knowledge. Roughly two-thirds of subjects complied with what they were ordered to do, despite their protests, according to Gibbard. Gibbard understands the motivation of these subjects in terms of conflicting norms that they have internalized.[22] On the one hand, the subject has internalized norms against intentional harm, but the subject has also internalized a norm in favor of being cooperative and doing one's job, obeying an authority. In such a conflict, we might think, we should look to the agent's norms concerning which norm has priority over the other.

On one plausible reading of the compliant subject's psychology, their protests indicate that as judges, they have internalized a norm that prescribes avoiding intentional harm over being cooperative. However, in the heat of the moment, this is not the norm on which they act. Instead, it seems that, in the moment, they are acting on a norm that prescribes being cooperative over avoiding intentional harm. But, Gibbard says, they are *merely in the grips of* such a norm – it would be a mistake to say that they genuinely accept that norm.[23]

Importantly, for our purposes, it would be a complete mistake to say that the compliant Milgram subjects reflectively endorse acting upon a desire to be compliant in those circumstances – even though they have internalized a norm that prescribes that they

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[22] Ibid., 60.
[23] Ibid.

be compliant in those circumstances. [24] It is plausible that they reflectively endorse acting upon such a desire only under the assumption that they have *accepted* a norm prescribing that they be compliant under those circumstances. [25] The phenomenon of being in the grips of a norm indicates that there are ways of internalizing a norm that do not guarantee the agent's reflective endorsement of the desires upon which she decides to act. [26]

In turn, we can say something similar about the woodworker's deliberation. It's true that he has internalized a whole host of norms, all connected with his pursuit of woodworking, but there is no requirement that he has *genuinely accepted* these norms, in a way that would make it plausible that he reflectively endorses acting upon the desires that he decides to act upon. And we can appeal to these norms, which he does not genuinely accept, to account for moments of deliberative pause during his immersion in his craft. Specifically, we can appeal to such norms to explain the respect in which he

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[24] Of course, in this work, the issue of reflective endorsement and rejection isn't Gibbard's focus. Instead, the focus is on which psychological state is expressed by a sincere utterance of a particular kind of normative claims about what it is rational to feel, think, and do. See, for instance, Ibid., 55.

[25] Gibbard thinks of norm acceptance partly in terms of one's dispositions to engage in normative discussion: "To accept a norm, we might say, is to be disposed to avow it in unconstrained normative discussion, as a result of the workings of demands for consistency in the positions one takes in normative discussion." Ibid., 74. The norms that a person accepts can also impact their behavior and thought, outside of normative discussion. Such discussion influences action and emotion in situations like the ones discussed, and under those conditions, the norms accepted by the agent are guiding the agent's actions and emotions. Ibid., 75.

[26] Bratman also discusses Gibbard's work on norm internalization as he builds his own account of reflective endorsement. Bratman's proposal, again, is that an agent's reflective endorsement is provided by her self-governing policies, which are policies to treat certain ends as providing *justifying reasons* within motivationally effective reasoning. But, Bratman notes, his view might seem already to smuggle in an element of reflective endorsement, in terms of availing itself of the notion of 'justifying reason.' Bratman draws on Gibbard's work to show that an agent can treat a desired end as justifying, even though she does not, on reflection, accept it as a justifying end – even if she reflectively rejects acting on that end. This is a kind of "attenuated reasoning." See discussion at Michael Bratman, "Hierarchy, Circularity, and Double Reduction," in *Structures of Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), sec. 5. I follow Bratman in thinking that this distinction, drawn from Gibbard, is helpful in characterizing a type of deliberation that doesn't build in an element of reflective endorsement.

takes certain considerations to count in favor of certain actions when he pauses and decides to perform those actions.

Moreover, the notion of *being in the grips of a norm* gives us a helpful tool for understanding the deliberative dispositions manifested within the woodworker's immersion to his craft. On Gibbard's view, an agent is in the grips of a norm when she is guided by a norm "in the heat of social encounter."[27] This is true of the cooperative Milgram subjects; their actions are guided by norms in the heat of an experimentally contrived social encounter. The woodworker, of course, isn't in the heat of a social encounter. The example is less dramatic than the one from the Milgram experimental setup. The woodworker is simply following these norms as a matter of rote, daily course. But as he's immersed in this activity, there's something to the thought that he's lost in the "heat" of the moment, as he's focused entirely on his craft.[28]

III. Taking Oneself to Have a Reason

So far, I've characterized three central aspects of the woodworker's immersion in his craft, in a way that illuminates how his immersion involves deliberation: (1) a view of the options made salient within his deliberation, (2) a view of the considerations that figure into the foreground of his deliberation, and (3) a view of the way in which he takes

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[27] Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 60.

[28] The phenomenological feel of rational immersion likely will resemble the way that Wolf describes feelings of active engagement, as feeling "especially alive." Susan Wolf, "Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of the Good Life," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 14, no. 1 (1997): 209. We see a similar phenomenon in the psychological research on "flow" experiences, which characteristically include losing oneself in the activity. See discussion at Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (HarperCollins, 2009), 49.

those certain considerations to count in favor of certain actions. These three views form my account of rational immersion, and the third aspect was the one that was central for addressing the challenge at the start of this chapter. The woodworker is initially inclined to use walnut for the tabletop. He takes the fact that walnut would make for a durable tabletop to count in favor of using walnut for the tabletop. He decides to use walnut for the tabletop. Yet, we need not understand this moment of deliberative pause as involving reflective endorsement of his desire to use walnut for the tabletop. We can characterize the respect in which he takes the relevant consideration (that walnut would make for a durable tabletop) to count in favor of using walnut for the tabletop in terms of his being in the grips of a norm prescribing that he use a durable material for a tabletop for daily use; and this form of norm internalization, in general, does not guarantee that the agent reflectively endorses acting upon a desire to perform the action prescribed by the norm.

Throughout my discussion, I have deliberately avoided another common locution: the locution of *taking oneself to have a reason* to perform one action rather than another. This is the locution, for instance, that figures into the Korsgaard's description of the activity of reason, from the beginning of this chapter. The problem with this locution is that it is an extremely slippery one. And the fact that it is so slippery, I think, can explain away the appeal of the thought that an agent must reflectively endorse acting upon a desire to Φ if she (i) before deliberation, desires to Φ and (ii) after deliberation, decides to Φ.

To see why, let's try to regiment the thoughts from the beginning of this chapter into a formal argument. For this argument, let's suppose (1) that an agent *A* desires to Φ and (2) decides, upon deliberation, to Φ. Now consider the **Endorsement Argument:**

P1: Necessarily, if an agent *A* who desires to Φ takes considerations *C* to count in favor of Φ-ing, then she takes those considerations to be reasons in favor of Φ-ing.

P2: Necessarily, if an agent *A* who desires to Φ takes considerations *C* to be reasons in favor of Φ-ing, then she reflectively endorses acting upon her desire to Φ.

C: Necessarily, if an agent *A* who desires to Φ takes consideration *C* to count in favor of Φ-ing, then she reflectively endorses acting upon her desire to Φ.

Spelling out these thoughts in explicit argument, though, lets us see exactly where it goes wrong. The notion of taking such-and-such considerations to be a reason is a slippery one, and the argument equivocates on the corresponding phrase. The problem is that the argument equivocates between a weak and strong sense of 'taking considerations to be a reason to Φ.' In the weak sense, P1 is true but P2 is false; in the strong sense, P2 is true but P1 is false.

Consider, first, P1. Suppose that the woodworker takes certain considerations to count in favor of Φ-ing. There is, to start, one very thin sense in which the woodworker acts for reasons. Directed-attention desires, as I noted earlier, operate in (again, to use the Pettit and Smith terminology) the "background": they figure into part of a rationalizing explanation for the agent's action. An agent Φ's for a reason when she Φ's as a result of

having the right combination of beliefs and desires in the background. [29] Such an explanation is a teleological explanation of the agent's action, but it's still too weak to capture the way that the woodworker's deliberation influences what he does; while it might account for a sense in which the woodworker acts *for* reasons, it still is too weak to account for a sense in which he *took* certain considerations *to be reasons*. However, we are able to say more about the woodworker. There is another explanation of the action available to us – one that explains the action in terms of the considerations that figured into the woodworker's deliberation, combined with the fact that he took those considerations to count in favor of performing that action.[30] But we've just seen a way of describing the woodworker's deliberation on which P2 is false. The woodworker initially desires to use walnut for the tabletop, he takes certain considerations to count in favor of using walnut for the tabletop, and he decides to use walnut for the tabletop. But he doesn't reflectively endorse acting upon his desire to use walnut for the tabletop.

In light of the fact that the woodworker takes those considerations to count in favor of performing a certain action, and that we can explain his action in part by reference to those considerations, it is natural to describe the woodworker as acting for reasons: as taking those considerations to be reasons for performing a certain action. So, there is a natural sense of 'taking such-and-such considerations to be a reason' in which P1 is true. But this is not the sense in which P2 is true; our discussion of the woodworker's deliberative dispositions shows us that. Of course, there is some perfectly

[29] The clearest examples are ones where the agent Φ's as a result of desire that Ψ and believing that Φ-ing is the most efficient (or good enough) way to bring about Ψ.
[30] This point is similar to Smith's discussion of the explanation of action from the deliberative perspective, at Smith, *The Moral Problem*, sec. 5.2.

natural sense of the locution in which P2 is true: there is some perfectly natural sense in which it is true that if an agent takes herself to have reasons to Φ and desires to Φ, she reflectively endorses acting on the basis of her desire to Φ. (Korsgaard, as quoted earlier, is clearly not misusing words.) That is, there is some sense of 'taking such-and-such considerations to be a reason' in which P2 is true. But this much stronger sense of 'taking such-and-such considerations to be a reason' is plainly not the sense in P1 is true.

IV. The Rational Immersion View, Reviewed

This chapter has been framed around a discussion of moments of *deliberative pause* within an agent's rational immersion: an agent desires to perform a certain action, in the course of pursuing his commitment; he pauses and deliberates about whether to perform that action; and he decides whether to perform that action. I've, again, used the woodworker as the central example. The woodworker desires to use walnut for the tabletop, pauses, thinks that walnut would make for a durable tabletop, and decides to use walnut for the tabletop. I've argued that we can characterize such moments of deliberative pause without requiring that the woodworker reflectively endorses acting upon his antecedent desire to use walnut for the tabletop. We can characterize the woodworker's deliberation in terms of the norms he has internalized, where internalizing a norm doesn't guarantee that he reflectively endorses acting upon a desire to perform an action prescribed by that norm. So, in general, we can characterize moments of deliberative pause without requiring that the agent reflectively endorses acting upon any of her sub-motives.

This provides an important development of the Rational Immersion View. Recall the statement of the view, from the previous chapter:

> **Rational Immersion View:** Necessarily, an agent structures her life if (i) she has a commitment that manifests across an extremely wide range of circumstances in which she finds herself and (ii) whose manifestation consists in immersion in activity that involves the extensive deployment of her rational capacities for deliberation and planning.

The issue was that (ii) didn't seem to invoke something that would provide a genuine alternative to the view that the agent's reflective endorsement makes it the case that she's structuring her own life. To engage in rational activity, an agent needs to engage in moments of deliberative pause; but it seemed that to engage in moments of deliberative pause, an agent needs to reflectively endorse acting upon any antecedent desire to perform the action that she decides to perform. I agree with the first point, but I've denied the second point. And it's the denial of the second point that allows us to see that the Rational Immersion View is a genuine alternative to the view that the agent's reflective endorsement makes it the case that she's structuring her own life.

To spell this out, we needed to provide an account of the immersive activity invoked in (ii). In this chapter, I've provided such an account. The goal was to characterize a mode of immersive activity that involved the extensive deployment of the agent's rational capacities for deliberation and planning. Rational immersion in the pursuit of a commitment involves the operation of the commitment within the background of deliberation, in such a way as to shape the content of the considerations

that figure into the foreground of deliberation, as described by Direction, earlier within this chapter. (By contrast, Frankfurtian reflection on a commitment brings the commitment into the foreground, breaking immersion in the activity.)

Moreover, the respect in which the agent counts as taking those considerations to count in favor of certain actions is explained in terms of the norms she has internalized. This means that, in spelling out (ii), we need to invoke the norms internalized by the agent, where such norms (at least partly) determine which considerations the agent takes to count in favor of which actions.[31] To put the pieces together, we arrive at the following proposal:

> **Rational Immersion View (Full):** Necessarily, an agent structures her life if she has a commitment *C* that meets the following conditions:
>
> > (i) *C* manifests across an extremely wide range of circumstances in which she finds herself;
> >
> > (ii) *C's* manifestation across those circumstances often consists in immersion in activity that involves the extensive deployment of her rational capacities for deliberation and planning; and

[31] Two agents who share the same commitment could internalize different norms related to the pursuit of that commitment. For instance, a woodworker in one tradition might have internalized norms that prioritize durability, whereas a woodworker from another tradition might have internalized norms that prioritize beauty. Here, I cannot explore the limits to such variation. Thanks to Sigrún Svavarsdóttir for prompting me to clarify this point.

(iii) *C* has shaped which norms she has internalized, in such a way as to shape how she engages in deliberation when *C* manifests across those circumstances[32]

(iii) spells out the impact of the commitment on the agent's deliberation while immersed, in way that illuminates the exercise of her rational capacities while immersed. And (iii), recall, does not require that the agent *accepts* the relevant norms; she might simply be in their grips, in such a way as not to guarantee that she reflectively endorses acting upon any of her sub-motives.

This provides us with the complete statement of the Rational Immersion View, as a view that provides a sufficient condition for an agent to count as structuring her own life. The Rational Immersion View does not explicitly invoke the agent's reflective endorsement, either of her commitment or her sub-motives, nor does it implicitly rely on any such reflective endorsement. However, this allows us to frame a clear objection to the view – a challenge that goes back to our discussion of the unwilling addict, from the previous chapter. It seems that an agent could meet the condition spelled out by the Rational Immersion View, yet reflectively *reject* acting upon the commitment that is

[32] Of course, *C* might well manifest in other ways; it might ground emotional or affective dispositions, for example. (For instance, the woodworker's commitment might ground a disposition to feel pleased with a job well done.) I mean only to focus on a particular type of manifestation of the commitment: namely, the manifestation that consists in rational immersion. Another, even more precise way of formulating the Rational Immersion View would be as follows: (i) *C* manifests in way *R* across an extremely wide range of circumstances in which the agent finds herself; (ii) Way *R* consists in immersion in activity that involves the extensive deployment of her rational capacities for deliberation and planning; and (iii) *C* has shaped which norms she has internalized, in such a way as to shape how she deliberates when *C* manifests in way *R*. Thanks to Tristram McPherson for pushing me to clarify this.

shaping her activity over time. In such a case, would it really be plausible to think that it's the *agent* who is structuring her own life? I turn to this challenge in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Structured Lives with Reflective Rejection

Recall the contrast that framed the discussion at the beginning of chapter 2. There is a pronounced contrast between giving a shape to one's own life, over time, and having a shape imposed on one's life, from the outside. This is connected with our sense of being the authors of our lives. Of course, we don't think that we shape *every* aspect of our lives, but in many cases, we think that we ourselves are making a contribution to the overall shape of our lives – a contribution that, I've argued, should be cashed out in terms of the agent's rational immersion over time and across circumstances. This formed the basis for the Rational Immersion View. At this point, however, it might seem that the Rational Immersion View threatens to blur together the distinction with which we started: the distinction between shaping one's own life and having a shape imposed from the outside.

