BACKSLIDING AND BAD FAITH

ASPIRATION, DISAVOWAL, AND (RESIDUAL) PRACTICAL IDENTITIES

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> For too much of my Life,
> I've apologized when I wasn't wrong,
> all to make a situation better.
> I'm not going to be that person anymore.
> —Samantha King, *Born to Love, Cursed to Feel*

IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, we have probably all been Samantha. We have seen something in ourselves that we dislike, and we have committed to change. The now undesired tendency could have been consciously cultivated—maybe Samantha decided to start apologizing as a way to keep peace. Or it could have been somewhat passively acquired, maybe as a coping mechanism to defuse tense situations. But whatever the tendency's origins, when Samantha says, "I'm not going to be that person anymore," she is committing to change—perhaps to hold her ground when her position is justified and not to apologize merely to avoid unpleasantness. If Samantha is like most of us, however, despite her sincere aspiration to change, the odds are that she will eventually (maybe repeatedly) find herself apologizing when tensions rise, even when she is not wrong. But when Samantha falls into that unwanted habit and apologizes, what sort of person is she? Is she still, or again, "that person," despite her commitment to change? Or does her commitment itself change the sort of person she is, even when she backslides? And if so, how?

On the one hand, one could argue that our actions are the best indicators of the sorts of people we are. As Inez says in Sartre's *No Exit*, "It's what one does, and nothing else, that shows the stuff one's made of."[1] According to this view, Samantha's conflict-avoidant apologies show who she is better than her stated desire or commitment to change: if she apologizes when she is not wrong, she is still (or is once again) "that person." On the other hand, not everything we

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1 Sartre, *No Exit*, 43.

do reflects who we are in the same way. Some apologies are unprompted and wholehearted. Others are begrudging, perhaps coming after significant prodding. That Samantha would be frustrated with and disappointed in herself for an unjustified apology, but happy if she were to stand her ground, suggests that the verbal apology ("what one does," in Inez's formulation) is only part of the story. And the details of the story matter.

Sometimes we explicitly say that an action reflects our core values or ideals. Perhaps more familiar is the way we sometimes seek leniency for poor behavior by claiming that the bad behavior is an aberration. We might say, "That's not who I really am," in order to distance ourselves from actions and perhaps to signal that we are trying to change, that the actions no longer represent our core values. But we can say the same words when we are simply in denial. And on the face of it, aspiring is different from being in denial. And different responses seem appropriate for backsliding aspirants like Samantha than for those who consistently seek what Harry Frankfurt calls "unmerited indulgence," who seek "forgiveness" but have no interest in changing bad behavior.[2] But how, exactly, are they different? And what do these differences suggest about the nature of the self and our relation to our actions?

To think through these questions, I use the notion of a *practical identity*, which Christine Korsgaard defines as "a description under which you value yourself." [3] The term has been widely adopted, even if the details vary and are sometimes unspecified.[4] Broadly speaking, practical identity refers to whatever forms one's practical outlook. Common examples are characteristics or roles, such as *parent*, *lover*, *teacher*, or, in Samantha's case, someone who does not apologize when she is not wrong. Admittedly, practical identity is a wriggly notion. It can be hard to pin down because we usually have various roles and characteristics. So, depending on how one parses it, one typically either has a complex practical identity or multiple identities. Korsgaard's account seems to be that we do have various particular practical identities—such as student, parent, or lover—but that part of the task of self-constitution is to integrate those roles into a single identity.[5] But practical identity is also wriggly because although

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2   Frankfurt, "Identification and Externality," 63.

3   Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, 101.

4   For a sample of views tacitly assuming, explicitly referencing, or critically engaging with Korsgaard's notion of practical identity, see Velleman, "Willing the Law"; Crowell, "*Sorge* or *Selbstbewußtsein*?" and "The Existential Sources of Normativity"; Atkins and McKenzie, *Practical Identity and Narrative Agency*; Lear, *A Case for Irony*; Wallace, *The View from Here*; Shoemaker, *Responsibility from the Margins*; Westlund, "Who Do We Think We Are?"

5   In *Sources of Normativity*, she writes, "Practical identity is a complex matter and for the average person there will be a jumble of such conceptions" (101). With her example of a

our self-conceptions matter, as Korsgaard's account emphasizes, our practical identities seem to outstrip our self-conceptions. We often see and engage with the world in ways that go beyond and can be at odds with our self-conceptions.

To explore these issues, we will discuss several fictional or fictionalized examples. In addition to Samantha, we will talk about a jealous individual and a parent who is trying to find better balance between work and family. To develop a multidimensional account of practical identity that captures the nuances of these cases, I use Korsgaard's account and Steven Crowell's Heideggerian alternative to distinguish between two dimensions of practical identity: *reflective practical identity* (roughly: how we see or think of ourselves) and *phenomenological practical identity* (roughly: the broader selves that shape how the world appears to us).[6] These dimensions typically involve feedback loops and so typically coordinate with each other in various ways. When I have the reflective practical identity of parent, for example—thinking of myself as a parent—there is coordination with my phenomenological practical identity when parental possibilities are salient. And in the other direction, when I inhabit the world of a parent—seeing the world in terms of parental possibilities—I am more likely to think of myself as a parent. Most of the time, then, because of this coordination, how we think of ourselves affects how the world appears, and how the world appears affects how we think of ourselves.[7] But these dimensions can come apart in everyday self-ignorance, more motivated self-deception, and aspiration. When an aspirant like Samantha changes how she thinks about herself and commits to change, she creates a tension between her reflective practical identity and her phenomenological practical identity in hopes of changing how she sees and lives in the world. She hopes that, in time, the change will become more complete and less effortful. But this change is often difficult.

One reason it is difficult is that aspirants can continue to see the world (partly) through the lenses of identities they are trying to leave behind, which conflict with their new self-conceptions—for example, continuing to see tense

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student who takes a required course, she argues that the student does act autonomously because his practical identity is a student (105–7). In *Self-Constitution*, she adds, "We have many particular practical identities and so we also face the task of uniting them into a coherent whole" (21). In *Self-Constitution*, she sometimes discusses the [whole …] in terms of personal identity, but she also sometimes uses these terms interchangeably: "We are each faced with the task of constructing a peculiar, individual kind of identity—*personal or practical identity*" (19–20, emphasis added).

6   Although I describe particulars of Korsgaard's and Crowell's accounts, I am not arguing for the particulars of either account. One could flesh out the details of these dimensions differently while retaining the core insight of the multidimensional picture.