At the outset, I noted that the distinction between structuring one's own life and having a shape imposed from the outside cannot be spelled out entirely in terms of the contrast between the shape acquired by acting on one's motives and the shape acquired through forces and events that are literally external to one's psychology. Again, the reason for this is that there is an important respect in which motives within an agent's psychology can function like external forces. We saw this in our discussion of the canonical example of the unwilling addict. The addict strongly desires to use a drug, but he reflectively rejects acting upon this desire – and his reflective rejection, we are invited

to think, is sufficient to make it the case that the unwilling addict's desire is akin to an external force. And this notion of externality has an important place within our discussion of the contrast between structuring one's own life and having a shape imposed from the outside. If the unwilling addict is using the drug, day in and day out, it's true that his *desire to use the drug* is shaping his activity over time, but it would be implausible to say that *he's* structuring his own life. The structure, instead, is coming from something akin to an external force, whose externality we explain in terms of his reflective rejection of acting upon that desire.[1]

This characterization of the unwilling addict suggests that if an agent reflectively rejects acting upon a motive, then the motive is "external" to her, in the sense that *even if* the motive is sufficiently shaping her activity in a way that gives a shape to her life, this wouldn't amount to her structuring her own life over time. The structure, instead, would be coming from the outside: from something akin to an external force. Put slightly differently, our discussion of the unwilling addict suggests the following thesis:

> **Rejection Link:** Necessarily, if an agent reflectively rejects acting upon a motive, then she does not structure her life around the pursuit of that motive.

However, there are cases in which Rejection Link and the Rational Immersion View will conflict about whether an agent counts as structuring her own life. The Rational

[1] The language of 'externality' and 'identification' is most vivid in Frankfurt, "Identification and Externality." We also find similar language, put in terms of "radical separation" of the person from the rejected desire, at Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," 170. For the language of "outlaw" forces, see Ibid., 175. The language of identification and endorsement finds a place even in Frankfurt's earlier work. See, e.g., discussion of identifying with a particular desire at Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 16.

Immersion View says that it's sufficient for an agent to count as structuring her own life that she has a commitment that grounds frequent immersion in activity that involves the extensive deployment of her rational capacities, and an agent could have such a commitment while *reflectively rejecting* acting upon that commitment. The unwilling addict gives us the basis for such an example. Consider the *rationally immersed unwilling addict*: an agent who has a commitment that grounds extensive immersion in activity related to the use of his drug, involving the sophisticated use of his rational capacities, but who nonetheless reflectively rejects acting upon this commitment.[2] (Indeed, this may seem like an even more menacing form of addiction, hijacking the use of his rational capacities while he's immersed!) The Rational Immersion View has the consequence that the rationally immersed unwilling addict is structuring his own life through the pursuit of his commitment to the use of the drug, despite the fact that he reflectively rejects acting upon it. Is this really plausible?

In this chapter, I will argue that this consequence of the Rational Immersion View is not quite as counterintuitive as it may seem. Yes, we are forced to say that the immersed unwilling addict is structuring his own life, but when we spell out in more detail (i) the way that the addict needs to be immersed and (ii) the sophistication of his immersive activity (in terms of the deployment of his rational capacities), this result isn't as odd as it might seem. This will also allow us to see that the issue of whether an agent is structuring her own life isn't the same as the issue of whether an agent is structuring her life *autonomously,* and that the relationship between these issues is by no means

[2] Thanks to Sigrún Svavarsdóttir for proposing this character.

straightforward. To start off, though, I will begin with another example. The purpose of this example is to train our philosophical imagination on another instance in which an agent reflectively rejects acting upon a commitment, but where he continues to be rationally immersed in the pursuit of that commitment. This example will allow us to home in on important contrasts between the rationally immersed unwilling addict and the traditional discussion of the unwilling addict.

I. Being Functionally Wanton

We need to start by thinking about the role of an agent's reflective rejection within her psychology. Of course, within the canon, such rejection constitutes the agent's *taking a stand* against acting on the motive. But, more than this, if an agent *genuinely* reflectively rejects acting on the basis of a motive, this is the sort of thing that tends to have an impact on how they are living, at least absent compulsion or serious mental disorder. Indeed, examples of such major life changes are familiar from fiction. Consider, for instance, the following familiar tale.

Before his Christmastime revelation, Scrooge was a miserly man.[3] His life was structured around the single-minded pursuit of wealth, to the expense of all else. It would be right to say that Scrooge's commitment to the pursuit of wealth structured his life. It grounded motivational, emotional, and deliberative dispositions that manifested across an extremely wide range of circumstances. Scrooge routinely performed actions that, by his

[3] Here I have in mind a significantly simplified version of the events that occur within the classic Dickens novella *A Christmas Carol*.

lights, would aid in his pursuit of wealth – even when they were quite cruel to others. Scrooge lived a rich emotional life, albeit one that was focused entirely on the pursuit of wealth. He felt elated when an investment paid off, despondent when a business venture went south, pleased when considering the prospect of acquiring even more wealth, and so on. And he routinely deliberated on the basis of his commitment to the pursuit of wealth. His attention would fix on options that, by his lights, would be likely to aid in his pursuit of wealth, and he would take the fact that some course of action would increase his wealth to count in favor of his performing that action. He engaged in this deliberative activity while immersed in the pursuit of his commitment to the pursuit of wealth. So, according to the Rational Immersion View, Scrooge was structuring his life around the pursuit of this commitment.

But, as the story goes, Scrooge had an important revelation that shook him to his core – a moment that led him to abandon his pursuit of wealth (or, at the very least, to moderate it quite extensively). The Scrooge we know, upon realizing how his life would look if he continued in his ways, abruptly and completely *rejects* acting on the basis of his commitment to the pursuit of wealth. To use the evocative language from the introduction, Scrooge's revelation consisted in *his* standing back from his commitment to the pursuit of wealth and saying, "No more!"[4] Scrooge disavows acting on the basis of his commitment to the pursuit of wealth. As I said earlier, there has been quite a bit of philosophical work about the *nature* of such a state of disavowal – about the precise psychological mechanisms that constitute one's rejection of acting on the basis of a

[4] See, again, Korsgaard's description of stepping back at Korsgaard, *The Constitution of Agency*, 4.

particular conative state.[5] It is in virtue of *something* in Scrooge's psychology that he now rejects acting on the basis of his commitment to the pursuit of wealth. The details of this feature of Scrooge's psychology, again, are not my focus in this dissertation.[6] Call this feature of Scrooge's psychology, whatever its nature, his 'rejection-constituting' attitude.

However, the remarkable thing about Scrooge's transformation is that it doesn't end simply with his disavowal. His disavowal has quite serious effects on his day-to-day life. He's now suddenly quite a bit more generous – quite a bit more willing, for instance, to allow an employee a day off, even though doing so will cost him a slight amount of money. In the classic story, Scrooge's rejection resonates throughout his psychology. It is *remarkably* effective in changing the way that he lives his life. But, of course, the story didn't need to turn out this way. Things might have gone differently.

Consider a variation on the classic story. Suppose that Scrooge lives his life in exactly the same way before the revelation, and suppose that he has exactly the same nighttime revelation.[7] He sees how his life would turn out, he feels horrible about this, and he – by whatever psychological mechanism – disavows acting on the basis of his life-structuring commitment to the pursuit of wealth. But the next morning comes along, and he needs to get ready for work. As he heads into work for the day, the events of the

[5] See, again, discussion at note 5 of the introduction.
[6] These rejection-constituting attitudes can have a wide variety of causal origins, and an account of them needs to accommodate this fact. It had better not turn out that a rejection-constituting attitude needs to be formed through cold, sober reflection, for instance. (This is plainly not what happens in Scrooge's case!) Bratman's view meets this desideratum. See discussion at Bratman, "A Desire of One's Own," 150–51. For related discussion, see Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 29.
[7] In discussion that follows, whenever I refer to Scrooge, I have in mind the Scrooge that figures into my revised version of the story.

previous night begin to fade into the background. He, of course, remembers what happened. (How could one forget being visited by a ghost?) But he slips back into his old ways of living. He starts to get back into the groove of his day-to-day job, and as he gets back into the groove, the disavowal from the previous night begins to fade into the background. Scrooge continues to live his life as if he'd never rejected acting on his commitment. He is motivated in the same ways as before; he responds emotionally in the same ways as before; he deliberates in the same ways as before. His doing this is simply a matter of slipping back into the mundane affairs of daily life. But if prompted – if he recalls the events from the previous night – he would once again say, "No more!" He would reaffirm his disavowal of acting on the basis of his commitment to the pursuit of wealth. Nonetheless, he'd slip out of it as he immerses himself in the affairs of his business. His rejection is there, all throughout his day; it's just not *salient*, or somehow operative within his psychology, when he gets back into day-to-day life.[8]

One might object that I've misdescribed the case. When Scrooge has his midnight revelation, he forms a certain mental state: the one, whatever it is, that constitutes his rejection of acting on the basis of his commitment to the pursuit of wealth. But, the objection goes, as soon as he gets back into the daily groove – as soon as he *really* becomes immersed in his old ways – he has *lost* this mental state, whatever it is. Scrooge is not immersed in the pursuit of a commitment that he rejects acting upon; the relevant

[8] We might think that Scrooge could become *resigned* to this fact about his psychology. But the topic of resignation is complicated. There is an important respect, on my telling of the story, in which Scrooge *continues* to reject this feature of his psychology – and this marks a difference between Scrooge's situation and the way that Frankfurt discusses resignation at Frankfurt, "Identification and Externality," 64.

sense in which Scrooge's reflection doesn't stick is just that he *loses* the mental state that constitutes his rejection of acting upon this motive.

However, this description is not plausible. We can suppose, as I said earlier, that Scrooge would stably reach one and the same conclusion upon reflection: as soon as he thinks about the way he's living his life, he recalls his ghastly encounters and thinks "No more!" He stably reaches the same conclusion about whether to act on the basis of his commitment to the pursuit of wealth. Nonetheless, daily life has its way of sucking him back in. Of course, one could insist that, in such a case, Scrooge has a certain mental state, then loses it, then regains it, then loses it once more, then re-regains it, and so on. But this picture is simply not credible.[9] It would be a bizarre departure from the traditional view of mental states as dispositional states (or grounds of dispositional states). Scrooge's rejection of his motive grounds certain dispositions – his disposition, for instance, to say "No more!" upon reflection – and there is a very clear point at which he acquired the mental state that grounds those dispositions (namely, when he was visited by a ghost). But this mental state simply does not manifest in his day-to-day life.[10] It is a state that plays a fairly narrow psychological role: it manifests only during his reflective moments.

[9] Even more, this view is especially problematic if the relevant state is a kind of policy, which is a certain kind of intention to which norms of stability apply, as on Bratman's account. This agent would be in flagrant violation of this norm. See discussion of stability at, e.g., Bratman, "Reflection, Planning, and Temporally Extended Agency," 26.

[10] Perhaps one would prefer to say that the rejection-constituting state manifests within his daily life but it's masked by the manifestation of his other desires, including his commitment to the pursuit of wealth. This should not make much of a difference in the discussion that follows.

On my (much less inspiring) variation on the classic story, Scrooge's commitment to the pursuit of wealth continues to structure much of the way that he engages with the world. It grounds motivational, emotional, and deliberative dispositions that continue to manifest across an extremely wide range of circumstances. And, crucially, for the Rational Immersion View, the commitment continues to ground Scrooge's frequent immersion in activity that involves the extensive deployment of his rational capacities. He's back at the job, deliberating about whether to take an investment, about whether to give his employees paid leave, and so on – and these deliberations proceed in exactly the same way as before his nighttime revelation, despite the presence of the rejection-constituting state within his psychology.

I contend that, on my variant of the classic story, Scrooge counts as structuring his own life through the pursuit of his commitment to wealth. True enough, he does reflectively reject acting upon the commitment, but this rejection-constituting state is just not having enough of an impact on Scrooge's daily life to make it plausible that he's no longer structuring his own life. Scrooge is, in fact, *functionally like the wanton*: the character of his immersive activity, including the extent to which he deploys his rational capacities without a second thought, is not changed at all by his having reflectively rejected acting upon his commitment to the pursuit of wealth. The deployment of his rational capacities, when he's immersed on the job, is the same as it would be if he were entirely wanton with respect to his commitment: if he neither endorsed nor rejected acting upon it. In chapter 2, I made the case that it was plausible that a committed wanton, like the woodworker, counted as structuring his own life because of the

extensive deployment of his rational capacities while engaged in immersive activity in the pursuit of his commitment. So, too, does Scrooge count as structuring his own life because of the extensive deployment of his rational capacities while engaged in immersive activity in the pursuit of his commitment.[11]

The Rational Immersion View provides the right diagnosis of both cases – it best accounts for the sense in which Scrooge, like the woodworker, is structuring his own life. The *mere presence* of a rejection-constituting state, within his psychology, is not sufficient to dislodge Scrooge from his role in structuring his own life. The rejection-constituting state needs to be doing *something* to shape the agent's activity, outside of her reflective moments, for her no longer to count as structuring her own life around the pursuit of the commitment she rejects acting upon. As we will see in the next section, when we think carefully about what is required for the agent's commitment to satisfy the condition spelled out by the Rational Immersion View, her rejection-constituting state would need to be fairly circumscribed in its impact on her activity outside of her reflective moments. This will make it more plausible to say that she's nonetheless structuring her life around the pursuit of that commitment – even when we focus on the case of the immersed unwilling addict.

II. The Immersed Unwilling Addict

[11] Perhaps we should follow Bratman in thinking that there is an important difference between the wanton, like the woodworker, and Scrooge, in terms of whether they can rightly be said to *value* their respective pursuits. See discussion at Michael Bratman, "Valuing and the Will," in *Structures of Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), sec. 8. Even if this is true, however, I still contend that this difference is not sufficient to make it plausible that the wanton, but not Scrooge, is structuring his own life.

We are now in a position to notice *two* major contrasts between my description of Scrooge and the traditional portrayal of the unwilling addict. The two primary contrasts are that (i) Scrooge, unlike the unwilling addict, is immersed in the activity produced by his commitment, and (ii) Scrooge, unlike the unwilling addict, is extensively deploying his rational capacities in the pursuit of his commitment. Once we make sure to frame the portrayal of the rationally immersed unwilling addict to account for these contrasts, it is no longer extremely implausible to claim that he's structuring his own life through the pursuit of his commitment to use the drug.

Let's start with the first contrast. The traditional discussion of the unwilling addict seems to blur together two distinct features, both connected with our sense that the desire is "external" to him. The problem is that we use various thoughts about *conflict* within the agent's psychology to mark out the way in which a desire is external to an agent. The unwilling addict is our guide; we peer into his psychology and see a conflict that puts a sharp demarcation between *him* and the desire to use the drug. But there are two importantly distinct dimensions to the conflict between the unwilling addict and this desire. First, as mentioned earlier, the unwilling addict reflectively *rejects* acting on the basis of this desire. The unwilling addict is not *wholly behind* the motive that moves him to action. Second, the unwilling addict *feels* the conflict at the time at which he is acting; he feels the force of temptation, fights it, but ultimately succumbs. He is not *wholly into* the action he is performing on the basis of his desire to use the drug.