7   Thanks to an anonymous referee for helping me think through these relationships in terms of coordination.

situations as calling for them to apologize. When they find themselves with these *residual practical identities*, they may stop seeking to change and instead turn to something else, such as resignation, denial of responsibility, self-deception, or some combination of these.[8] Some former aspirants come to identify fully with their aspirational reflective practical identity and deny responsibility for actions that do not fit with that self-conception. They might see those actions as not really theirs, even though the actions fit with their lagging phenomenological practical identity. Others resign themselves to their situations as if they have no say in (and thus no responsibility for) the matter. Of course, former aspirants do not have a monopoly on resignation, denial, or self-deception. But the same features that make aspiration and responsibility-taking disavowals possible also provide the scaffolding for responsibility-avoidant (pseudo-)disavowals, so we may confuse aspiration with denial or self-deception.[9] We could see the backsliding aspirant as merely being in denial or see the person in denial as an aspirant not yet living up to their aspirations. But lumping these together conceals important differences in these agents.

It is natural to think of who we *really* are either in terms of our aspirations (or core values) or in terms of our actions. But without proper nuance, these both distort our moral psychology. As beings who care about who we are, we are (sometimes thankfully) more than our actions. But we are also (sometimes frustratingly) more than our aspirational selves. The natures of human selfhood and agency depend on our ability to care about and take responsibility for ourselves, including parts of our selves over which we do not have complete immediate control. In this paper, I propose a multidimensional account of practical identity and use Merleau-Ponty's account of world polarization to explore the dynamic between reflective practical identity and phenomenological practical identity. This conceptual framework illuminates the unique profiles of self-ignorance, resignation, aspiration, and denial. It also explains a form of practical ambivalence common in aspirants transitioning from one way of being to another.

1. WHO ARE YOU, ANYWAY?

On the one hand, when Samantha commits to change by asserting, "I'm not going to be that person anymore," she changes who she is. She now values herself under a different description, or at least disvalues herself under some description. But in aspiring to not be "that person anymore," she wants more

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8   This is not to say that all aspirants should continue on their trajectories. They could determine, for example, that their initial aspirations were naïve, misguided, or not worth the costs.

9   Thanks to an anonymous referee for helping articulate this relationship.

than to see herself differently. She wants to change how she sees and lives in the world. She wants to become someone who does not feel the need to apologize (and does not apologize) when she is not wrong. But she has probably already changed. She has likely become someone who would be disappointed if she were to apologize when not wrong. To make sense of the complexity of Samantha's situation—the change she has wrought and the further change she seeks—let us start with Korsgaard's and Crowell's accounts of practical identity.

1.1. Reflective Practical Identity

As Korsgaard describes the human condition, we find ourselves with impulses—feelings, beliefs, and desires that impel us to act.[10] The reflective structure of human consciousness, however, allows us to control which impulses lead to action. This structure makes autonomy possible, but it brings with it a kind of necessity. It makes it so we *can*, but also *must*, decide which impulses we will endorse (and act on) and which we will reject.[11] And this is where practical identities are crucial. Practical identities—descriptions under which we value ourselves—provide criteria for determining what counts as a reason, for distinguishing impulses we approve of from those we do not: "We endorse or reject our impulses by determining whether they are consistent with the ways in which we identify ourselves."[12]

Korsgaard sees endorsing reasons for action as an act of existential significance. Practical identities are largely socially received roles and ways to live:

> Some we are born into, like being someone's child or neighbor or being the citizen of a certain country. Some we adopt for reasons, like joining a profession that is worthwhile and suits your talents or devoting yourself to a cause in which you ardently believe. Many we adopt voluntarily, but without reasons in anything more than a minimal sense.[13]

10 I highlight Korsgaard's account because Crowell frames his Heideggerian account as a contrast to Korsgaard's, but also, more substantively, because hers is a paradigmatic account of reflective practical identity, in which self-conceptions play a decisive role in determining one's agential standpoint. One could change details about the structure of the self, the nature of self-conceptions and how they factor into agency, and so forth, while still having reflective practical identity (broadly construed) play a crucial role.

11 Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, 113.

12 Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, 120. Sometimes Korsgaard describes endorsement in self-consciously reflective ways, as when she equates endorsement with an agent identifying with the reasons and obligations relevant to some description. Other times, however, she describes it more pragmatically: we endorse some desire, role, or identity when we act in accordance with it. See, for example, *Self-Constitution*, 43.

13 Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 23.

When we endorse reasons stemming from an identity, we "carv[e] out a personal identity for which we are responsible"—something that Korsgaard sees as "one of the inescapable tasks of human life."[14] When we see ourselves as parents, lovers, teachers, students, or friends, these roles become reason-giving.[15] We commit to (try to) act according to the norms of that identity. When I then act according to impulses that are consistent with those norms, I am likely to "regard [the] movement . . . as *my action*" and not merely as "some force that is at work *on* me or *in* me."[16] When someone who values herself as a student raises her arm to make a comment, she is behind the wheel differently than if her arm rises because of a muscle spasm—*she* does it, one might say, and her reflective practical identity as a student gives her the reasons to do so.[17] For Korsgaard, "autonomy is commanding yourself to do what you think it would be a good idea to do, [which] depends on who you think you are."[18] I get something right, agentially speaking, when I act on reasons flowing from an identity with which I identify. Because Samantha identifies as someone who does not back down, when she rejects the impulse to apologize and instead acts on the impulse to stand her ground, the movement appears to her as an (autonomous) action and not merely the result of forces working on or in her.

However, siding with an impulse does not ensure that it leads to action. We can be moved by impulses that conflict with our adopted practical identities. Addiction and depression, for example, can compromise agency by making some impulses effective even when we do not see them as good reasons and other impulses ineffective even when we see them as good reasons. Samantha's case is different, however. If she apologizes when she is not wrong, the apologetic impulses are consistent with an identity that once more fully (perhaps with her approval) shaped her outlook but that she is now trying to leave

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14 Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 24.

15 On his reading of Korsgaard, Velleman identifies self-conception with practical identity: "Willing the law is a matter of adopting a self-conception, or 'practical identity'" ("Willing the Law," 297).

16 Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 18 (emphasis in original).

17 Frankfurt uses the example of someone raising her arm and an arm rising spasmodically to distinguish between actions and physical movements that happen to her ("Identification and Externality," 58). Kieran Setiya contests this account, at least in regard to reflexes. He contends that my arm moving as a reflex is not something that happens to me but is something that I do as a reflex action. The contrast—something that I do not do—is someone lifting my arm, perhaps during a medical examination. According to Setiya, the ways Korsgaard and Frankfurt distinguish between things I do and things that happen to me already assume we are looking for a certain kind of action—actions done for reasons—and not for what makes something an action (*Practical Knowledge*).