Indeed, we see both ideas at play within Frankfurt's discussion about the importance, to us, of being wholehearted:[12]

> It matters greatly to us whether the desires by which we are moved to act as we do motivate us because we want them to be effective in moving us or whether they move us regardless of ourselves or even despite ourselves. In the latter cases we are moved to act as we do without wanting wholeheartedly to be motivated as we are. Our hearts are at best divided, and they may even not be in what we are doing at all.[13]

Importantly, though, there seem to be two quite different ideas suggested by this passage. The first is that an agent is not wholehearted in his action when he's acting on the basis of a desire that he reflectively rejects. This is the sense in which the agent is not *wholly behind* the motive on which he acts. But there is another sense, suggested by the very final sentence of this passage. The agent's heart is divided; he's not really into it, when he's doing it. This is the sense in which the agent is not *wholly into* the action he is performing. This seems to be a matter of the character of the agent's activity produced by that motive – a matter of whether the agent is immersed in the activity.

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[12] On Frankfurt's view, wholeheartedness is purely a volitional matter. An agent is wholehearted when she has organized her volitional complex into a coherent whole. This doesn't preclude conflicts between an agent's first-order desires; it simply means that the agent has *decisively* identified with one of the conflicting desires. Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," 165. See also helpful discussion of Frankfurt's views at Velleman, "Identification and Identity," 341–42.
[13] Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness," 163.

It is no surprise that these two dimensions of wholeheartedness are blurred together, given the traditional focus on cases of compulsion.[14] The unwilling addict not only disavows acting on the basis of his desire to use the drug; he *feels* the conflict, as the desire overpowers him, and this changes the character of his experience when he uses the drug. Moreover, we are invited to think that the way that he feels the conflict involves a kind of *awareness* of his desire to use the drug, at the time of action: he's thinking that he wants to use the drug, very strongly, but that he disavows doing so, right until he succumbs. The occurrence of any of these thoughts – as hallmarks of the way that he *feels* the conflict, as he's succumbing to the use of the drug – would be sufficient to break his immersion in the activity. He's using the drug, sure enough, but he's not immersed when he does so.

The unwilling addict is torn *because* of the disavowal, *because* it feels to him as if the desire is striking him from the outside.[15] He is not wholly into the action *because* he is not wholly behind the motives that produce the action. But my case of Scrooge shows that these two dimensions can pull apart. With Scrooge, we have an agent who reflectively rejects acting on the basis of a particular motive, but whose reflective rejection *does not* change the nature of his immersion in the activity produced by that motive. And this is why Scrooge counts as structuring his own life, on the Rational Immersion View, but the traditional unwilling addict does not.

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[14] Here my worry is similar to one in Arpaly's work: the traditional philosophical examples within moral psychology can have a distorting effect. See discussion at Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, chap. 1. See esp. Ibid., 7.

[15] For discussion of the *feeling* of externality, see Timothy Schroeder and Nomy Arpaly, "Alienation and Externality," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (1999): 371–387.

However, the challenge at the beginning of this chapter moves beyond the original portrayal of the unwilling addict. We need to consider an addict who is *rationally immersed* in the pursuit of his commitment to use the drug. Perhaps, when he thinks about his life, he feels repulsed by his drug use; he reflectively rejects acting on the basis of his desire to use the drug, and this rejection-constituting state manifests during his more reflective moments. But, when he wakes up the next day, he's like Scrooge: when he seeks, prepares, and uses the drug, he's totally immersed, in a way that involves the extensive deployment of his rational capacities. Like Scrooge, let us suppose, his rejection-constituting attitude makes no difference to the character of his immersive activity in the pursuit of his commitment to use the drug. And let us also suppose that this commitment is manifesting frequently over time and across circumstances, and that its manifestation consists in such immersion. The pursuit of this commitment, in other words, is giving a shape to his own life. But is it plausible that *he* is giving a shape to his own life?

The answer, at first, seems to be 'no' – this is just an especially menacing, pervasive addiction, made all the worse by the fact that it's crystallized into a commitment that manifests in the addict's immersion in his drug use. And this might seem to be a problem for the Rational Immersion View. However, we need to remind ourselves of what needs to be true of the rationally immersed unwilling addict for him to count as structuring his own life, according to the Rational Immersion View. It's not enough for the unwilling addict to be immersed; he needs to be *rationally immersed*. We

must keep in mind that this addict would need to be immersed in a way that involves the extensive deployment of his rational capacities for deliberation and planning.

The rationally immersed unwilling addict, thus, differs twice over from the traditional portrayal of the unwilling addict. To start, as I said earlier, he's immersed; he's not feeling the conflict when he's pursuing his commitment, in the way suggested by the traditional portrayal. But even if we stipulate that he's immersed, we need to be careful not to fall into thinking that the addict is simply moved *blindly* from one hit of the drug to the next. Instead, to frame our picture of the rationally immersed unwilling addict, we need to attribute to him a fairly sophisticated form of activity in the pursuit of his drug. He needs to be deliberating, for instance, about the best way to get his next hit of the drug. (And this, again, needs to involve moments of deliberative pause, of the sort characterized in the previous chapter. It's not enough that he's struck with what seems like a good idea for his next hit and he moves straightaway to do it; he's not simply pulled by one desire, to the next, and so on, in the pursuit of his commitment. The contents of his deliberation are shaped by the norms he has internalized, related to the pursuit of his drug of choice, in the way described in the preceding chapter.) To match Scrooge and the woodworker, he needs to be engaged in sophisticated forms of judgment – perhaps about the relative merits and qualities of different types of his drug of choice. He needs to plan out his activities in such a way as best to pursue his commitment over time; his activities will involve a lot of coordination over time, in a way that (once again) contrasts from the impulsive behavior suggested by the traditional description of the unwilling addict. The addict's activity is not the blind, impulsive pursuit of a particular

drug; it would need to be sophisticated rational activity serving the procurement, preparation, and use of the drug.

With this in mind, I contend that it is no longer extremely counterintuitive to claim that the rationally immersed unwilling addict is structuring his own life in the pursuit of his commitment to the use of the drug. The addict's commitment is still making a profound contribution to the way he engages with the world, over time; it grounds his being wholly into actions performed in the pursuit of that commitment, in a way that involves the extensive deployment of his rational capacities for deliberation and planning. This connects with an interesting sense in which this commitment counts as the addict's *own*, despite his disavowal, and so doesn't amount to something akin to an external force. I examine this point in the next section.

III. Structuring One's Own Life: Autonomously?

Nonetheless, we might think, there is something deeply defective about the agency of Scrooge and the rationally immersed unwilling addict. It would be incredibly bizarre, at the very least, to say that these agents are paradigms of autonomous rational agency. I grant this point. I agree that there is an important respect in which Scrooge and the addict are not acting autonomously; Scrooge and the addict are thereby not structuring their lives *autonomously*. Yet, I am committed to the claim that Scrooge and the addict are structuring their own lives, albeit non-autonomously. Is this a plausible distinction to make? After all, the whole point of distinguishing between an agent's structuring her own life and having a structure imposed from the outside was to account

for the central respect in which it is the *agent herself* who is shaping her own life – and this might seem like *exactly* the type of attributability that is central to our understanding of autonomy and autonomous action.

However, I think that this distinction is not as suspect as it might initially seem. To start, let us train our focus on another pair of examples. Consider two agents, both of whom are subject to military conscription. Suppose that Tom and Sam are from a strong military state that has mandatory military conscription for all male citizens of a certain age. If a recruit resists, the military will *force* him to go through training, into combat, and so on – he will be physically moved from camp to camp, threatened with increasing physical punishments, and so on, until he complies. He will be forced to perform one military duty after the other if he refuses to do so of his own volition. Tom and Sam are both conscripted by the regime, and they both do their time within the military. Tom, however, completely refuses to engage in the military life. Of course, the military has its way of forcing Tom to complete one duty, then the next, and the next, and so on, despite his resistance. Tom is forced into performing a whole host of actions, related to his military service, but he never immerses himself in it; he's always trying to fight back, however he can. He plainly does not have a commitment to military service.

Sam, by contrast, happily goes along with it. In an important sense, Sam internalizes the military life. But he's not especially reflective about this; he doesn't decide to go in for the military life after carefully weighing the pros and cons. Instead, Sam simply falls into this way of life, as a result of the prevailing social and ideological forces within his society. *This is just what men around here do*, he thinks to himself. Sam

thereby forms a commitment to military service, and this commitment frequently manifests in immersive activity that involves the sophisticated deployment of his rational capacities for deliberation and planning.

In this pair of cases, there is a structure or shape to the lives of both agents: a shape unified by military service. However, in Tom's case, there is an important respect in which the shape is coming from the outside: he's being forced from one place to the next, from one duty to the next. Sam, by contrast, has formed and pursued a commitment to military service, and this commitment is giving his life a certain shape. In an important respect, Sam (but not Tom) is giving a shape to his own life; this fact is reflected in the way that Sam has internalized the social and ideological pressures to go in for the military life. However, it would be strained to think of Sam as structuring his life *autonomously*. There is an important respect in which Sam's actions are heteronomous; they are the result of social and ideological forces in response to which he unreflectively fell into the military life.[16] There is thus an interesting sense in which Sam is structuring his own life, but not doing so autonomously – and this is the sort of distinction that I am after within this section.

This means that, as we think about Scrooge and the rationally immersed unwilling addict, we need to be careful to keep apart two separate issues. The first is whether an

[16] For discussion of the relationship between such social and historical factors and autonomy, see John Christman, "Autonomy and Personal History," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (1991): 1–24; Diana T. Meyers, "Personal Autonomy and the Paradox of Feminine Socialization," *Journal of Philosophy* 84, no. 11 (1987): 619–628. Here, it is also worth stressing that not all views of autonomy and autonomous action emphasize the importance of the agent's reflective endorsement or rejection of the particular motives that move her to act; we could focus instead on other factors that determine the agent's actions. For instance, see Sarah Buss, "Autonomous Action: Self-Determination in the Passive Mode," *Ethics* 122, no. 4 (2012): 647–691.

agent counts as structuring her own life, as opposed to having a structure imposed from the outside. And to address this issue, we want a view that illuminates the respect in which the agent is making a distinctive contribution to the shape of her life over time. The Rational Immersion View is an attempt to provide this form of illumination. By contrast, the second issue is whether an agent counts as structuring her life in a way that is *autonomous*. It's not just that she's the one giving a certain shape or texture to her life; she's in that role, and she's acting autonomously in that role. These issues are easy to clump together when we think about whether the agent is the *author* of her life. When we inquire into this issue, we might have in mind the first, less demanding question: the question of whether she's the one who is structuring her life. But we might also have in mind the second, more demanding question: whether she's structuring her life *autonomously.*[17] With this contrast in mind, it is even less counterintuitive to claim that Scrooge and the rationally immersed unwilling addict are structuring their own lives. It would be fairly counterintuitive to say that they are doing so autonomously; it is much less counterintuitive to say that they are doing so *at all.*

In making this distinction, I'm following recent work by Smith and Sayre-McCord about which mental states count as the agent's *own*, in an interestingly rich sense. Here, I will focus on their discussion of the agent's desires.[18] When we think about this issue, they say, we need to be careful to keep apart two separate types of questions.

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[17] Similar remarks apply to whether the agent is structuring her life *freely*. It's one thing to say that she's structuring her life; it's another to say that she's structuring her life freely.

[18] They also provide a view as to which beliefs count as the agent's own. These are the beliefs that are robust, in the sense that they would be stable upon exposure to additional experience, information, and reflection. Such beliefs constitute the agent's distinctive world-view. Smith and Sayre-McCord, "Desires…and Beliefs…of One's Own," sec. 1.

There are *descriptive questions* – about which desires count as an agent's own – and *normative questions* – about which desires an agent needs to have in order to be free and autonomous.[19] When we say that a particular desire or commitment is an agent's own, we don't merely mean to say that it figures into her psychology, as one of her mental states. Instead, these are the desires that make up a central part of the agent's personality; these are the ones with which she can be correctly identified.[20] But, as Smith and Sayre-McCord stress, the central aspects of an agent's personality are ones that she might strongly disown – a fact that took center stage within my discussion of Scrooge.[21]

I have also been targeting a phenomenon that would answer descriptive questions about which desires count as an agent's own, in the sense of contributing to the agent's distinctive personality. The central aspects of an agent's personality, as Smith and Sayre-McCord rightly note, are those aspects "that shape what and why we do what we do."[22] When I've focused on questions about how the agent is structuring her life over time, I've had in mind exactly these issues – questions about how certain features of the agent's psychology (namely, certain of her commitments) shape her activity over time in such a way as to make it the case that *she's* shaping her life over time. My discussion of the conditions under which the agent counts as structuring her life over time is one way of isolating which aspects of the agent's psychology constitute a central aspect of her

[19] See especially Ibid., sec. 3.
[20] See especially Ibid., 141.
[21] See especially discussion at Ibid., 130. Smith and Sayre-McCord are explicit that the unwilling addict's desire to use the drug counts as her own, if it is robust; see Ibid., 142.
[22] Smith and Sayre-McCord, "Desires…and Beliefs…of One's Own," 130.

personality: a central aspect that is shaping significantly how she is engaging with her environment.

This means that, following Smith and Sayre-McCord, I think it is perfectly sensible to inquire into whether an agent is structuring her own life, independently of whether she's doing so autonomously. Our initial target question – about when the agent counts as structuring her own life, as opposed to having a structure imposed from the outside – is a way of elucidating the nature of the agent's *distinctive way of engaging* with her environment. An agent's distinctive way of engaging with her environment consists in how she structures her own life over time. And, on the Rational Immersion View, we understand how she is structuring her own life in terms of how she is deploying her rational capacities: specifically, how she is deploying her rational capacities while immersed in the pursuit of her commitments.

We can thus characterize another sense in which a desire counts as "internal" to the agent, or as the agent's own, without any reference to her autonomy. A desire counts as an agent's own, in this sense, if it is contributing to the agent's distinctive personality, or way of engaging with the world. And I think that it is extremely profitable to think of this issue in terms of how the agent is structuring her own life over time. Doing so allows us to see a misstep in Smith and Sayre-McCord's proposal. They propose that a desire is an agent's own, in this sense, if it is *robust*: if it would be stable in strength upon increasing exposure to experience, information, and reflection.[23] However, their proposal

[23] Ibid., 141. The central notion of robustness, within this formulation, is characterized in terms of stability of the *strength* of a particular desire upon additional exposure to experience, information, reflection, and "other pressures"; the limiting case of a desire losing strength upon such exposure is a desire's "disappearing altogether." Ibid., 139.

does not address the *extent* to which the desire manifests throughout the agent's life, and I think that this omission makes it a poor proposal for characterizing the central aspects of an agent's personality.

Consider an agent with a remarkably robust desire that barely ever manifests. Suppose that Tim has an extremely robust desire to acquire a rookie Jaromir Jagr hockey playing card. This desire would survive upon extremely extensive exposure to new information, experience, and reflection. But suppose that Tim *hardly ever* acts on the basis of this desire, throughout his life. It's true that, if someone put a rookie Jaromir Jagr playing card in front of him, he'd grab it up without a second's thought. But he never goes out of his way to look for one. This desire hardly ever influences his behavior or thought. To use the terminology from chapter 2, this is a desire that has a deep but especially narrow psychological role: it's extremely resilient to change, but it hardly ever manifests.

Perhaps there is some sense in which Tim's remarkably robust desire contributes to his personality, but it would seem like a complete mistake to think that it's making a central or significant contribution to his personality; it's just not having much of an impact in terms of shaping his activity over time. And, surely, the extent to which this desire is contributing to Tim's personality is not measured by the extent to which it is robust.[24] This suggests that the dimension of *robustness*, to which Smith and Sayre-McCord appeal, isn't the one that is important to characterizing the respect in which a

[24] Compare, by contrast: "The crucial point is that robust desires that people have, *precisely because they are robust*, help to give them the personalities that they have, personalities that attract us to them or repel us." Smith and Sayre-McCord, "Desires…and Beliefs…of One's Own," 141. (Emphasis added.)

desire constitutes a central aspect of an agent's personality. We do much better to appeal to the desire's *width*, (perhaps) in conjunction with its depth. A desire makes a central contribution to the agent's distinctive personality *only if* it plays a wide psychological role. The interesting questions about which desires contribute to an agent's distinctive way of engaging with her environment are not ones about which desires would still be around in nearby counterfactual circumstances; they are questions about which desires are *actually having an impact* in shaping how she's living her life over time. And these are the questions that fall under the heading of how the agent is structuring her own life over time.

The Rational Immersion View – and the focus of the dissertation so far – can be located as addressing descriptive questions about which desires count as an agent's own, in a sense that does not address whether she would be autonomous in acting on the basis of those desires. And this stands in contrast with the sense in which a desire is an agent's own, or "internal" to her, that is relevant to whether she is acting autonomously (or structuring her own life autonomously). These are issues that are given the right initial gloss by Smith and Sayre-McCord: issues about which desires are making a contribution to the agent's personality, or her distinctive way of engaging with the world. It is fruitful to think about the agent's distinctive way of engaging with the world in terms of how she's structuring her life over time. Doing so makes clear that we need to look to the *extent* to which the desire is shaping the agent's behavior in order to account accurately for the extent to which it is contributing to the agent's personality over time.

So far, however, I have discussed only a desire's wide psychological role; I've said that a desire makes a central contribution to an agent's distinctive personality only if it has a wide psychological role. Of course, the Rational Immersion View doesn't merely appeal to desires that manifest across a wide range of circumstances. It appeals to desires that manifest across a wide range of circumstances in a particular sort of way: by manifesting in immersive activity that involves the extensive deployment of the agent's rational capacities for deliberation and planning. The selection of these manifestation conditions, however, is also intuitively connected to which desires make a central contribution to the agent's distinctive personality. Her distinctive personality is constituted, in part, by her distinctive way of engaging with the world. And, on the rationalist tradition on which we identify the agent (or her functional role) with the exercise of her rational capacities, her distinctive way of engaging with the world consists in her distinctive way of deploying her rational capacities for deliberation and planning. Put together, we get the following rationalist view about which desires count as an agent's own, in terms of making a central contribution to her personality: a desire is an agent's own if and only if it manifests across a wide range of circumstances in a way that involves the sufficiently extensive deployment of the agent's rational capacities for deliberation and planning. In this respect, the Rational Immersion View builds on a rationalist proposal that is an improvement over the original Smith and Sayre-McCord proposal: the rationalist proposal has a promising story about the sense in which the agent is involved in the actions generated by the desires that make a central contribution to her personality.

Just as the Rational Immersion View provides a sufficient condition for structuring one's own life over time, it can be extended neatly into a proposal about the sufficient conditions under which a desire is "internal" to the agent – into a proposal about which desires count as an agent's own, in the sense of making a contribution to her distinctive personality. A desire counts as an agent's own if the agent is structuring her life through the pursuit of that desire, and the Rational Immersion View provides a sufficient condition for the agent to count as structuring her own life. Put together, the desire will count as an agent's own, in this sense, if (i) it is a commitment that is manifesting in an extremely wide range of circumstances in which the agent finds herself and (ii) the manifestation of that commitment consists in immersive activity that involves the extensive deployment of her rational capacities for deliberation and planning. As before, however, it is worth stressing that this is only a sufficient condition; the Rational Immersion View, again, is not committed to the result that the *only way* of sufficiently deploying one's rational capacities is through immersive activity.

IV. A Summary of the Contributions So Far

Throughout the preceding three chapters, I've motivated, developed, and defended a particular view on when an agent counts as structuring her own life This is the Rational Immersion View. The motivation for the view came in chapter 2, as the view rightly characterizes the conditions under which a wanton would count as structuring his own life. The development of the view came in chapter 3, as we characterized in more detail the nature of the immersive activity that is the manifestation of the commitment;

and we saw that the view does not presuppose that the agent reflectively endorses acting upon any of the motives upon which she acts, even if she decides to perform an action that she antecedently desires to perform. And, finally, in this chapter I've defended the view against a pressing objection: I've defended the view against the objection that it has the implausible result that an agent could structure her own life around the pursuit of a commitment that she reflectively rejects acting upon. I've argued that, once we home in on what needs to be the case for the commitment to satisfy the condition specified by the Rational Immersion View, it is no longer implausible to claim that the agent is structuring her life around the pursuit of such a commitment – a fact that is easier to appreciate when we distinguish between (i) an agent's structuring her own life and (ii) her structuring her own life autonomously.

Thus concludes my discussion of the conditions under which an agent counts as structuring her own life. In the remaining chapter, I will shift my focus. It is an obvious fact of life that we do engage in Frankfurtian reflection on the commitments through which we structure our lives; this was presupposed, for instance, within my discussion of Scrooge and the addict within this chapter. In the following chapter, I will argue that this type of reflection takes a certain shape – a shape that it takes in virtue of the nature of the type of commitment upon which the agent is reflecting. On the view that will emerge throughout the next chapter, reflection on such a commitment takes the shape of *story-telling*.

Chapter 5: Structuring Lives and Stories

The Rational Immersion View not only provides a sufficient condition for an agent to count as structuring her own life; it also specifies a kind of mental state, in terms of its functional role. As we've seen throughout our discussion, it specifies a functional role characteristic of one kind of *life-structuring commitment*.[1] Once more, here is the full characterization of the Rational Immersion View:

> **Rational Immersion View (Full):** Necessarily, an agent structures her life if she has a commitment *C* that meets the following conditions:
>
> (i) *C* manifests across an extremely wide range of circumstances in which she finds herself;

[1] The state described here resembles and was inspired by Svavarsdóttir's characterization of the attitude of valuing, as an attitude that grounds motivational, emotional, deliberative, and other cognitive dispositions that are stable across time and circumstances. Svavarsdóttir, "Having Value and Being Worth Valuing," sec. III. It is worth stressing that the dispositions I have discussed are much more limited than the ones included within Svavarsdóttir's characterization of valuing; I have focused primarily on the dispositions that are connected with the exercise of the agent's rational capacities while immersed in the pursuit of a particular project. (I have also refrained from saying that Scrooge and the addict *value* their respective pursuits, since it sounds extremely odd – at the very least – to say that they value pursuing a commitment that they reflectively reject acting upon.) Such commitments also resemble what Noggle describes as "core values," as "centers around which webs of other motivation are woven." Robert Noggle, "Integrity, the Self, and Desire-Based Accounts of the Good," *Philosophical Studies* 96, no. 3 (1999): 319–20. In the same spirit as Smith and Sayre-McCord, I also agree with Noggle's claim that when an agent's core values and her reflective endorsement conflict (e.g., when she rejects acting on the basis of one of her values), it's the core values that are "constitutive of who the person is." Ibid., 320. An agent's life-structuring commitments also include what Williams labels her "ground projects"; see discussion at Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality," in *Moral Luck* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 12–13.

(ii) *C's* manifestation across those circumstances consists in immersion in activity that involves the extensive deployment of her rational capacities for deliberation and planning; and

(iii) *C* has shaped which norms she has internalized, in such a way as to shape how she engages in deliberation when *C* manifests across those circumstances

C is a life-structuring commitment if it satisfies (i)-(iii). And these conditions just provide a specification of the state's functional role. An agent's conative state *D* is a *life-structuring* commitment if (i) *D* is a commitment that manifests extensively over time, (ii) *D's* manifestation consists in immersive activity that involves the extensive deployment of the agent's rational capacities for deliberation and planning, and (iii) *D* has shaped which norms the agent has internalized, in such a way as to shape how she engages in deliberation when *D* manifests.[2] Just as the Rational Immersion View provides only a sufficient condition for an agent to count as structuring her own life, so too does it provide only a sufficient condition for a conative state to be a life-structuring commitment. In this chapter, I will be focused only on this type of life-structuring commitment, and I intend for my claims about life-structuring commitments to apply only to commitments of this type. I suspect that the central claims within this chapter also will apply to other types of life-structuring commitment, but I set this issue to the side in what follows. Notice, as well, that I have provided only suggestive remarks about the contents of these commitments: they are commitments *to do* certain things or *to be*

[2] As discussed in the preceding chapter, such life-structuring commitments are *internal* to the agent, or the agent's own, in the sense that they contribute to the agent's distinctive personality, or way of engaging with the world – they are desires of the agent's own, in the sense that interests Smith and Sayre-McCord, at Smith and Sayre-McCord, "Desires…and Beliefs…of One's Own.".

certain ways. I will have more to say on the content of these commitments later in this chapter.

In the preceding three chapters, I examined possible forms of independence between the exercise of our capacity to structure our own lives and the exercise of our Frankfurtian reflective capacities. Of course, I did not mean to deny the extremely plausible claim that ordinary human agents frequently do reflect on how they are structuring their lives. More than this, I did not mean to deny that oftentimes, this reflection takes precisely the form described within the Frankfurtian tradition. An agent is structuring her life around the pursuit of a particular commitment; she steps back from that commitment; she thinks about whether to structure her life around it; and she endorses or rejects doing so. In this chapter, I will shift my focus to the nature of such reflection, when directed toward our life-structuring commitments.

> Consider, for instance, how this process might go for Scrooge or the woodworker: Scrooge is structuring his life around the pursuit of a commitment to the acquisition of wealth, at all costs. One night, however, he pauses to reflect on this very commitment, as a thing that is shaping how he's spending all his time and effort. He thinks about all his long hours at the office, about the many times his actions have affected others, and about his many successful investments. But he's left cold by all of this; he disavows acting on his commitment, and he views it as callous. "No more," he thinks![3]

[3] Noticeably, I've described the moment of reflection (in this case) as involving nothing quite as elaborate as a visit from a ghost, as in the traditional story.

> The woodworker is structuring his life around the pursuit of a commitment to woodworking. He's frequently immersed in his craft, but one night, he goes home and starts to think about how he's spending his days. He, at least for the moment, steps back from his commitment to woodworking, and he thinks about the way that the pursuit of this commitment is shaping his actions over time: the way he's going to the shop, day in and day out, and creating craft after craft, much to the acclaim of his customers. He feels pride toward how he is living; he avows acting on the basis of his commitment to woodworking.[4]

Notice that, in each case, we see a certain kind of process: the agent acquires *full awareness* of a commitment, as a potential ground for action, and the agent takes a side with respect to acting on it, by endorsing or rejecting acting upon it. Such a process is familiar from the literature on Frankfurtian reflection, especially within the Kantian tradition.[5] More than this, Frankfurtian reflection on a motive is often framed as involving a peculiar sort of awareness of a motive – it's an awareness that involves *stepping back* from the motive.[6] Consider, for instance, the following description of the phenomenon from Velleman:

> When an agent reflects on the motives vying to govern his behavior, he occupies a position of critical detachment from those motives; and when he takes sides with

[4] As Kauppinen notes, there is a sense of pride – he labels it "agential pride" – that is tied to seeing oneself as a protagonist of a story. In light of the discussion that follows, it seems right to think of this instance of pride as an instance of agential pride; the woodworker's reflection involves seeing himself as the protagonist of a particular story. See discussion at Kauppinen, "Meaningfulness and Time," 357–58.

[5] See especially Velleman, "What Happens When Someone Acts?," 477; Korsgaard, "The Activity of Reason," 31–32.

[6] See, most vividly, discussion at Velleman, "What Happens When Someone Acts?," sec. XII; Korsgaard, "The Activity of Reason," sec. 4.

> some of those motives, he bolsters them with a force additional to, and hence other than, their own.[7]

When we reflect on our motives, we acquire a kind of critical distance from the motive; we step back from it. When applied to our life-structuring commitments, the core idea is that reflection on a life-structuring commitment involves *stepping back* from the commitment. We saw this in the reflective moments of the woodworker and Scrooge; both agents *stepped outside* the perspective generated by the pursuit of their respective commitments. This is the respect in which they acquired critical distance while reflecting. And the Rational Immersion View, developed within the previous three chapters, provides an illumination of the perspective that each agent is stepping back from: it's his perspective while immersed in the pursuit of his commitment.

Yet, it is not immediately obvious what this *stepping back* consists in. In this chapter, I will examine the process of acquiring full awareness of a life-structuring commitment, as a potential ground for action. The end goal will be to provide an illumination of the procedure of stepping back – of acquiring critical distance from the perspective generated by the commitment. We first need to notice something peculiar about the shape of Frankfurtian reflection on a life-structuring commitment. As I will argue throughout sections I through III, full awareness of such a commitment involves telling a story of one's life structured by the pursuit of that commitment. Recognizing that full awareness of a life-structuring commitment involves story-telling will enable us to use tools from the literature on narration to spell out the relevant process of stepping

[7] Velleman, "What Happens When Someone Acts?," 476–77.

back from the commitment. Throughout sections IV and V, I will illuminate the process of stepping back by appealing to the process of creating *ironic distance*. As Peter Goldie describes it, ironic distance is a gap between the perspective of a character internal to a narrative and the perspective of the author, narrator, or audience.[8] As will concern us here, the relevant type of ironic distance is in terms of distance between the perspective of the reflecting self and the perspective of the immersed self. The agent while reflecting has stepped back from her commitment when there is ironic distance between her perspective while reflecting and her perspective while immersed in the pursuit of her commitment.

I. Full Awareness of a Motive

The notion that will be the central focus of this chapter is *full awareness of a motive,* as a potential ground for action. This is a notion that we can extract out of the discussion from the Kantian successors to Frankfurt. Consider, for instance, Korsgaard's way of describing this sort of process:

> We are self-conscious in a particular way: we are conscious of the grounds on which we act, and therefore are in control of them. When you are aware that you are tempted, say, to do a certain action because you are experiencing a certain desire, you can step back from that connection and reflect on it.[9]

[8] Goldie, *The Mess Inside*, 34.
[9] Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 19.

Here, Korsgaard nicely describes our self-consciousness of our own motives, as potential grounds for actions – motives that we can endorse or reject acting upon. When I talk of *awareness* of a motive, I have in mind this particular kind of self-consciousness. However, it's not immediately obvious what is involved in the possession of such awareness. To see some of the complexities involved, consider the following example.

Suppose that both Fred and Ted have a desire to eat some chocolate ice cream. Now, let us also suppose, they are both engaged in some Frankfurtian reflection on their desire to eat some chocolate ice cream. They pause and consider whether to endorse or reject acting on this desire. They both correctly self-ascribe a desire to eat chocolate ice cream to themselves. But the crucial contrast between Fred and Ted is that Fred, unlike Ted, has a pretty good idea of what is involved in eating some chocolate ice cream. He's got a good idea of what the world would be like if his desire were satisfied, where this includes an accurate understanding of what it would be like to eat some chocolate ice cream. He's got accurate beliefs about the other features of chocolate ice cream. (He knows, for instance, the nutritional information, and he's aware of how eating the ice cream would conflict with his dietary or health goals.) Ted, by contrast, doesn't have a very good understanding of the object of his desire. He is deeply confused about what the world would be like if he ate some chocolate ice cream. (Perhaps he has confused views about what it would be like to eat some chocolate ice cream; perhaps he has some confused views about its nutritional value.)