18 Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 107.

behind. After her explicit disavowal, her practical identity involves a complexity different from the "jumble of conceptions" Korsgaard mentions.[19] Samantha has neither fully left behind who she once was nor fully become who she wants to be. Her reflective practical identity *is* (partly) someone who does not apologize when she is not wrong. But when she backslides, she seems *also* to still be someone who does apologize when she is not wrong. If her identity were to depend entirely on how she explicitly values herself, however, her backsliding apologies would seem to be mere movements, not actions. But given her disavowed identity's influence on how she views the world, seeing her apologies as mere movements seems to mischaracterize both those apologies and her agential situation.

1.2. Phenomenological Practical Identity

Crowell presents his Heideggerian account of practical identity as an alternative to Korsgaard's.[20] He argues that Korsgaard's account relies on an overly reflective and rationalistic picture of human agency, which ultimately leads to a "rationalistic distortion in her phenomenology of action," particularly regarding the everyday coping that characterizes much of our lives.[21] Everyday coping, in Hubert Dreyfus's interpretation of Heidegger, refers to the way we skillfully yet non-deliberatively respond to situations—when driving, for example.[22] Because reflectiveness is often deemed a (sometimes *the*) distinctive feature of humans, Crowell's criticism and his Heideggerian proposal appeal to the intuition that many ordinary actions seem unreflective.[23] Once we possess the relevant skills, many actions rarely seem reflective or deliberative. Without much thought, we respond to what the situation calls for—we loop shoelaces, tap the blinker down to signal a turn, or offer a helping hand or comforting word. Crowell thinks an account of practical identity based on Heidegger's notion of *Worumwillen* (for-the-sake-of-which) can better account for how practical identities function in everyday coping.[24]

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19   Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity*, 101.

20   Crowell, "The Existential Sources of Normativity."

21   Crowell, "The Existential Sources of Normativity," 241.

22   See Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World* and *Skillful Coping*. For a clear summary of Dreyfus's account of everyday coping, see Mark Wrathall's introduction to *Skillful Coping*.

23   Michael Bratman, for example, describes reflectiveness as central to human agency (*Structures of Agency*).

24   Crowell, "Existential Sources of Normativity." When necessary to disambiguate, I refer to Korsgaard's notion as *reflective practical identity* and Heideggerian *Worumwillen* as *phenomenological practical identity*. Otherwise, *practical identity* refers to both.

For Heidegger, a *Worumwillen* (or for-the-sake-of-which) is "a self-interpretation that informs and orders all my activities."[25] It is "a possible way of being a self" (such as being a parent, teacher, or carpenter) that organizes or grounds intentions and actions by providing criteria according to which some actions are self-determined, autonomous, expressive of what is my own and not mere happenings in my life.[26] When, as a carpenter, I hammer in nails to secure boards, the "in-order-to" (*Um-zu*) of securing boards is grounded in a "for-the-sake-of-which" (being a carpenter) that I have seized upon.[27] On Crowell's account, when I try to be some practical identity, it affects how the world appears to me: "When I try to exercise the skills that define [a particular *Worumwillen*], try to live up to the demands of the job, I act for the sake of a possibility of my own being, and only so can things present themselves to me in light of *their* possibilities."[28] As I try to engage with the world as a carpenter—to live up to the constitutive norms of being a carpenter—the wood, nails, saws, and planes show their distinctive possibilities. The world appears to me as it does to a carpenter.[29]

Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes this phenomenon as world polarization. Under normal circumstances, he writes, a "person's projects polarize the world, causing a thousand signs to appear there, as if by magic, that guide action, as signs in a museum guide the visitor."[30] Our projects affect the salience and

25 Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 95.

26 Crowell, "Existential Sources of Normativity," 242–44. This sounds a lot like Korsgaard, because even though I use Crowell to highlight a different dimension of practical identity, Crowell frames his account as a corrective to Korsgaard ("Existential Sources of Normativity," 241).

27 Crowell, "Existential Sources of Normativity," 244. See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 86 (Macquarrie and Robinson, 119).

28 Crowell, "Existential Sources of Normativity," 245. Of course, one can hammer nails to secure boards "for-the-sake-of" various practical identities—I can hammer nails to help a friend, for example. Hammering nails would then have the same "in-order-to" but be anchored in a different "for-the-sake-of-which." Thanks to Mark Wrathall for suggesting this possibility.

29 On Korsgaard's view, identifying with some role (hopefully) changes how relevant impulses appear; on Crowell's view, trying to inhabit some role (hopefully) changes how the world appears.

30 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 115. Stephan Käufer ("Heidegger on Existentiality, Constancy, and the Self") and Mark Wrathall ("Who Is the Self of Everyday Existence?") both draw on Heidegger to develop accounts of the self in terms of polarization (or something very similar). Käufer describes the self in terms of the ability to let ourselves be drawn in by what beckons us (466). Wrathall describes the self as "a function that needs to be performed if a situation is to invite and sustain action: I am the polarization of the affordances of a situation into particular solicitations to act (22). On key points, both Käufer and Wrathall use Merleau-Ponty's analysis to develop or clarify their Heideggerian accounts of selfhood.

affective orientations of potential actions. Some opportunities are strongly inviting. Others are weakly repulsive. And some fail to stand out. As a parent and professor, helping my child with homework, revising papers, and preparing lectures are more salient than practicing Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" (assuming I am not also a pianist with an upcoming recital). Combining Crowell's Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, whether and the extent to which we have some (phenomenological) practical identity depends on the world being polarized by that identity, with situations "calling for or ruling out certain actions."[31]

World polarization can be sudden and far-reaching. Some new parents quickly see the world in comprehensively parental ways, with the world strongly soliciting actions not previously on their radars. But world polarization is not always that way. Other parents change their explicit priorities but struggle to develop the skills and dispositions that allow them to see and respond well to parenting situations. Our self-conceptions and conscious commitments to projects typically affect how the world appears to us—seeing myself as someone's friend, for example, likely shapes how their struggles or successes affect me—so there is usually coordination between reflective practical identity and phenomenological practical identity. But there can be slippage between the two.