Both Fred and Ted (i) desire to eat some chocolate ice cream and (ii) in reflection, correctly ascribe to themselves this particular desire. Are they both equally aware of their

desire, as a potential ground for action? It seems that, in an important sense, they are not. Fred, unlike Ted, has an accurate understanding of the object of his desire: he has an accurate understanding of what the world would be like if his desire were satisfied. Ted, by contrast, has only a muddled or confused understanding of the object of his desire. It seems that, as a result of this, Fred has a *more accurate* or *fuller* awareness of his desire, as a potential ground for action, that is reflected in his accurate understanding of the object of his desire. However, I don't wish to get into terminological disputes about how to use the labels 'awareness' and 'full awareness.' In what follows, I will simply stipulate that *full awareness* of a motive, as a potential ground for action, involves an accurate understanding of the object of that motive: an accurate understanding of what the world would be like if the motive were satisfied.

That said, this is not an objectionable bit of stipulation. When an agent, like Ted, self-ascribes to himself a particular motive without an accurate understanding of its object, this marks an important defect in his reflection: there is an important respect in which his reflection is proceeding with faulty inputs, in terms of his understanding of the motive that he is (accurately) ascribing to himself.[10] Throughout this chapter, I will be focused only on *accurate* reflection: this is reflection in which the agent acquires full awareness of a motive, where this awareness necessarily involves an accurate

[10] This point is similar in spirit to Sobel's remarks that an agent who has a desire for X, but who has only a muddled understanding of X, does not have a desire that is *really for* X: such a desire is "not responsive to the true nature of its object, and in that sense, is not really for it." David Sobel, "Subjectivism and Idealization," *Ethics* 119, no. 2 (2009): 347.

understanding of the object of her motive.[11] Accurate reflection is reflection without the defect that plagues Ted's reflection on his desire to eat some chocolate ice cream.[12]

Moreover, I will not be focused on every single aspect of an agent's accurate understanding of the object of her commitment. I will be focused instead on the dimension along which Fred and Ted differ: the respect in which only Fred has an *accurate understanding* of what the world would be like if his desire were satisfied. One of the core respects in which Fred's reflection involved an accurate understanding was that he had an accurate *representation* of what the world would be like if his desire were satisfied: he had an accurate representation of his eating some chocolate ice cream, where this involved, *inter alia,* accurate beliefs about what would be involved in eating some chocolate ice cream. Spelling out, in detail, the precise contents of this representation, as well as Fred's mental relationship to those contents, is no straightforward task, and I will not attempt to provide a full account of this phenomenon within this chapter. Instead, I will spell out *some* aspects of this type of representation throughout the ensuing discussion – aspects that figure into an accurate understanding of the object of a life-structuring commitment.

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[11] The process of acquiring full awareness of a motive, in this sense, resembles the process of *getting clear* on a particular object (namely, the object of the motive); this process figures into Svavarsdóttir's characterization of the canonical method of value inquiry, at Sigrún Svavarsdóttir, "Detecting Value with Motivational Responses," in *Motivational Internalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 215.

[12] Obviously, an agent could count as reflecting on a desire even if she isn't accurately reflecting on that desire. Consider, for instance, Railton's classic example of Beth, who desires to be a writer but doesn't have an accurate view of how miserable she would be as a writer. Peter Railton, "Facts and Values," in *Facts, Values, and Norms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 50–51. Presumably, Beth could reflect on her desire to become a writer – and even endorse acting upon it (foolishly, we might think) – even though she's not doing so accurately.

Now, we must turn to the objects of such commitments. So far, as I indicated in this chapter's introduction, I have made only suggestive remarks about the contents of our life-structuring commitments: remarks to the effect that the woodworker's commitment is a commitment *to producing great woodworks* and that Scrooge's commitment is a commitment *to the acquisition of wealth*. Let me now say more about how I am understanding the objects of these commitments.

II. Life-Structuring Commitments: De Se *and Self-Reflexive*

As I've characterized the objects of the woodworker's and Scrooge's life-structuring commitments, I have done so using the infinitive construction: they are commitments *to do* certain things or *to be* a certain way. This means that I am understanding these commitments as *de se* propositional attitudes. These attitudes are familiar from the literature on propositional attitudes. Consider, to use John Perry's famous example, the *messy shopper.*[13] Suppose I am walking around the supermarket. I notice a trail of flour, and I figure that someone must have flour spilling from their cart. I say to myself, "Geez, *that unfortunate guy* is making a mess." Unbeknownst to me at the time, *I* happen to be the person whose cart is leaving behind all that flour. With time, I come to this realization; I realize *I'm* the unfortunate guy making a mess! I say to myself, "*I'm* making a mess!" I immediately begin trying to patch up the bag of flour to stop the leak.

[13] John Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical," *Noûs* 13, no. December (1979): 3.

My realization that *I'm* making a mess is tied very closely to this action. This realization marks some sort of change in mental state. But it's not obvious how to spell this out in detail. After all, it's true the entire time that I believe of Brian that he's making a mess.[14] At the beginning, I had a *de dicto* belief: a belief that *that unfortunate* guy is making a mess. However, only after my realization – the realization that I'm making a mess – did I come to have a *de se* belief: the belief that *I'm* the one making the mess. The defining characteristic of a *de se* belief is that it involves a *first-person* mode of presentation of the agent who has the belief.[15] An agent who has the *de se* belief characteristically expresses that belief by way of using an indexical like 'I.' In my version of Perry's famous shopper example, for instance, I express my *de se* belief (after my realization) by saying, "*I'm* making a mess." The *de se* character of this belief could not be conveyed by using anything other than the indexical 'I.' If I said "That unfortunate guy is a making a mess," I wouldn't be expressing a *de se* belief. And this is true *even if* I happen to be that unfortunate guy. My belief report would not have conveyed the distinctively first-personal mode of presentation of my belief.

[14] This belief – the belief of Brian that he's making a mess – is a *de re* belief. There are complications here in thinking about thinking about the relationship between all three types of belief: *de re*, *de dicto*, and *de se*. We might, following some of Perry's discussion, think that *de re* belief is *de dicto* belief + some special way of referring to the subject (in this case, Brian) of the proposition believed. Ibid., 10–11. Or we might, following Lewis, think that *de re* belief isn't really a type of belief, but instead "states of affairs that obtain in virtue of the relations of the subject's beliefs to the res in question." See David Lewis, "Attitudes de Dicto and de Se," *Philosophical Review* 88, no. 4 (1979): 538. These complications are messy, and I can't do full justice to them here.

[15] Such beliefs are an instance of what Perry calls 'locating beliefs': "beliefs about where one is, when it is, and who one is." Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical," 5. Locating beliefs also include beliefs that the subject would express by saying 'here' and 'now.' Here I will focus on beliefs whose expression requires the use of 'I.'

It's controversial how best to accommodate *de se* attitudes within one's account of propositional attitudes and their content. Perhaps, following Lewis, we should think that the objects of these attitudes are really properties, which can be represented as centered worlds.[16] Or perhaps, following Perry, we should distinguish between beliefs and belief states, where belief states are individuated by using sentences with indexicals.[17] It's also controversial how to accommodate *de se* attitudes within one's theory of communication, as well as one's semantics for propositional attitude ascriptions.[18] These are all issues that I am not in a position to settle, and they will not concern me here. But I want to mark the contrast between belief *de dicto* and belief *de se*, first, by way of example. And second, I want to explain the contrast illustrated by such examples in terms of the *way* that the proposition that is the content of the attitude is presented: a *de se* belief that P is one that presents P in a distinctively first-personal way.[19] I wish to remain neutral on any further details. This illustration of the contrast should suffice for the purposes of characterizing the object of a life-structuring commitment. In what follows, by convention, when I speak of a *de se* attitude, I will mark it as an attitude *de se*. So, for instance, if I say that the woodworker has a *de se* belief that he is a woodworker, what I'm reporting is that he has a certain belief that (i)

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[16] See Lewis, "Attitudes de Dicto and de Se," 314.
[17] See Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical," 18–20. .
[18] For a nice discussion on these points, see Dilip Ninan, "De Se Attitudes: Ascription and Communication," *Philosophy Compass* 5, no. 7 (2010): 551–567.
[19] Ninan stresses that it's important that our initial gloss on *de se* attitudes as well as the *de se/de dicto* contrast not be tied too closely to any one particular semantic or philosophical theory. Otherwise, we might be too quick to conclude that *de se* attitudes don't exist because the particular semantic theory, in terms of which we've characterized those attitudes, is deeply flawed. See discussion at Dilip Ninan, "What Is the Problem of De Se Attitudes?," in *About Oneself: De Se Attitudes and Communication*, ed. Manuel Garcia-Carpintero and Stephan Torre (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), sec. 1.2. My gloss is similar to Ninan's theory-neutral characterization of *de se* attitudes within that section.

has a distinctively first-personal mode of presentation and (ii) he would express by saying, "I am a woodworker."

So far, I've discussed the contrast between belief *de dicto* and belief *de se*. But the *de dicto/de se* contrast applies to other mental attitudes, as well. Consider desire. We can distinguish between *de dicto* desire and *de se* desire. Suppose that I want to eat some ice cream. The infinitive construction ('to eat some ice cream') suggests that this is a desire *de se*: what I want is that *I* eat some ice cream. The canonical way for me to *report* my *de se* desire is by using the infinitive clause: "I want [to eat some ice cream]."[20] And this contrast applies not only to desires but to the whole class of conative attitudes, including life-structuring commitments. The canonical method for reporting the *de se* conative attitude remains the same as well. The woodworker has a commitment *to* producing great woodworks, and he would report having this commitment by saying, "I am committed to producing great woodworks." That suggests that the commitment is *de se*: it's a *de se* commitment that he produce great woodworks. Scrooge has a commitment *to* the acquisition of wealth, and he would report having this commitment by saying, "I am committed to the acquisition of wealth." Again, this suggests that the commitment is *de se*: it's a *de se* commitment that he acquire wealth.

So much, then, for the *de se* character of such life-structuring commitments. However, there is another important aspect of such commitments – an aspect familiar

[20] Notice that here I'm reporting rather than expressing my desire. The canonical way of expressing a belief that P is by uttering a sentence that, in that context, has P as its propositional content. The canonical way of expressing a desire that P is … something else. (Perhaps saying, "Mmmm, ice cream!") Nonetheless, it's easy to report that one has a particular desire by using the constructions "I desire/want to" and "I desire/want that."

within the literature on intentions.[21] If I intend to go to the store, what I really intend is that I go to the store (by way of this very intention); my intention wouldn't count as satisfied, or fulfilled, if someone arrived at my house, forcibly kidnapped me, and dropped me off at the store. In that case, it'd be true that I went to the store, but false that I went to the store by way of any particular intention. My intention is *self-reflexive.* This, too, is true of the woodworker's commitment to produce great woodworks. It's a commitment to produce great woodworks (by way of this very commitment). To see why, think a bit more about the satisfaction conditions for the commitment. It wouldn't be sufficient for the commitment to count as satisfied that someone forcibly grabbed the woodworker, forcibly guided his hands to cut out some pieces of wood, forcibly made him assemble the pieces together, and so on – even if the resulting product is actually quite good.[22] And this is true generally of our *de se* commitments. They count as fulfilled, or satisfied, only on the condition that we brought about the relevant state of affairs (e.g., that *I produce great woodwork*) by way of that particular commitment. Life-structuring commitments are routinely *self-reflexive*: they count as satisfied only if the agent brings about the desired state of affairs by way of that very commitment.

In the ensuing discussion, I will proceed under the assumption that *all* life-structuring commitments are *de se* and self-reflexive. This point is not obvious; it's not

[21] See, for instance, Gilbert Harman, "Desired Desires," in *Value, Welfare, and Morality*, ed. R.G. Frey and Christopher W. Morris (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 141–43. See also Bratman's discussion at Bratman, "Reflection, Planning, and Temporally Extended Agency," 38.

[22] There is a complication here: perhaps there is a sense in which this wouldn't count as the woodworker *producing* the relevant woodworks. If that's right, though, then the self-reflexive component – that the behavior needs to be caused, in the right way, by the agent's mental states – is just built into the notion of *producing* itself.

obvious, for instance, why an agent couldn't have a life-structuring commitment that is *de dicto* or that is not self-reflexive, even if such commitments are fairly uncommon or unusual. I address this point within Appendix A. There, I argue that the central point of the next section is true even for accurate Frankfurtian reflection on *de dicto* life-structuring commitments that are not self-reflexive. To streamline discussion here, however, I will remain focused only on life-structuring commitments that are *de se* and self-reflexive. The woodworker and Scrooge's respective commitments are of this sort. What, then, is required to have an accurate understanding of *that* sort of object?

III. Full Awareness of a Life-Structuring Commitment

Let's start, again, by focusing on the woodworker's reflection on his life-structuring commitment to producing great woodworks (by way of this very commitment). If he's to reflect accurately on this commitment, he needs to have full awareness of the commitment, in a way that involves an accurate representation of what the world would be like if his commitment were satisfied. So, to start off, he needs to represent *himself* as being a certain way: as having produced great woodworks. However, this alone wouldn't be enough – his representation wouldn't have taken into account the self-reflexive component of his commitment to producing great woodworks.

The woodworker, then, needs to represent his producing great woodworks in a particular sort of way: by way of the manifestation of this commitment over time. This means that, *inter alia*, he needs to represent the manifestation of this commitment over time. And the manifestation of this commitment, as described at the end of the previous

chapter, is immersive activity that involves the extensive deployment of his rational capacities. However, these are not one-off episodes of immersive activity; his commitment manifests (in this immersive activity) across a wide range of circumstances over time, and the woodworker needs to take into account this fact within his representation of what the world would be like if his commitment were satisfied. So, the woodworker needs to represent the episodes in which this commitment manifests over time. And, to do so, he needs to represent a *sequence* of events: namely, a sequence of events in which the commitment manifests in immersive activity, where this activity involves deliberation and planning.

Nonetheless, one might object, I've built too much into the woodworker's reflection. Is it really plausible that the woodworker needs to do *all* of that, in order to count as reflecting accurately on his life-structuring commitment? Here, however, it is worth reminding ourselves of the type of reflection that is the focus of our discussion. This is a type of reflection that involves full awareness of a commitment, where this full awareness involves an accurate understanding of the object of that commitment. The object of a life-structuring commitment, it turns out, is fairly complicated – especially due to the self-reflexive component of its content. To have an accurate understanding of this sort of object, one needs an accurate representation of what the world would be like if the commitment were satisfied. And this representation needs to take into account the self-reflexive element of the commitment. Again, if the woodworker simply thought of his having produced great woodworks, but didn't accurately represent *how* his commitment shaped his activity in a way that led to his having produced great

woodworks, he would have an impoverished understanding of the object of his commitment. This commitment shapes his activity by manifesting in immersive activity over time and across circumstances; I've required the woodworker to have an accurate representation of *that.* Getting an accurate representation of that, however, involves more than representing a particular state of affairs (e.g., the state of affairs in which he's produced some great woodworks); it involves representing a sequence of events in which the commitment is manifesting over time.