A key difference between Korsgaard's and Crowell's accounts is that, for Crowell, our original self-awareness of our practical identities comes through what we do and how the world appears to us. "I am constantly self-aware," he writes, "because I discover myself in what I do: I am aware of myself as a carpenter, father, or teacher because the things that surround me show me the face that they show to one who acts as a carpenter, father, or teacher does."[32] With a nod to Korsgaard, Crowell elaborates, "to understand oneself as a carpenter, philosopher, father, or friend is not to represent oneself under a certain description but to be able to be those things."[33] Self-understanding, in this sense, is to have skills and dispositions that allow one to effectively navigate the world of an identity. Merely conforming to the relevant standards is insufficient, however. I must *try* to be a carpenter, philosopher, or parent. And trying cannot be reduced to "the exercise of any set of practical skills or abilities" but "presupposes the possibility of acting in light of norms and not acting merely in conformity with norms."[34] Having some practical identity depends on being able to

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31 Rouse, "Self-Awareness and Self-Understanding," 166.

32 Crowell, "Existential Sources of Normativity," 247.

33 Crowell, "Competence over Being as Existing," 81.

34 Crowell, "Competence over Being as Existing," 82. Crowell uses the example of taking a picture with an old camera to illustrate the ability to act in light of norms. Whether the camera is appropriate depends on my purposes: "If I experience the camera as defective because my photographs are blurry, this is because I am trying to capture the moment for

act in light of the difference, relative to that identity, between better and worse, success and failure, and exercise the relevant "ability-to-be" (*Seinkonnen*).[35]

Recall that for the dimension of practical identity that Korsgaard highlights, how we identify is crucial: by adopting and identifying with roles, their norms become normative for us. One could think of the difference between reflective and phenomenological practical identities as highlighting the distinction between (a) seeing and understanding reasons to act and (b) being solicited to act. If I identify as a parent but do not readily see the world as a parent, I still have reasons to act as a parent (in light of my adopted identity) and can act deliberately according to the norms of that identity. But I need to act deliberately because the world does not (yet) solicit me as it would if I more fully had the identity of parent.[36] Conversely, as we see in backsliding aspirants, the world can solicit me to act according to an identity whose deliberative force I have disavowed.

1.3. A Multidimensional Account of Practical Identity

I propose that if we take Korsgaard's and Crowell's (Heideggerian) accounts not as competing but as highlighting distinct but interwoven aspects of practical identity, the resulting multidimensional account of practical identity allows us to better see the distinct contours of self-ignorance, aspiration, resignation, and denial. Moreover, such an account allows us to accept Crowell's broad Heideggerian point that "the greater part of our practical lives" is spent in pre-reflective, non-deliberative action and that primary self-awareness comes not through reflection or introspection but through how the world appears to us, while still holding that the capacity to reflect (for example, on who we are and want to be) still shapes our experience, for good and ill.[37] Thoughts about our values and aims can make certain possible actions more salient to us and others less salient.[38] But those same capacities also allow reflective self-awareness to pull apart from phenomenological self-awareness in ways that underpin self-ignorance, self-deception, denial, and bad faith.

Because the practical outlooks of aspirants are often (partly) shaped by residual practical identities, it can take time, work, and often luck for commitments like Samantha's to take hold, for the influence of disowned identities to

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my family. If I experience the same camera as quite suitable, this is because I am trying to make the prototype for a painting in the style of Gerhard Richter" ("Responsibility, Autonomy, and Affectivity," 216).

35   Crowell, "Responsibility, Autonomy, and Affectivity," 226.

36   Thanks to Mark Wrathall for highlighting this point for me.

37   Crowell, "Existential Sources of Normativity," 257.

38   Komarine Romdenh-Romluc uses the work of Merleau-Ponty to describe different roles that thought can play in action ("Thought in Action").

dissipate and for aspired-to identities to permeate or more fully polarize one's world. As a result, when people say, "That's not who I am," but their actions suggest otherwise, it can be hard to tell backsliding aspirants apart from those who are self-ignorant or in denial. These individuals all have tensions between their behavior (or actions) and their beliefs (or statements of commitment or disavowal), but their situations are different. As aspirants seek to change how they pre-reflectively live in the world, they can experience a sort of practical ambivalence because the polarizations of their world are in flux. But as aspirants, they acknowledge and are working through that ambivalence. The others, by contrast, either are not in positions to enact such a change or choose not to do so. To see how the multidimensional account of practical identity makes sense of a range of cases, we will discuss Samantha, Shakespeare's *Othello*, and several variations of a parent with workaholic tendencies.

1.4. Self-Ignorance and Practical Identities

When there is a gap between how someone sees themselves and how we (and others) see them, it is easy to chalk it up to willful (or semi-willful) self-deception. But active convincing need not be involved. Let us take Eric Schwitzgebel's claim that "[we] live in cocoons of ignorance, especially where our self-conception is at stake."[39] In many cases, the cocoons of ignorance related to self-conceptions (whether called self-ignorance or self-deception) boil down to a mismatch between the self-awareness of phenomenological practical identity—in which one pre-reflectively senses how to respond to different situations and can act accordingly—and the self-awareness of reflective practical identity.[40] We can notice and respond to the world's solicitations without seeing ourselves as having the identities that are tied up with that solicitational structure.

 The specific contours of our first-personal experience depend on our roles and characteristics, but our original experience of those roles and characteristics is distinct from (and prior to) our conscious thoughts about whether we inhabit some role or possess some characteristic. Describing how we pre-reflectively experience our identities, Merleau-Ponty writes:

> I am for myself neither "jealous," nor "curious," nor "hunchbacked," nor "a civil servant." We are often amazed that the disabled person or the person suffering from a disease can bear the situation. But in their own eyes they are not disabled or dying. Until the moment he slips into a

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39 Schwitzgebel, "Self-Ignorance," 197.

40 Herbert Fingarette similarly argues that we can notice things and guide our behavior accordingly without explicitly focusing our attention on them ("Self-Deception Needs No Explaining").

coma, the dying person is inhabited by a consciousness; he is every-
thing that he sees…. [Our particular characteristics] are the price we
pay, without even thinking about it, for being in the world.[41]

His claim that "I am for myself neither 'jealous,' nor 'curious,' nor 'hunchbacked,'
nor 'a civil servant'" does not mean that he—or, by extension, each of us—is
none of those things. The claim is that even if I assent to a proposition that I
am (an) *X*, I still cannot be, for myself, (an) *X*. It is not just that our thoughts
about ourselves in terms of such descriptions are phenomenologically second-
ary. The stronger claim is that we cannot relate to ourselves as (mere) objects to
which those qualities, characteristics, or identities apply.[42] Our characteristics
and identities shape the contours of our being-in-the-world—polarizing our
worlds, for example—but our fundamental first-personal experience of our
being-in-the-world is of the specific world made possible by those identities.