That said, it still would not do justice to the woodworker's reflection simply to say that he's representing a sequence of events. He's also portraying them as connected to one another. It's not just that the woodworker is representing one instance in which he did some woodworking, then another instance in which he did some more woodworking, then yet another, and so on, culminating in his having made some quality woodworks. He's portraying the earlier events as *causally connected* to the later events. Suppose the woodworker has been working on his craft since he was a child. In his reflection, he might think something like the following:

> When I was a child, I worked extremely hard at the basics of woodworking, and I'm now able to construct very fine and durable works of wood.

In this example, there are (at least) two events: (i) the event in which the woodworker trained as a child and (ii) the event in which he constructed fine and durable woodworks. More than this, implicit within the woodworker's thinking are *causal* connections between the events represented. As the woodworker is thinking about it, event (i) was a

necessary component of a jointly sufficient cause for (ii).[23] After all, (i) on its own wasn't sufficient – he needed access to the right tools, and so on, to later make great woodworks. But without (i), none of the other events would have been sufficient to bring it about that he had produced great works. For example, he might have had all the tools and tried to make some piece of woodwork (e.g., a table), but unless he had worked hard previously, he wouldn't have been able to build a very good one.

Moreover, it's no accident that the woodworker's thinking about these events portrays them as connected in these ways. An essential fact about our life-structuring commitments, in terms of the functional role specified by the Rational Immersion View, is that they persist throughout time and manifest across circumstances. They shape the agent's activity over time. As an agent thinks about the events in which her commitment manifests in rational immersion, she will be portraying those events as connected: as instances of one and the same underlying commitment that is manifesting over time. And, at least for many such commitments, it's plausible that one manifestation of that commitment (e.g., working hard toward a goal) would be a necessary component for a jointly sufficient cause of another manifestation of that commitment (e.g., the pursuit of that goal at the next level or career stage).

Now, notice that the woodworker is portraying certain types of *causal* connections between the events represented within his thinking. These are instances of the type of connection that Noël Carroll emphasizes as integral to narratives. As Carroll

[23] This makes the relevant causal connection an instance of one of Mackie's INUS conditions, discussed at J. L. Mackie, "Causes and Conditions," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1965): 245–64. See additional discussion at note 24.

correctly notes, not every representation of a sequence of events counts as a narrative. To count as a narrative, he says, the events represented need to be portrayed as bearing a sufficient number of *narrative connections* to one another. [24] On Carroll's view, there is a narrative connection between events *E1* and *E2* within a representation when the representation portrays *E1* as individually necessary for a jointly sufficient (but itself not necessary) cause of *E2*.[25] And notice that this is exactly the type of causal connection that is exemplified by my earlier partial description of the woodworker's reflection on his life-structuring commitment to woodworking.

Moreover, the events represented within the woodworker's reflection are portrayed as unified in other ways. As I said earlier, the woodworker would need to portray these events *as* manifestations of one and the same commitment over time. This means that his representation will also bear other familiar marks of narratives – marks that go beyond the portrayal of causal connections between the events represented. To spell this out, we can draw on recent work by Gregory Currie on narrativity. On Currie's view, the interesting question isn't whether a particular representation *counts* as a

[24] Moreover, as reflected in my formulation of Carroll's view, it's not enough for a representation to count as a story for there in fact to be relevant causal connections between the events represented. The representation needs to somehow portray this connection; the connection has to be within the story, even if it's not made explicit. The reverse is true, as well: a representation could count as a story if it portrays causal connections between the events represented even if there are in fact no such causal connections between the events represented.

[25] More precisely, the earlier event needs only to make a contribution to an INUS condition. Noël Carroll, "On the Narrative Connection," in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 126–27. Carroll's formulation of this point draws crucially on Mackie's characterization of an INUS condition: a necessary part of a condition that itself is sufficient but not necessary for some event to occur. See Mackie, "Causes and Conditions." Goldie, *The Mess Inside*, chap. 1 and 2., also draws on INUS conditions in his discussion of narrative. On Carroll's view, this account of the narrative connection has some benefits. In particular, he argues that it provides an illuminating account of narrative closure; see Noël Carroll, "Narrative Closure," *Philosophical Studies* 135, no. 1 (2007): sec. 4.

narrative, but whether it scores high along a particular dimension – the dimension of narrativity.[26] *Exemplary narratives*, on Currie's view, are those that provide details about "a few highly interrelated persons and their fortunes, replete with information about connections of dependency," combined with a high degree of *thematic unity*.[27] When we think of narratives, we often think of representations that score high along all of these dimensions, such as classic novels.

With this in mind, we can see that the woodworker's reflection does more than portray causal connections between the events represented. The relevant events include *actions* (namely, the woodworker's actions while immersed) and these actions make sense, in light of the woodworker's commitment. The events represented are *teleological* in a certain way: the events are all ones in which the protagonist is working toward the *achievement* of his life-structuring commitment. There is, thus, a focus on a person's motives and behaviors – a feature common to many exemplary narratives, as Currie points out.[28] Earlier, I said that the woodworker would portray the events as causally connected, in the right sort of way: as bearing narrative connections to one another, in Carroll's sense. Now notice that the *grounds* for this causal interconnectedness allow us to see that the story bears a certain kind of unity, which would make the story rank high

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[26] Gregory Currie, *Narratives and Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 35. Whether something counts as a narrative is a contextual matter – whether it surpasses a contextually salient threshold for narrativity. Ibid.
[27] Currie, *Narratives and Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories*, 35. On Currie's view, the relevant kind of dependence is *causal* dependence, but he is critical of Carroll's selection of INUS conditions as the relevant form of causal dependence. Drawing on the work of Lewis, Currie proposes that the relevant form of dependence should be understood in terms of *causal explanation*, which can be provided in a number of different ways. Ibid., 40.
[28] Currie, *Narratives and Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories*, 36.

in terms of Currie's scale of narrativity. Each manifestation shares an underlying cause (the commitment), which explains the respect in which the events are causally connected. This provides a tremendous degree of *thematic unity* between the events represented. As Currie characterizes it, the relevant notion of thematic unity is "provided by a focus on some common thread in the activity of particular persons in particular connected circumstances."[29] And this is exactly the kind of unity that is front and center within the woodworker's reflection: the events represented are particular (namely, particular manifestations of the commitment in immersive activity) and feature a particular character (namely, oneself), and the events are united by a common thread (namely, the pursuit of a particular commitment). The representation of events within the woodworker's reflection might *seem* thin, at first, but it in fact scores quite high on Currie's plausible scale of narrativity – even if it still falls short of, say, a classic novel.

In sum, I have so far argued that there is an interesting sense in which an agent is fully aware of her life-structuring commitment, as a potential ground for action, only if she has an accurate understanding of the object of that commitment. That accurate understanding involves, *inter alia*, an accurate understanding of what the world would be like if the commitment were satisfied. Because life-structuring commitments are *de se* and self-reflexive, an accurate understanding of their object involves a representation of a sequence of events in which that commitment manifests in rational immersion. Such a representation will portray the events as connected: as *manifestations* of one and the same commitment throughout time, which will make the representation score high in terms of

[29] Ibid., 39.

causal interconnectedness and thematic unity. This means that the representation will score high on Currie's scale of narrativity, and thus it is accurate to say that the representation counts as a *story* or *narrative.*[30] Thus, it is accurate to describe the agent's full awareness of her life-structuring commitment as involving *telling a story* of her life structured by the pursuit of that commitment.[31]

As Velleman teaches us, though, these types of causal and thematic connections are not the only factors that figure into our thinking about narratives. Narratives have the power to move us, emotionally: to make us *feel* certain ways toward the events represented. It is this feature of narratives that will form the basis for my illumination of the process of stepping back, or acquiring critical distance, from one's life-structuring commitments. To spell this out in more detail, we need to say more about the agent's role not just as *narrator* of her story-telling, but as *audience* to her own story-telling. The relevant divergence is best characterized in terms of a difference between the emotional and evaluative perspective of the reflecting self and the immersed self: between the perspective of the agent when reflecting and the perspective of the agent while immersed.

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[30] Here, it is worth making explicit how I will use the terminology in what follows. I will use 'story' and 'narrative' interchangeably; whenever I use one of these terms, I intend to refer to a particular kind of *representation* of a sequence of events. The *content* of the story is, in part, the events represented by the story (as well as the connections that are portrayed to obtain between such events). Ordinarily, telling a story involves creating some kind of *artefact*; see Ibid., chap. 1. (Currie, however, does not use terms the same way; narratives are artefacts "that have as their function the communication of a story, which function they have by virtue of their makers' intentions" Ibid., 6.) This point should not matter much in the ensuing discussion.

[31] Of course, the telling needn't be out loud; in the examples provided earlier, the reflecting agent was merely thinking through the story to herself. Nonetheless, as she's thinking through events *to herself*, she's also playing the role of the audience to her own story-telling – a fact that will be central to the discussion in the next section.

IV. Emotional Import

So far, I have said precious little about another familiar aspect of ordinary story-telling: the respect in which story-telling is emotionally engaging. This feature figures centrally within Velleman's discussion of narrative and narrative explanation.[32] On Velleman's view, the essential feature of a narrative is its power to clarify how to feel for the audience about certain events, as well as the sequence taken as a whole.[33] On Velleman's view, this is accomplished by initiating and resolving a certain emotional *cadence* within the audience, from the beginning to the end of the story. Stories give us a kind of *emotional understanding* about a particular sequence of events, "a subjective understanding of how to feel about them," as opposed to a kind of causal understanding

[32] Of course, Velleman isn't the only philosopher to emphasize this element of story-telling. We see this in Goldie's account of narrative. Narrative structure provides "coherence, meaningfulness, and evaluative and emotional import" to the events related within the narrative. See Goldie, *The Mess Inside*, 2. Goldie says that coherence is closely connected with *causal coherence*, but isn't the same as it. Ibid., 16. Narratives are *internally meaningful* by "revealing how the thoughts, feelings, and actions of those people who are internal to the narrative could have made sense of them from their perspective at that time" Ibid., 17. Narratives are *externally* meaningful by "revealing the narrator's external perspective": thoughts and feelings that convey why the narrative is presented in a particular way. Ibid. Finally, narratives are have evaluative and emotional import by conveying the emotional and evaluative responses of the characters and narrators. Ibid., 22–25. Rosati draws on Goldie's characterization of narrative structure at Rosati, "The Story of a Life," sec. III.
See also Ibid.; Goldie, *The Mess Inside*, 22–25.

[33] J. David Velleman, "Narrative Explanation," *Philosophical Review* 112, no. 1 (2003): 19. On Velleman's view, stories guide an audience through an emotional cadence, from beginning, middle, to end. Ibid., 18.

of how those events came to pass.[34] And, on the face of it, Velleman is on to something: he's on to an important, if not essential, feature of stories and story-telling.[35]

Here, I will focus specifically on the thought that stories have the *power* to generate emotional responses within an audience. I will set aside whether or not such responses are fitting or appropriate responses to the events represented within the story.[36] This feature of story-telling provides the basis for the account of *stepping back*, and critical distance, that will be developed within this chapter. To start, though, we should notice that the emotional import of a story is something that is appreciated by an audience – something that arises from the audience's engagement with a story. And it's clear that *how* an audience engages emotionally with a story depends on *how* they are thinking through the events represented within the story. How an audience engages with the events within a story depends, among other things, on whether they take up the perspective of a particular character within the story or whether they view the events within the story with a cool, passionless detachment from a god's eye point of view. As Currie notes, in general, a narrator will convey events along with a "*framework* which the reader is

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[34] Velleman, "Narrative Explanation," 20. Velleman presents this view as an alternative to one like Carroll's, about the nature of the narrative connection. See especially discussion at Ibid., 3. And for response, see Carroll's discussion at Noël Carroll, "Interpretation, History, and Narrative," in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), sec. 5. In my work, I am not interested in evaluating this disagreement *as* a disagreement. Instead, I think it's best to think about these types of connections on their own terms. Perhaps we should be pluralists: simply distinguish between two different types of stories – one for which causal connections are essential, the other for which the generation of emotional responses is essential. It's not clear what progress there is to be made by insisting that only the presence of one type of connection makes a representation of a sequence of events count a story.

[35] As Velleman puts it at the start, "how storytelling conveys understanding is inseparable from the question what makes for a good story." Velleman, "Narrative Explanation," 1.

[36] Such factors play a prominent role in Rosati's discussion of *meaning-affecting* relations; see Rosati, "The Story of a Life," 34.

encouraged to adopt, a way of engaging imaginatively with those events."[37] And, in many cases, the audience will take the narrator or author's (often implicit) cue, and use that framework for engaging with the events represented within the story.[38] In what follows, since the reflecting agent is both narrator and audience to her story-telling, I will proceed under the assumption that the perspective of the audience and narrator coincide exactly; the agent, when reflecting, is playing the role of both narrator and audience, and in her role as audience, she is responding emotionally to the events represented within the story.[39]

What we want, to start with, is a clear case in which we have an instance of ironic distance that is aptly described as "stepping back" from the perspective of the agent immersed within the commitment. The work of Richard Wollheim gives us a clear starting point. He distinguishes between *three* types of audiences, characterized in terms of their way of engaging with the content of the story. The role of the audience is to respond, in one way or another, to the events represented. By thinking about the woodworker's role as audience for the story that he's constructing, we can get a clearer view of the different ways he could engage with the events represented. And we can find, at minimum, one way of engaging emotionally that involves ironic distance, of the appropriate sort.

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[37] Gregory Currie, "Framing Narratives," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 60 (2007): 18.
[38] Of course, this doesn't always happen. There are reluctant or resistant audiences. For discussion, see Currie, *Narratives and Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories*, chap. 6.
[39] For discussion of the fact that a single person can play both of these roles – the role of narrator and audience – see discussion at Goldie, *The Mess Inside*, 40–43.

We can start by distinguishing between different *points of view* that the woodworker could occupy as he represents the sequence of events in which his commitment manifests in deliberation and action. The woodworker might represent this sequence of events from a *first-person* point of view. In doing so, he would imagine the events as if from the inside: he would represent the events *from the point of view* of himself thoroughly invested in the pursuit of the commitment.[40] This way of representing the sequence of events would involve "centrally imagining" oneself as occupying a particular position within those events: as occupying the point of view of the agent thoroughly invested in a particular commitment.[41] If the woodworker occupies this first-person point of view, he's playing the role of what Wollheim calls the *empathetic audience.* This kind of audience, according to Wollheim, replicates (intentionally or unintentionally) the responses of one of the characters within the story: namely, the one selected as protagonist.[42] By entertaining events from the first-person point of view, the woodworker produces in himself the same emotional responses as he would have if immersed in the pursuit of woodworking.[43]

It's clear that, when the woodworker plays the role of the empathetic audience, he's not acquiring full awareness of his commitment in a way that involves stepping back

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[40] It's important to be careful when we think about the relationships between different types of audience, defined in terms of the way they emotionally engage with the story, and different points of view occupied when representing events within reflection. It's not obvious that there need to be any necessary connections here. I return to this point later in this chapter.

[41] For discussion of the 'centered' v. 'acentered' locution, see Richard Wollheim, *The Thread of Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 71–72.