In this process, our being-in-the-world typically affects our judgments,
including judgments about ourselves. Merleau-Ponty writes: "'I exist as a
worker' or 'I exist as a bourgeois' first, and this mode of communication with
the world and society motivates both my revolutionary or conservative projects
and my explicit judgments ('I am a worker,' or 'I am a bourgeois')."[43] Because
our ways of being and styles of life motivate our explicit judgments—including
judgments about the sorts of people we are—judgments about ourselves tend
to track our being-in-the-world. However, those judgments are secondary and
can be clouded by various factors.[44] Simine Vazire suggests that our ability
even to see ourselves accurately is worse when the self-perception is of traits
thought to be highly desirable or undesirable, such as intelligence and creativ-
ity.[45] When we reflect, introspect, or think about what we are like, we can be

41   Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 458–59.

42   Thanks to Mark Wrathall for helping to develop this point.

43   Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 469.

44   There are various explanations for self-ignorance about practical identities. Lear describes
     unconscious practical identities (*A Case for Irony*); John Doris claims that we "contain
     unaccessed and unruly depths" (*Talking to Ourselves*). Some think we have good reason
     to quiet beliefs that go against our self-conceptions. V. S. Ramachandran suggests that
     certain kinds of self-deception and confabulation have evolved as tools for imposing "sta-
     bility, internal consistency and coherence on behavior" (*Phantoms in the Brain*, 254). To
     maintain stability, we can use "the so-called Freudian defenses—the denials, repressions,
     and self-delusion that govern our daily lives" (Ramachandran, 134). Frankfurt describes
     self-deception as an (ultimately misguided) attempt to escape the volitional ambivalence
     that can threaten robust human agency ("The Faintest Passion"). When our wills are
     divided, we may avoid volitional stalemate by telling ourselves that we do not *really* care
     about one of the competing desires.

45   Vazire, "Who Knows What about a Person?"

(and perhaps inevitably are) imperfectly aware of the practical identities that polarize our worlds.

Let us look at a couple of cases of potential self-ignorance of (portions of) one's phenomenological practical identity. Shakespeare's *Othello* offers a famous illustration of Merleau-Ponty's claim that the jealous person is not, for himself, jealous. If jealousy is a "green-eyed monster," the jealous lover could see a green-tinted world—suspecting his lover of infidelity—while thoroughly unaware of the tint and without thinking of himself as jealous.[46] He could have the phenomenological practical identity of a jealous lover without seeing himself as one. Of course, he *could* see himself as a jealous lover. But his thinking of himself as jealous is secondary to his inhabiting a world characterized by pervasive suspicion, wanting what others have, or dissatisfaction with his situation.

Next, imagine someone who says yes to a request to stay late at work the same night as a family event he has promised to attend. In the first version of the scenario, the parent is a *self-ignorant workaholic* who is reflectively unaware of the global way in which work polarizes his world. Even though he believes he has struck a balance between different areas of life, he sees the world primarily and pervasively in work-oriented ways. He seeks and takes on extra tasks, stays needlessly late at the office, overly diligently checks his email, and so forth. His actions respond so exclusively to work-related solicitations that it creates tension with his reflective practical identity (as someone with good work-life balance). This tension between his explicit self-conception and the way the world is polarized puts him in a position of self-ignorance. Although this tension sometimes leads to some cognitive dissonance, an intervention or a crisis may be needed for him to become reflectively aware of how his world is polarized and of the nature of the tension.

When such agents inhabit worlds polarized by identities with which they do not identify, the miscoordination between the different dimensions of practical identity is often described as self-ignorance or self-deception.

1.5. Out of the Garden: Responding to Lost Ignorance

These "cocoons of [self-]ignorance" resulting from miscoordination between explicit self-conceptions and world polarization can be threatened (often helpfully) in various ways. Sometimes we do it largely on our own, through reflection or introspection. But often we need others to point it out to us or to help us talk through them. However it happens, though, once we become better aware of both dimensions of our identity—including undesired characteristics

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46 Shakespeare, *Othello*, 3.3.170.

or phenomenological practical identities—pure self-ignorance is off the table. We then have various options, including:

1. Resignation: We can resign ourselves to the unsavory identity ("*That's just who I am*").
2. Aspiration: We can become aspirants and seek to change so that there is better harmony between our self-conceptions and the way our worlds are polarized ("*That's not who I want to be*" or the aspirational version of "*That's not who I am*").
3. Denial: We can deny that we are that sort of person or that there is any tension between these dimensions (the denial-laced "*That's not who I am*").

And we can and often do cycle between these and other responses.[47]

To illustrate these possibilities, let us look at three variations of our workaholic.

The resigned workaholic is reflectively aware of the global way in which work polarizes his world. He knows he works more than he would like, given other things he cares about. He is sometimes disappointed with himself for failing to do what he thinks is most important. But he has come to accept that he just is someone who works too much. He is not sure if it is ambition, insecurity, an unassailable work ethic, or a combination of these, but he has resigned himself to the situation. Even though he sometimes wishes he could do things differently, he thinks it is beyond his power to enact meaningful change, so he does not try.

In another variation, the individual already aspires to better work-life balance.

The aspirant is a self-acknowledged recovering workaholic. Having recognized his tendency to say yes to projects and to work in ways that conflict with his broader values, he has committed to strike a better balance between work, family, and other pursuits. And he is working to change. The request to stay late finds him inhabiting a world whose polarization is in flux—transitioning away from one in which work is always most salient and toward one in which other interests sometimes take priority. The world still solicits staying late, and he feels the motivational pull, but it now also solicits him to be with his family. When he says yes and stays at work, he is conflicted. Staying late is intelligible to him—it responds to how the world has been (and to some extent still is) polarized. But the

47 One could, for example, embrace the (previously) undesired characteristic or identity, perhaps revising one's beliefs about its desirability.

world's polarization is now less straightforward. Nonwork projects are more salient than they once were, even if his aspired-to practical identity and its values, cares, and dispositions are not yet as fully integrated as he would like.

Instead of aspiration or resignation, one could also turn to denial.