[42] Ibid., 68. We see a similar point in some of Velleman's work on identification, at Velleman, "Identification and Identity," n. 58.

[43] Or, perhaps, the woodworker attempts to produce only *vicarious* versions of the relevant emotional responses, rather than the actual responses. I set aside this complication in what follows.

from it. He’s trying, the best he can, to *step into* the immersed perspective: his perspective while immersed in the pursuit of his commitment. There is, thus, no ironic distance of the relevant sort. However, the woodworker needn’t think through the events from the first-person point of view. Instead, he could think through the story from a third-person point of view. If he does this, we could think of his role as audience in terms of one of two different types of audience.

First, as Wollheim notes, there are *detached* audiences. The detached audience avoids having any emotional responses to the events represented; such an audience simply registers the events represented within the story. For instance, the woodworker might simply represent the events in which the commitment is manifested, as well as the causal connections between those events, but do so in a way where he doesn’t feel anything toward those events.[44] This form of thinking is completely emotionally and motivationally inert. Once again, though, this doesn’t yet seem to be a clear instance in which there is ironic distance between the perspective of the agent while reflecting and the perspective of the agent while immersed. It’s not obvious that the agent while reflecting, if she plays the role of a detached audience, has much of a perspective *at all*; there is no distinctive way of engaging emotionally with the events in the story such that this way of engaging emotionally is different from how the immersed self is engaging with the events within the story.

[44] Wollheim, *The Thread of Life*, 67. The detached audience, Wollheim says, could favor, or side with, one character rather than another, provided that favor “doesn’t escalate into feeling.” Ibid.

Finally, Wollheim notes, an agent can play the role of the *sympathetic* audience.[45] Someone playing the role of this kind of audience thinks about events from the outside; she thinks about the events in an *acentered* way, from the point of view of no one represented within the story. This form of thinking could be third-personal, like the detached audience, yet emotionally charged.[46] And this seems to give us exactly the kind of distance that we are looking for. For instance, playing the role of this type of audience, the woodworker would think about the events represented, about his life structured by the pursuit of the commitment, but from the outside. Nonetheless, he could still have a wide range of emotional responses. Perhaps, as in the example from the start of this chapter, he finds this sort of life positively engaging; perhaps, instead, he feels strong disapproval toward investing so much of his time and efforts into a mere craft. Either way, his doing so isn't merely a matter of his *simulating* the perspective of an agent immersed in the pursuit of this commitment. Likewise, this seems to be an apt way to characterize Scrooge's way of engaging with the events that figure into his reflection. Scrooge thinks about the events, from a third-person point of view; he sees how this commitment is shaping his deliberation and action, but he does so from a third-person perspective. And from this perspective, he finds the events shameful or disgraceful, and he comes to reject acting on the basis of that commitment. This distance between the perspective of himself

[45] Wollheim, *The Thread of Life*, 67.
[46] See especially Wollheim's remarks about responding emotionally or affectively to acentrally imagined events: "It is only if the internal audience is sympathetic rather than detached that the tendency can be posited [to feel a certain way about those events]" Ibid., 80–81. See also Peter Goldie, "Wollheim on Emotion and Imagination," *Philosophical Studies* 127, no. 1 (2006): 1–17.

as protagonist and the perspective of himself as audience opens the space for Scrooge to come to reject acting on the basis of his commitment.

This, then, gives us an initial way of characterizing the procedure of stepping back that is involved in acquiring full awareness of a life-structuring commitment, as a potential ground for action. The mechanism for stepping back is the mechanism for creating ironic distance between the perspective of the agent while reflecting and the perspective of the agent while immersed. The way that the perspective of the agent while reflecting diverges from that of the agent while immersed is explained, at least partly, in terms of her playing the role of the sympathetic audience as she's reflecting: as she's thinking about the events represented within the story. In other words, the divergence in perspective is explained, at least in part, by her representing the events from a third-person, yet emotionally charged perspective.

Before proceeding, I should address an objection to the discussion so far.[47] In this section, I've said that we could think of accurate reflection on one's life-structuring commitments in terms of entertaining a story from a third-person rather than first-person point of view. But this might seem completely incompatible with my characterization of these commitments from earlier within this chapter. There, I took on the assumption that life-structuring commitments are commitments *de se*: commitments *to do* certain things, *to be* a certain way. The woodworker's commitment, for instance, is a commitment *to* produce great woodworks, and the infinitive construction suggests that we should think of the commitment as a *de se* commitment, involving a first-person mode of presentation

[47] Thanks to Sigrún Svavarsdóttir for pushing me on this objection.

of its propositional content: the content *that he produce great woodworks.* But it's exactly this feature that would lead us to think that reflection on *this* kind of commitment requires occupying a certain point of view: the point of view of someone thoroughly invested in the production of great woodworks. If the woodworker reflects on this commitment but doesn't occupy a first-person point of view, it might seem odd to say that he's reflecting on a commitment *de se.* Reflecting on a *de se* commitment requires *de se* imagining, which is a matter of centrally imagining the events represented.

However, this last step within the objection is mistaken. This objection assumes that the only method of *de se* representation is *first-personal* representation: representing the events as if from the inside. But, as we see in Dilip Ninan's work, this just isn't the case. Consider, for instance, dream reports, due to the linguist George Lakoff. Such reports include, "I dreamt that I was Brigitte Bardot and that I kissed me," and as Ninan notes, we can cast this in terms of an imagination report: "I imagined that I was Brigitte Bardot and that I kissed me."[48] We're invited to think that the content of this imagining involves *seeing* the scene from Bardot's point of view, but also representing the person on the receiving end as *oneself* – and this is different from my, for instance, representing the scene from Bardot's point of view and representing BM on the other end. (The content of the imagining changes if we suppose that I don't know I'm BM.) Here, I cannot provide a full characterization of this mode of representation, nor a full account of the relationship between *de se* representation or imagining, in the first-person sort of way,

[48] Dilip Ninan, "Imagination and the Self," in *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Imagination*, ed. Amy Kind (Routledge, forthcoming), sec. 5.

and this *other* form of *de se* representation – the one that seems equivalent to a "this is me" label on a particular character within the scene, even if one doesn't see the scene from the point of view of that character. But it seems clearly to be a phenomenon, and it's one that I can avail myself of within my account of accurate Frankfurtian reflection on a life-structuring commitment. I've said that such reflection involves *de se* representation. But *de se* representation isn't necessarily representation from a certain character's point of view; instead, it might simply be representation combined with something akin to a "this is me" label over one of the characters.[49]

V. Ironic Distance, Reconsidered: Points of View and Perspectives

So far, I have focused on one clear instance of ironic distance between the perspective of the reflecting self and the perspective of the immersed self. This was the case where the agent played the role of sympathetic audience while reflecting. However, at this point, it is worth re-visiting the notion of perspective with which we started. Doing so will enable us to see that playing the role of the sympathetic audience is not the *only* way of creating the relevant type of ironic distance.

From the onset, I was thinking of *point of view* and *perspective* in equivalent terms, initially described in visual or otherwise sensory terms. To take up the point of view of a character within the story is to imagine the events as if one occupied the spatial

[49] See also Ninan's evocative discussion of imagining being race-car driver Danica Patrick, in which such imagining involves shifting between third-person and first-person points of view, at Ibid., sec. 6. I suspect that something similar goes on within thinking about one's own life structured by the pursuit of a certain commitment – one imagines living a life structured by the pursuit of that commitment, and one might take up that point of view *sometimes*, but flash between that point of view and a third-person point of view.

and temporal location of that character: to *centrally imagine* events as if one was that character. But we can distinguish between *centrally imagining* oneself from a particular spatio-temporal location and the other elements that get grouped together under the notions of perspective or point of view. For instance, we can distinguish between imagining a scene from a particular vantage point – the vantage point occupied by the character – and imagining the scene by simulating the character's conative and emotional states. Let's use the label 'point of view' for only the spatial and temporal vantage point from which one might represent a particular sequence of events. And, following Elisabeth Camp, let us use 'perspective' for another, more evaluatively laden notion: the notion that includes things like *organization* (with relative salience) and *emotional valence* on the events represented.[50] Finally, let's use the label 'total perspective' for the two combined: an agent has taken up a character's total perspective when she imagines the scene from the character's point of view, with the character's perspective.

Consider, for instance, the imaginative exercise of imagining oneself as Caesar crossing the Rubicon.[51] This exercise involves representing the scene from a particular vantage point. I'm invited to imagine the Rubicon and the rest of the scene through the eyes of Caesar. It's difficult to complete this task without also taking up some relevant

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[50] See discussion at Elisabeth Camp, "Two Varieties of Literary Imagination: Metaphor, Fiction, and Thought Experiments," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 33, no. 1 (2009): 110–11. Importantly, for Camp, a perspective gives us a "tool for thinking" Ibid., 111. See also discussion at Karen Simecek, "Beyond Narrative: Poetry, Emotion and the Perspectival View," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 55, no. 4 (2015): 497–513.

[51] In this case, there is an important sense in which I am *really imagining being Caesar;* as Wollheim would put it, in my imagining, the possibility of running into Caesar is *closed off,* in an important way. See discussion at Wollheim, *The Thread of Life*, 76. For related discussion on whether I'm imagining something that is possible, see Ninan, "Imagination and the Self"; J. David Velleman, "Self to Self," in *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 170–202. I will not be entering that debate, in what follows.

background beliefs as part of the imaginative exercise. To imagine Caesar's crossing the Rubicon from his point of view, we are not simply to imagine being near a certain river, at a certain time; to imagine crossing over it; and so on. We are also invited to see the scene *with* the beliefs that this river is the Rubicon, at a certain point of history, and so on. Suppose we stopped there; suppose we didn't also take up Caesar's conative attitudes and evaluative attitudes. There is an important respect in which we've still imagined *being Caesar crossing the Rubicon*; we've imagine the scene from his point of view, characterized in part by background beliefs that such-and-such river is the Rubicon, at such-and-such time, and so on.[52]

However, more often, we are invited to take up conative as well as cognitive features of the character: we are invited to view the scene with Caesar's political ambitions, his sense of which things matter and which don't, his frustration with the current form of government, and so on. We're invited to *take up* a whole lot of things – things that go very far beyond merely imagining oneself in a particular spatio-temporal location. In Camp's terms, we're invited to take up a certain tool for thought, as well – a tool that has us share Caesar's sense for what's important, his emotional responses, and his way of incorporating new thoughts on our focal topic (related to his political ambitions).[53] We are invited to take up Caesar's perspective as well as his point of view.

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[52] There are different ways of occupying a third-personal point of view on a story, depending on how one envisions one's vantage point. For instance, one might imagine Caesar's crossing the Rubicon, from his side of the Rubicon; one might also imagine Caesar's crossing the Rubicon, from the other side of the Rubicon. In both cases, one is occupying a point of view, in my sense – but it's a third-personal point of view, since it's not the point of view of any of the characters within the story. (Of course, matters would be different if one were imagining the scene from those locations but *from the point of view of a soldier* occupying those locations.) Thanks to Sigrún Svavarsdóttir for pushing me to clarify these points.
[53] See again Camp, "Two Varieties of Literary Imagination," 110–11.

Again, I will label this *entire* cluster of features – the character's spatio-temporal location, beliefs, and conative states (including emotional states and sense of what's important) – the character's *total perspective*, and to occupy this perspective is to take *all* of those things on, as part of the imaginary project.

What is involved in representing a particular sequence of events "as if from the inside"? Well, it depends on how far "inside" we go. We could imagine a cold killer's actions from their point of view, yet maintain our original emotional responses – maintain a sense of condemnation of their actions, even though we imagine the bloody knife, gory scene, and so on, as if *we* were holding the knife, had committed those acts, and so on. This suggests that a crucial point from the previous section – that in Frankfurtian reflection, one needn't take up the point of view of the protagonist, or oneself thoroughly immersed in the pursuit of a commitment – can be put in another way. In reflecting on a life-structuring commitment, one needn't *fully occupy the total perspective* of oneself thoroughly immersed in the pursuit of the commitment. Instead, perhaps, one could occupy the *point of view* of such a character but refrain from taking up the total perspective: specifically, one could imagine oneself as occupying that character's spatio-temporal location (and seeing the world from such a location), combined with relevant background beliefs about the scene, but refrain from taking up the character's conative states and emotional responses.[54] This would allow for an agent to think through the events within the story from the first-person point of view, while maintaining ironic

[54] See, however, discussion from Currie about how easy it for ordinary humans to engage in imitative acts as a result of imagination. Currie, *Narratives and Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories*, 100–106. See also discussion at Velleman, "Identification and Identity," 351.

distance from the perspective – characterized in terms of evaluative and emotional responses – of the protagonist of the story.

This opens the space for other modes of attaining ironic distance, and so other modes of stepping back from the perspective of oneself immersed in the pursuit of a commitment. The paradigmatic instance of stepping back from a life-structuring commitment is when one plays the role of the sympathetic audience while entertaining a story of one's life structured by the pursuit of that commitment. But the defining feature of the sympathetic audience – the feature that accounts for the sense in which one has "stepped back" – is ironic distance, in terms of distance between the emotional or evaluative perspective of the reflecting self and the immersed self: the sense in which one's way of engaging emotionally with the events represented isn't merely a mimicking of the way that the protagonist is engaging emotionally with those events.[55] More than this, these modes of ironic distance are appropriately characterized as forms of *critical distance*.[56] One has stepped away from how one evaluates and responds emotionally while immersed within the pursuit of the commitment.

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[55] Ironic distance figures prominently into Goldie's account of autobiographical thinking about one's past. See discussion at Goldie, *The Mess Inside*, chap. 2.

[56] This notion of critical distance, and stepping back, is not just familiar from the literature on Frankfurtian reflection. It also figures prominently within Thomas Nagel's famous work on the impersonal standpoint, which is involved in seeing the world as "centerless—as containing ourselves and other beings with particular points of view." Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 140. Nagel does not think that this impersonal standpoint is one from which nothing seems to matter; he thinks, for instance, that the badness of pain can be recognized from this point of view. Ibid., chap. 8.5. See additional discussion of Nagel's view at Sigrún Svavarsdóttir, "Objective Values: Does Metaethics Rest on a Mistake?," in *Objectivity in Law and Morals*, ed. Brian Leiter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 144–193. Such a standpoint, plainly, involves stepping outside of one's perspective while immersed in one's commitments. Yet, when I speak of the creation of ironic distance, I don't have in mind something as particular as Nagel's impersonal standpoint or the process of detachment through which we arrive at that standpoint. For additional discussion of the relationship between such a perspective and one's engaged perspective, see Thomas Nagel, "The Absurd," *Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 20 (1971): 716–727.

Recognizing that accurate Frankfurtian reflection on a life-structuring commitment involves story-telling allows us to characterize these ways of acquiring critical distance. It allows us to illuminate what I take to be a familiar feature of reflection – one that is easy to overlook if we think that reflecting on a commitment always involves "getting into the skin" of the part of someone immersed in the pursuit of that commitment, to borrow a phrase from Lewis.[57] If we think in these terms, it's tempting to fall into thinking that critical reflection on a life-structuring commitment must proceed in two discrete steps. First, one imagines living in a way that involves immersion in the pursuit of that commitment; second, one steps out of that perspective, somehow, and makes some form of appraisal or evaluation about the merits of that way of living.