The workaholic who is in denial on some level realizes that he has workaholic tendencies and that these tendencies conflict with his other values. His friends and family regularly and (to him) irritatingly call him a workaholic. But rather than considering the possibility and, potentially, working to change, he denies the tendencies and insists to himself and others that he already has balance. As in the case of the self-ignorant, the tension between his phenomenological practical identity and his reflective practical identity persists. But he is more aware of the tension than is the self-ignorant. As in the case of the aspirant, he senses something is off-kilter, and his explicit thoughts and self-presentations have a performative element. However, unlike the aspirant, his thoughts and denial aim not to change but to perpetuate his current way of being. But there is also some resignation. Rather than seeking to change, he rejects the comments of friends and family and muffles his hunch that they might be right. If he continues in his denial, his reflective practical identity could become increasingly ineffectual, insensitive to the way the world appears to him.

Even though the person stays at the office in all variations, these individuals are in different agential situations. They do have some things in common. For example, if asked about being a workaholic, the self-ignorant, the aspirant, and the denier might all claim, "That's not who I am." And apart from the self-ignorant individual, they are all aware of miscoordination between the different dimensions of their identities. But even the more self-aware individuals respond to that self-awareness differently. When the aspirant and the denier say, "That's not who I am," one says it to reinforce a commitment to change and the other to avoid change. The resigned individual and the person in denial, then, each fails to properly account for a key aspect of human existence. And even though they fail to account for different aspects, they are both in bad faith. They both fail to take responsibility for the selves that they are—one by denying that their phenomenological practical identity is genuinely them, the other by denying that they (likely partly through their reflective practical identity) have the capacity to shape how the world appears to them.[48]

48 In Sartre's famous account, bad faith is possible because human beings have the two-fold property of being both "a facticity and a transcendence" (*Being and Nothingness,*

Some degree of self-awareness—including an awareness of the different dimensions of one's practical identity and the level of coordination between them—is typically a precondition for taking responsibility for who we are. Such self-awareness can facilitate self-governance and promote coherence among our values.[49] As we are better aware of how the world solicits us and how we (tend to) respond to those solicitations, we may be better able to respond to situations and, over time, to shift how we are solicited. This could ultimately help us better coordinate our different identities (such as parent and writer) and the different dimensions of those identities. But of course, improved self-awareness does not always lead us to take responsibility for ourselves. All too often, improved self-awareness leads to denial and the avoidance of responsibility. Taking responsibility can be difficult, perhaps partly because it can be difficult to change how the world is polarized for us.

1.6. World Polarization, Residual Practical Identities, and Practical Ambivalence

When we aspire to become something, we want not only to act a certain way but to bring about a "deep change in how one sees and feels and thinks."[50] We want our practical outlook and actions to naturally and seamlessly reflect the new identity. If I aspire to be a good parent, I want to see, feel, and think in a way that allows parental actions to be largely non-deliberative or "spontaneous," to borrow Brownstein's term.[51] Typically, we can respond skillfully yet non-deliberatively to situations only when the relevant norms and dispositions are so thoroughly incorporated into our way of being that they have become muscle memory, so to speak, and no longer require reflective deliberation.[52] The agent

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99). According to Sartre, "These two aspects of human-reality are in truth—and ought to be—capable of being validly coordinated. But bad faith does not want to coordinate them" (99). Bad faith involves what Wrathall calls "a motivated failure to see" that we are responsible for the disintegration or lack of coordination between facticity and transcendence ("Ambiguity, Opacity, and Sartrean Bad Faith," 287). Sartre's accounts of human existence and, by extension, bad faith are complex, and I do not argue here that the miscoordination described in my multidimensional account is identical to the miscoordination between facticity and transcendence that Sartre describes. I am suggesting, however, that there are (at least) relevant structural parallels, and that the multidimensional account of practical identity may help illuminate different varieties of bad faith. For more on Sartre's account of bad faith, see *Being and Nothingness*.

49 Or at least help us be more clear-eyed about the tensions in our lives.

50 Callard, *Aspiration*, 2.

51 Brownstein, *The Implicit Mind*.

52 Driving and typing are common examples of skills that start with very deliberate learning but, once one becomes skilled, can appear as very nuanced "autopilot." To be clear, practical identities need not begin with reflective deliberation. Some are largely the result of

who has "become" the identity now sees the world in light of the identity and can skillfully respond without deliberating about what norms apply in a situation. To become (or be) a certain kind of person, then, is to have (or develop) a certain practical outlook and to be able to inhabit the world accordingly.

The process of aspiration—of becoming (and then being) a certain kind of person—is thus often fraught and ongoing because successful aspiration involves changing not only how we see ourselves but also how the world is polarized for us. To effect these changes often involves not only acquiring new identities but also turning away or distancing ourselves from identities that, to that point, have shaped how we saw, felt, and thought about the world. Attempts at distancing can take many forms, but they sometimes involve explicitly disavowing previous identities or ways of being, as in Samantha's "I'm not going to be that person anymore." Merely verbal disavowal is obviously inadequate and can be worse, potentially involving deception of others or ourselves (and perhaps both) in the service of perpetuating bad behavior. But even genuine, clear-eyed attempts at disavowals can be frustratingly ineffectual, failing to eradicate the influence of renounced identities. The uptake of aspired-to identities can be slower and more difficult than we anticipate. Despite our best efforts, renounced identities can continue to affect, even hold sway over, our practical outlook. In short, we often find ourselves with *residual practical identities*, identities that continue to polarize our worlds even though we no longer value ourselves under the relevant descriptions.

Take Gary Watson's example of someone who "thinks his sexual inclinations are the work of the devil, that the very fact that he has sexual inclinations bespeaks his corrupt nature."[53] Even if this person were to stop believing that his sexual inclinations are the work of the devil or signs of his corrupt nature, his world could continue to be polarized in a way that makes sexual actions appear repulsive. The world would then solicit him according to an identity he no longer identifies with, and which could be at odds with his other reflective and/or phenomenological identities.[54] Or, turning to our earlier examples, even if Samantha no longer believes that she should apologize when she is not wrong, her world could still be polarized by the identity of one who preemptively and faultlessly apologizes. The world could still solicit her to unfairly take the blame for situations and to apologize to avoid conflict. If she were to

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acculturation. And even with actively acquired practical identities, the understanding of relevant norms is often largely inherited from and tacitly shaped by others.

53 Watson, "Free Agency," 19.

54 I have described residual phenomenological practical identities, but residual reflective practical identities are also possible. We could, for example, continue to identify with and value ourselves under some description after that identity no longer polarizes our world.

apologize, she would likely be disappointed with herself. But she would be disappointed precisely because the action would make sense to her and would indicate that she has not yet become who she aspires to be. We could say similar things about the person aspiring to better work-life balance who continues to see a thoroughly work-polarized world.

What should we say, then, about those who genuinely disavow some identity and want it to stop guiding their actions but continue to see the world through the lens of and act in keeping with the disavowed identity? In these cases of complex world polarization, the agent's world is polarized by the aspired-to identity *and* the renounced identity. The world could thus simultaneously solicit different actions, or the same action could appear as both attractive and repulsive, leading to a state of practical ambivalence.[55] This complex polarization reflects the complex identities of aspirants. But even practically ambivalent aspirants—whose worlds are polarized in different (perhaps competing) ways—are in a different position than those who are self-ignorant, resigned, or in denial.[56]

Even if aspirants do not or cannot see progress, by identifying with and committing to a different way to live, they have changed their reflective practical identities. And because reflectively endorsing or subjectively identifying with an identity often changes how our worlds are polarized—by changing our attention and changing the world's solicitations, as well as the strength of those solicitations—changing one's reflective practical identity already tends to change one's phenomenological practical identity. But until a more complete repolarization takes hold for these work-in-progress aspirants, these changes are usually partial and effortful, more deliberative and reflective than habitual or second nature. The aspired-to identities have not yet taken hold, and disavowed identities still have influence. Because reflective endorsement and subjective identification are neither necessary nor sufficient for one to robustly have some phenomenological practical identity, effective aspiration often depends on continuing to productively acknowledge and work through residual identities.

I have focused here on the complex world polarization and the resulting practical ambivalence we see in aspirants. But because human agency and

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55   Practical ambivalence can also arise when different reflective identities have competing demands. For example, consciously identifying as both parent and professor could lead to competing pressures. But even if there are potential pressures between two (or more) competing reflective identities, practical ambivalence in aspirants is distinct because one experiences practical ambivalence even though one's identity is settled on the reflective level.

56   Another possibility is a type of radical acceptance of the sort of person one is. Like resignation, acceptance involves a recognition of one's phenomenological practical identity. But it does not completely cede control over the situation and could be preliminary to aspiration.

selfhood involves negotiating and coordinating the different dimensions of ourselves, these phenomena are common and not isolated to aspirants (at least insofar as Agnes Callard understands aspiration). Even maintaining some identity—say, being a parent or teacher—is an ongoing process in which we interpret the identity and its contours, inhabit a world polarized by that identity, learn from others, and, as we live in the world, revise our understandings of our values and identities, and on and on. For these reasons, options like denial and resignation always lurk around the corner. When we find ourselves doing things that we know we should not or wish we would not, rather than facing the tensions between the different dimensions of our practical identity and working to better coordinate them, it is all too easy (or all-too-human) to preserve the tension or gap by denying either its existence or our capacity to close it.

2. ASPIRATION, DENIAL, AND RESIGNATION

2.1. That's Not Who I Am

Just as Samantha says, "I'm not going to be that person anymore," we can say, "That's not who I am. From this moment on …" in order to disavow actions reflecting certain values and to reinforce a commitment to a different path or set of values. When we claim to not be "that person anymore" but do what "that person" would do, it can be a way for us, as aspirants, to distance ourselves from our past identities as part of an effort to change our way of being. But we can say the same words while in denial in order to avoid or deny responsibility for our actions. Responsibility-avoidant disavowals simply express denial that some identity applies to us and are decidedly not part of an effort to change.[57] This kind of denial can ultimately impede our ability to become who we want to be or, in some cases, to act as the people we think we already are.

Aspirants and deniers both have a miscoordination between the identities with which they explicitly identify (their reflective practical identities) and the identities that polarize their world (their phenomenological practical identities). As a result, we might call all such agents self-deceived if they were to, like Samantha, claim to "not be that person anymore." But that would be a mistake. The denier's denial that she is a certain way is entwined with a lack of interest in

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57 Specifics matter, of course. Self-ignorant denial is different from denial couched in motivated (somewhat self-aware) self-deception. However, because we can deny only what has been raised as a possibility, if we are in denial, pure self-ignorance is probably off the table. More commonly, as we become better aware of potential tensions between dimensions of our identity—or, more generally, of some unpleasant trait, quality, or tendency—instead of taking responsibility and working to change, we double down on those identities while simultaneously denying that we have them.

changing in order to better coordinate her phenomenological practical identity with her explicit self-conception. By contrast, the aspirant is keenly aware of her phenomenological practical identity and is trying to change herself in order to better coordinate how she sees the world with how she (aspirationally) thinks of herself. When she says, "That's not who I am," she is not attempting accurate self-assessment so much as stating a changed self-conception and committing to be (or not be) a certain kind of person. She is not avoiding the difficult path of changing her orientation toward the world but reinforcing her commitment to that change.[58]

This is why aspirant Samantha, as an aspirant, is different, for example, from someone who claims to be "a nice guy" but who is consistently rude and inconsiderate and shows no effort to change how he treats others. The self-identified "nice guy" could be merely self-ignorant. Or he could be in denial if, when pressed, he refuses to consider his actions or simply reinterprets them to preserve a pleasant self-conception. But Samantha is different. When she apologizes despite her commitment, she acts according to a residual phenomenological practical identity whose influence she is working to leave behind.

2.2. Denial and Resignation

In one form of denial, we identify fully with our reflective practical identities—"That is who I *really* am," for example—and reject that our phenomenological practical identities are genuinely ours. This form of denial simultaneously overvalues and misunderstands the role of reflective practical identity. To be sure, the emphasis on reflective practical identity gets something right. Our capacity for reflectiveness (and, by extension, our reflective practical identity) allows us to shape our phenomenological practical identity; it can help us direct and take responsibility for our ways of being. However, in the form of denial in which we fully identify with our reflective practical identity in a way that detaches it from our phenomenological practical identity, we end up undercutting the influence of our reflective practical identity. When we claim in denial that we are not (or are) that person, we weaken or undermine our ability to be self-responsible with regard to that aspect of our existence. This often appears as self-enhancement, in which we downplay evidence that conflicts with a positive self-conception by exaggerating the good and minimizing the bad. But one could also identify with a negative self-conception and downplay conflicting evidence. Whatever the details, however, insofar as the denier hides from or ignores his phenomenological practical identity, he risks ever-increasing tensions and dissonance between

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58   For recent treatments of aspiration and moral improvement, see Callard, *Aspiration*; and Stohr, *Minding the Gap*.

his explicit self-conceptions and his way of being. Though not always pleasant, acknowledging that unwanted qualities (and residual practical identities) are part of ourselves is often crucial to being able to better work through them. To actively change our way of being requires us not only to be somewhat aware of it but also to take responsibility for it.[59] In denial, we refuse to consider that there could be a miscoordination between our self-conceptions and our way of being. Or if we consider it, we refuse to take responsibility for the dimensions or their coordination. In this way, as Sartre describes it in his discussion of bad faith, "I am in a place where no reproach can reach me."[60]