But it seems entirely artificial to insist that critical reflection would need to proceed in these two, discrete phases; indeed, the mundane moments of reflection from the beginning of this chapter are examples of reflective moments that do not fit that mold. The work within this chapter enables us to spell out why: there are ways of stepping back from a commitment that are not psychologically distinct processes from the process of acquiring full awareness of the commitment, as a potential ground for action. Stepping back from a life-structuring commitment can arise through a particular way of acquiring full awareness of the commitment, as a potential ground of action: from a special way of engaging with the story that is told within reflection on that commitment. And, more than this, the emotional responses generated by representing events in this way can cause an

[57] Lewis uses this locution in his discussion of the canonical form of value inquiry into a putative *de se* value. For the locution, see Michael Smith, David Lewis, and Mark Johnston, "Dispositional Theories of Value," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 63 (1989): 126.

agent to take a side, one way or the other, with respect to whether to act on the basis of that commitment. Frankfurtian reflection can be emotionally engaging in exactly the same way as story-telling – and how we feel about the story can influence whether we endorse acting on the commitment that underlies the events within the story.

VI. Summary: More than Second-Order Awareness

On the proposal developed within this chapter, we can illuminate the respect in which an agent counts as "stepping back" from the commitment on which she is reflecting. The mechanism for stepping back just is the mechanism for creating ironic distance between her perspective while reflecting and her perspective while immersed. The essential divergence between these two perspectives is in terms of the emotional and evaluative responses characteristic of each perspective: the way of engaging emotionally with the events within the story. This enables us to see that an agent could acquire ironic distance, in this sense, even while taking up the point of view (in terms of the background beliefs and spatio-temporal vantage point) of herself while immersed. I think that this marks an improvement in our thinking about the underlying notion of stepping back.

To see why, consider again one of the examples with which we started. The woodworker is reflecting on his commitment to woodworking; he's acquiring full awareness of the commitment, as a potential ground for action, in a way that involves stepping back from it. One straightforward thing that he's done is acquire a second-order awareness of this commitment: he believes (correctly) that he has a commitment to producing great woodworks. An initially appealing gloss on the notion of stepping back

is in terms of some kind of *second-order awareness* of the motives that would ordinarily incline one to action. Consider, for instance, Velleman's discussion of the way that this kind of awareness breaks immersion:

> The more conscious we become of a motive, the more it becomes the object of our thought; and the more it becomes the object of our thought, the less we think from the perspective of its subject; and the less we think from the perspective of the motive's subject, the less engrossed we are in the activities that it motivates.[58]

Of course, as Velleman is aware, there is no necessary connection between (i) second-order awareness of a motive and (ii) having stepped into a perspective different from the one generated by the motive.[59] For instance, an agent could have second-order awareness of a particular life-structuring commitment while nonetheless simulating the emotional and evaluative perspective that she would have while immersed. If this is what she's up to, then it seems that her second-order awareness of her commitment is a mere idle cog; it's not sufficient to account for any meaningful critical distance between her perspective while reflecting and her perspective while immersed. This suggests that second-order awareness *alone* isn't the crucial element in acquiring critical distance from the perspective generated by the pursuit of a commitment. The important ingredient in *stepping back* from the commitment on which one is reflecting is a matter of stepping

[58] Velleman, "The Way of the Wanton," 180.

[59] On his view, we combine these perspectives – and close the reflective gap – by reflexively desiring that the original first-order desire be effective (partly by way of this very higher-order desire). Reflexively desiring to act on a desire to drink (by way of this desire) is a perspective in which one "*thirsts reflexively*" Ibid., 180–81. I admit that I find this account of the convergence puzzling, but I agree that second-order awareness on its own isn't sufficient for introducing a gap in perspective between the reflecting self and the immersed self.

outside one’s perspective while immersed – something that is not guaranteed by mere second-order awareness of one’s conative states. Once we recognize that full awareness of a life-structuring commitment, as a potential ground for action, involves telling a story of one’s life structured by the pursuit of that commitment, we can draw heavily on tools from the literature on narration to shed light on this crucial ingredient. Specifically, I’ve argued, we can avail ourselves of the tools of ironic distance to illuminate the respect in which the reflecting agent counts as stepping outside her perspective while immersed in the pursuit of her commitment.

Chapter 6: Concluding Remarks

Throughout this dissertation, I have examined the relationship between the exercise of our capacity for structuring our own lives and the exercise of our capacities for Frankfurtian reflection. In other words, I have focused on issues related to the relationship between how we structure our own lives and how we reflect on how we are structuring our own lives. In chapters 2 through 4, I developed a view about the conditions under which an agent counted as structuring her own life: this was the Rational Immersion View, according to which she structures her own life if she has a commitment that is manifesting in rational immersion across a wide range of circumstances. And in chapter 5, I examined the exercise of our Frankfurtian reflective capacities, when directed toward our life-structuring commitments. I argued that *full awareness* of such a commitment, as an ingredient of Frankfurtian reflection on that commitment, involves telling a story of one's life structured by the pursuit of that commitment. In light of this, we can understand the respect in which the agent acquires *critical distance* during such reflection by appealing to the creation of ironic distance between her perspective while reflecting and her perspective while immersed.

The resulting picture recasts the role of our capacities for Frankfurtian reflection within the theory of agency. We started by examining the conditions under which an agent counts as structuring her own life, as opposed to having a shape imposed from the

outside; and the account of the former gives us an interesting sense in which the agent counts as the *author* of her own life. As I note within chapters 2 through 4, it's very tempting to think that the exercise of the agent's reflective capacities plays an integral in accounting for the sense in which the agent counts as the author of her own life. Throughout those chapters, I argue against different ways of formulating this point. However, as emerges throughout chapter 5, the exercise of our Frankfurtian reflective capacities, when applied to our life-structuring commitments, accounts for a sense in which we become *narrators* of our own lives; reflecting accurately on a life-structuring commitment involves the narration of a story in which one's life is structured by the pursuit of that commitment. I am hopeful that this gives us a new, interesting way of thinking about the philosophical importance of our capacities for Frankfurtian reflection. Perhaps they provide us with a valuable form of self-understanding: the understanding that is conveyed by a narrative about one's life structured by the pursuit of one's commitments.[1] But I leave the development of such issues for a later date.

[1] The thought that Frankfurtian reflection conveys self-understanding isn't especially novel. See, for instance, Buss, "Autonomous Action," 652. The view developed within chapter 5, however, can give us a way to spell out this mode of self-understanding: it's the mode of understanding conveyed by a narrative. Perhaps this is a type of emotional understanding, as discussed by Velleman, at Velleman, "Narrative Explanation." For additional discussion of the understanding conveyed by narrative, see Louis Mink, "History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension," *New Literary History* 1, no. 3 (1970): 541–58. Again, at this stage, I am not in a position to settle these issues.

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Appendix A: *De Dicto* Life-Structuring Commitments

In chapter 5, I took as an assumption that all life-structuring commitments were *de se* and self-reflexive: all life-structuring commitments were commitments *to do* something or *to be* a certain way (by way of this very commitment). However, as I said in that chapter, it is far from obvious that all life-structuring commitments must take this form. I think it is plausible that many of our life-structuring commitments are *de se* and self-reflexive, but it seems possible – if unusual – for an agent to have a life-structuring commitment that is *de dicto*.

Let's consider an example. Suppose that Beth has a life-structuring commitment *that great artworks are preserved*, but not a commitment *to* the preservation of great artworks. To spell out why this commitment counts as a life-structuring one, we can turn to the machinery from the end of chapter 3. The commitment manifests in a wide range of circumstances, and its manifestation consists in immersive activity that involves the extensive deployment of her rational capacities for deliberation or planning. Perhaps *de se* attitudes need to enter the picture, at some point; perhaps she needs to form *de se* intentions or policies (e.g., the policy to volunteer at a particular museum twice weekly)

as a result of her deliberation or planning while immersed.[1] But there is no obvious incompatibility between (i) the commitment's playing this role and (ii) the commitment's being *de dicto.*[2]

Now, suppose that Beth is reflecting accurately on this life-structuring commitment. As I explained in section III of chapter 5, to reflect accurately, she would need to have an accurate representation of what the world would be like if this commitment were satisfied or fulfilled. This means that Beth would need an accurate representation of what the world would be like if great artworks were preserved. Perhaps such a representation consists in a representation of a world in which all the existing great artworks are featured prominently within museums, where the public can see and appreciate them. Importantly, this representation need not include a representation of Beth's commitment manifesting over time and across circumstances. And this is because Beth's commitment lacks a self-reflexive component. Unlike in the case of the woodworker, who had a self-reflexive *de se* life-structuring commitment, the satisfaction conditions for Beth's commitment are completely neutral between whether great artworks are preserved by way of her efforts or whether great artworks are preserved while she sits idly on the sidelines.

So, I admit, Beth could count as having an accurate representation of what the world would be like if her commitment were satisfied without representing the

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[1] This is assuming that a *de se* attitude must be present to issue in action. For skepticism on this point, see Herman Cappelen and Josh Dever, *The Inessential Indexical: On the Philosophical Insignificance of Perspective and the First Person* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 3.

[2] It is important to remember that this commitment is still manifesting across a wide range of circumstances in which Beth finds herself. If it didn't, then the commitment wouldn't count as a life-structuring one.

manifestation of her commitment in immersive activity over time and across circumstances. But would such a representation be sufficient for full awareness of her commitment, as a potential ground for action? Here, as before, I think there are complications. To bring them into focus, consider another example.

Suppose that Luke and Duke both have a *de dicto* commitment. Suppose that they both have a commitment *that Mirror Lake be restored to its original state*. Luke's commitment is a life-structuring one, in the sense defined at the end of chapter 3. It's a commitment that is manifesting over a wide range of circumstances in immersive activity that involves the extensive deployment of his rational capacities for deliberation and planning. He spends hundreds of hours engaged in fundraising efforts, meetings with university officials, and so on – all in the name of the restoration effort. Duke, by contrast, is much less involved in the restoration effort. He still has a commitment that Mirror Lake be restored, but it's not a life-structuring one. He spends a couple of hours each weekend on the phone, trying to raise funds for the restoration, but beyond that, he does nothing. He'd still be upset if the restoration effort fell apart, but he's not structuring his life around it.

Now, suppose that Luke and Duke are reflecting on their respective commitments. As described at the beginning of chapter 5, both Luke and Duke are looking to acquire *full awareness* of their respective commitments, as a potential ground for action. However, it is clear that there is an important difference between their commitments: Luke has a life-structuring commitment, whereas Duke does not. And this is a fact that should figure *somewhere* into their reflection. It is a fact that can make a clear difference

to whether an agent endorses or rejects acting upon a particular commitment. Duke, for instance, might endorse acting upon his (less than life-structuring) commitment that Mirror Lake be preserved, while he would reject acting upon a life-structuring commitment that Mirror Lake be preserved. (The marsh, he may think, is worth some time and effort – but not *that* much!)

I propose that this fact figures into *full awareness* of their respective commitments, as a potential ground for action. Full awareness of a commitment involves awareness of the commitment *qua* commitment-type that it is: *qua* the extent to which one would be invested in the object of the commitment.[3] The crucial idea is that the case of Luke and Duke reveals that the *type* of commitment on which one is reflecting can make a difference to whether one endorses or rejects acting on that commitment. And, just as an agent counts as having a fuller or more accurate understanding of her commitment by having an accurate understanding of its object, so too does she count as having a fuller or more accurate understanding of her commitment by having an accurate understanding of the extent to which that commitment would manifest throughout her life. As before, though, I don't want to get into a verbal disagreement about how to use 'awareness' or 'full awareness.' I will, as before, stipulate that *full awareness* of a commitment involves an accurate understanding of the extent to which that commitment would manifest throughout one's life, by shaping one's activity over time.[4]

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[3] Thanks to Justin D'Arms for suggesting this locution.

[4] Another way of putting this point is that accurate reflection on a life-structuring commitment involves reflection on what Keller would describe as the *achievement* rather than the *attainment* of the commitment; it involves thinking about the satisfaction of the commitment *by the agent's own efforts.* See discussion at Simon Keller, "Welfare and the Achievement of Goals," *Philosophical Studies* 121, no. 1 (2004): 33. (Keller characterizes the *strength* of a goal in terms of "the extent to which its bearer organizes her life

As before, however, this isn't an objectionable bit of stipulation. It's a bit of stipulation that is intended to account for the intuitively important fact about the difference between Luke and Duke's reflection: the fact about the extent to which their commitment would shape their activity over time, a fact that is relevant to whether they endorse or reject acting upon their respective commitments. Full awareness of a commitment, as I use the term, involves taking into account this fact.[5] Moreover, this fact is easy for us to overlook, given many of the canonical examples of reflective endorsement and rejection that figure within the literature. In many of the canonical examples in the literature, we're invited to consider an agent who is considering whether to act on a particular motive at a particular time. There is a perfectly natural way of reading Frankfurt's example of the unwilling addict, for instance, on which this is the case: the unwilling addict rejects his desire to use the drug *here and now*.[6] If we read such simple cases in this way, this can obscure the fact that we engage in Frankfurtian reflection on all sorts of different *types* of motives, and the type of motive on which we are reflecting makes a difference to the form of our reflection.

With this in mind, we can turn to Beth's life-structuring commitment that great artworks are preserved. Full awareness of this commitment involves not just an accurate

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around its pursuit" Ibid.; this suggests that Keller is thinking about goals in a way similar to how I'm thinking about life-structuring commitments.)

[5] This is similar to and partly inspired by the way Sobel discusses an accurate understanding of the object of one's desire as an accurate understanding of what the desired object 'would be like to be a part of one's life." Sobel, "Subjectivism and Idealization," 344. An accurate understanding of an object as part of one's life, however, seems richer than just an understanding of what it would be like to *have* the desired object – it seems also to involve an accurate understanding of the extent to which one is invested in the object. And this is what I've attempted to characterize in this section.

[6] See discussion at Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 12.

understanding of the object of that commitment; it also involves an accurate understanding of the extent to which that commitment would manifest within deliberation and action. (Again, the extent to which the commitment shapes Beth's activity over time can make a difference to whether she endorses or rejects acting upon it.) An accurate understanding of the extent to which her commitment would manifest within deliberation and action involves, *inter alia,* an accurate representation of the extent to which her commitment would manifest within deliberation and action. Such a representation would need to portray the episodes in which her commitment manifests in rational immersion. And, just as in the case of the woodworker's commitment, this representation would thereby need to include a representation of a sequence of events in which her commitment manifests in rational immersion. Beth would also be portraying these events as unified, in the same way as the woodworker did within his reflection on his commitment: these events would be unified as instances of one and the same commitment. The representation thereby would also score high on Currie's scale of narrativity, and thus it is accurate to call this representation a *story* or *narrative*.

In sum, then, there is a fact that figures prominently into accurate reflection on a life-structuring commitment: accurate reflection on a life-structuring commitment involves reflection on the commitment *qua* the type of commitment that it is. To have full awareness of a life-structuring commitment *qua* life-structuring commitment, one needs an accurate understand of the extent to which the commitment would shape one's activity over time – and this understanding consists in, *inter alia,* a representation of a sequence of events in which that commitment manifests in deliberation and action. This

representation will count as a story, for the same reasons why the woodworker's representation counted as a story. Thus, accurate reflection on any of our life-structuring commitments – even the *de dicto* ones – involves a bit of story-telling: such story-telling is involved in attaining an accurate understanding of the life-structuring commitment *qua* life-structuring commitment.