Although resignation looks different from denial, it is the other side of the same coin. In resignation, the agent is very sensitive to certain features of his phenomenological practical identity but fails to understand or acknowledge that he has some power to bring about a change in how the world appears to him. He resigns himself to the way the world appears to him, as if he were a mere object and not the sort of being who can shape his existence. The resigned workaholic, for example, is keenly aware that work considerations thoroughly polarize his world but fails or refuses to see that how his world is polarized and how he lives in the world depend (at least partly) on how he self-identifies, how he understands his roles, and so forth. In denying (or refusing to see) that how his roles and dispositions shape his practical identity depends partly on how he takes them up, for example, he also denies (or tries to deny) responsibility for himself. He sees his reflective practical identity not as a dimension of himself that can shape and shift his phenomenological practical identity, but as an inert acknowledgment of who he is.[61]

The denier and the resigned individual both separate themselves from the aspirant or the proto-aspirant in the way they avoid responsibility for their whole selves. When someone genuinely asks themselves if they are jealous or a workaholic, for example, they put themselves in a different space than someone who reflexively and emphatically denies being jealous or a workaholic without considering the possibility.[62] Knee-jerk emphatic denial closes

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59 Because of these difficulties, much apparent aspiration could in fact be denial in which we identify with our aspirational self and deny that unwanted features or dimensions of ourselves are our own.

60 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 100.

61 Resignation, so described, is distinct from a kind of acceptance that is compatible with self-responsibility. Such acceptance could lead to self-directed aspirational change. But it could also manifest as one embracing and taking responsibility for one's way of being without the deep change usually associated with aspiration.

62 Take, for example, the question that guides Neil Levy in "Am I Racist? Implicit Bias and the Ascription of Racism." If we understand racial biases as functioning not merely on the individual level but as structuring the social world in various ways, there are unique

us to the possibility of learning about and potentially changing ourselves. The resigned agent's denial of the capacity to change is obvious, but perhaps less obvious is the way in which, like denial, resignation tries to evade responsibility for actions. Although the denier and the resigned individual veer too far in different directions, they similarly (attempt to) avoid responsibility in ways that undermine their agency.

3. CONCLUSION

Earlier we asked, "What sort of person is Samantha?" Specifically, what sort of person is she after she claims "I'm not going to be that person anymore" but then finds herself doing the very things "that person" did? Because a backsliding aspirant can look a lot like someone who is in denial, we might be tempted to say that Samantha is in denial. But we are now better positioned to see why that is not the case. If someone were to catch her apologizing and ask her, "Well, is that the sort of person you are?" before responding, Samantha might first want to ask how much time her interlocutor has. But once that is settled, if we assume that her aspiration and commitment to change is sincere, she can genuinely say, "That's not who I am." At the very least, she has changed her reflective practical identity, an important dimension of who she is. At the same time, a more honest and likely more effective aspirational path would also lead her to acknowledge that the tendency to apologize is also part of who she is, albeit a part that she is trying to change. Whereas the denier refuses to consider the possibility, Samantha fully owns not only that she has been "that sort of person" but that, to some extent, she still is "that person." In an important sense, then, Sartre's Inez is right that what we do shows who we truly are. But to really understand "what we do," we need a nuanced picture of the agent.

Statements of disavowal made by backsliding aspirants are different from those made by those who are in denial. When entangled with denial, they are likely attempts to evade responsibility without genuinely changing or making amends. By contrast, for aspirants, such statements can be a way to take responsibility for oneself or renew commitment to change. Yet, even though reflective practical identities (partly) shape our world and life, explicit aspirations do not automatically take hold and do not exhaust how the world is polarized for us. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "My freedom, even if it has the power to commit me to [some new cause], does not have the power to turn me immediately into

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complexities facing the aspiring anti-racist. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting potential differences between different types of aspiration, including the ineliminable social dimension of some things we may aspire to become or leave behind.

what I decide to be."[63] When Samantha says, "I'm not going to be that person anymore," she commits herself to a new path, but that commitment does not yet fully and immediately change her into the person she aspires to be. Until her everyday being-in-the-world more fully reflects that commitment, she is not yet fully one who apologizes only when she is wrong.

For various reasons, deep, multidimensional change is no small feat. For one, the shapes of identities—inherited or actively acquired—are not entirely up to us. To some degree, we are unconsciously socialized into ways of being. Even when we consciously work to inhabit a role and to live a certain way, the dimensions of our identities—the shapes of roles, the way we are disposed to act in different situations, our notion(s) of the good life, and so forth—are largely acquired through upbringing and socialization. The privileged child may not think of himself as privileged. He could attribute his success entirely to his hard work while failing to see how his privilege has served as a boost or safety net along the way. The talented athlete sees specific actions as appropriate responses to situations without realizing how her athletic gifts make actions viable for her that are not for most people. Her pre-reflective experience of herself is not as *exceptionally talented*, but as *take (make) this sho*t or *run past that defender*.[64] Or returning to Samantha, before she realizes that she has been apologizing when she was not wrong and commits to change, her initial experience in relevant situations is of a world calling for apologies in tense situations, not of herself as one who apologizes when she is not wrong. Once aware of the tendency, however, she has options. She can take responsibility for different dimensions of herself and the coordination between them—either embracing the tendency perhaps, or, as we have described her, changing how she thinks about herself in hopes of effecting deeper change.

Frankfurt claims that humans are distinctive because they can want to be different, in their preferences and purposes, from what they are.[65] The multi-dimensional account goes further. Our aspirations—who and how we want to be—partly constitute who we are. But we are also more than our self-conceptions and aspirations (or reflective practical identities), so it can be an uneasy fit between this dimension of ourselves, on the one hand, and how we see the world and act, on the other. We could be better, worse, or just different. But the nature of those tensions and how we relate to them—particularly, how we seek to resolve (or, in cases of denial, avoid resolving) them—underpin

63 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 473.

64 See, for example, David Foster Wallace's description of Roger Federer in "Federer Both Flesh and Not" (20–21).

65 Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person."

self-ignorance, denial, resignation, or aspiration. Our self-conceptions and aspirations play crucial roles in human agency. But just as we distort the nature of who we are if we overlook their role in determining the sorts of people we are, there is a parallel risk in overvaluing their importance in the selves that we are.[66]

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