

Chapter 3

**THE CEMENT OF SOCIAL ALCHEMY:
PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF
MIND-GROUP AND PERSONAL IDENTITY**

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ABSTRACT

This essay advances an original theory of mind-group and personal identity and at the same time critically examines related concepts in the work of Peter Strawson and Harry Frankfurt. A mind group is here defined as a kind of social group that is built up by way of the practical beliefs, desires, and preferences of those who make up the group. Part One of the paper introduces a summative model of mind-group identity. It explicates social life as a net of beliefs and desires, the points of intersection of which are persons who share these beliefs and desires. The second Part propounds an account of “person” that strikes a balance between situationists, who hold that persons change their behavior in every new circumstance, and the champions of “character” in virtue ethics. In the interest of achieving this compromise position between these competing orientations, we consider persons as quasi-geometric figures that at once persist in the current of time yet concomitantly change under differing circumstances. Our practical preferences are what determine the frame that facilitates analysis of the person as a quasi-geometric figure. The paper concludes by showing, in Part Three, how the conception of person introduced here resolves difficulties of the summative model.

Keywords: collective intentionality, Harry Frankfurt, mind groups, personal identity, Peter Strawson

INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL ONTOLOGY THE OTHER WAY ROUND

When the discussion of collective intentionality commenced some twenty-five years ago, the principal aim was to oppose the individualistic epistemologies that have reigned since Descartes and John Locke. A seminal inspiration of the new movement was Wittgenstein's insistence on the social character of meaning. True, we often cognize the external world in solitude. It is equally true, however, that we get acquainted with, believe, desire, or accept objects, facts, and ideas collectively. Of special interest in debates on collective intentionality were the "plural subjects" of knowledge and belief.

This paper investigates collective intentionality from a different standpoint, namely that of the person as individual. At the same time, it follows the mainstream collectivist epistemologists who approach social reality as anti-realist constructivists. This approach, which has its roots in Kant's transcendental philosophy, claims that the external social world is not given to us but is set up through particular intentional states. This position, as we shall see presently, is not necessarily relativistic.

The discussion that follows concentrates on two issues: (i) why and how a person joins or remains part of a mind community, a social group; (ii) the significance of collective intentions, beliefs and desires for the social epistemology of every person as an individual. Addressing these issues involves developing several supporting concepts and critically assessing alternative theories.

I. A CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY OF PERSONS AND MIND GROUPS

1. The Problem

"Men make for themselves *pictures* of ideal forms of life"—so Peter F. Strawson was the first to declare in his paper "Social Morality and Individual Ideal" (Strawson 1974: 26, emphasis added). Over the course of time, according

to Strawson, we stick to—make pictures of—those series of forms of life that we believe or desire to join.

The first point to observe about Strawson's view is that the "pictures" in question can hardly be understood in the conventional sense of the word. Indeed, our perception of what we so depict for ourselves often falls far short of anything like our experience of what is visually intelligible. It is thus more correct to think of them as *ideals*, and to paraphrase Strawson this way: "Men make for themselves *ideals* of forms of life". We understand ourselves as being part of these forms (Bourdieu 1987).

But what are ideals? They are, first and foremost, models of self-identification that the feeling of "being a part of a mind group" impels people to adopt. We join a mind group or we remain part of a mind group because we feel comfortable to be one of its members. An example: Wittgenstein "joined the ranks" of the Austrian–Hungarian Army in August 1914 because he felt safe and "at home" in it (as his biographers Brian McGuinness and Ray Monk tell us). A defining element of such affiliation is that our *taste* decides which social group we shall join. This position is close to the view of those theorists who hold that members of a group typically share a common narrative. In such contexts, the narrative plays the role of an ideal that renders the group coherent. To be more exact, ideals are the regulative elements of social life, while the beliefs and desires that we attach to those ideals are the "cement"¹ that bonds individual persons together as a group.

The fact that one and the same person adheres to divergent ideals at the same time, whether at a unique juncture or at different periods of life, explains the enigma of the "multiple selves", our multiple identities, as described in Elster (1987)—our recurrent attachment to different mind groups. Indeed, each individual person entertains beliefs and desires that attach to diverse clusters of intentions. This occurs across the entire spectrum of intentional frameworks, from deliberate decisions to day-dreams. One seminal implication of this is that we readily identify ourselves with the characters that feature in narratives of different kinds. Strawson inferred that this "partly explains, among other things, the enormous charm of reading novels, biographies, histories" (1974: 27).

A person typically belongs to various mind groups—ideological, cultural and political. These range from national and ethnic affiliations and political parties to sports partialities and various fashionable trends and praxes in science and the arts. We commit ourselves to them on the strength of our practical desires and beliefs. Hence the objects of such desires and beliefs are most varied.

¹ In using this metaphor we follow Mackie (1980).

Some people construct inner selves in large part by joining those who follow the English soccer club of “Manchester United”, others do so by joining the devotees of Giuseppe Verdi’s operas, still others by connecting with mountain-climbing enthusiasts, with worshippers of Hollywood celebrities, or with freedom fighters of various sorts. Our practical attitudes thus do not concern our relation to other persons only. Consequently, they are not necessarily moral in nature; nor are they necessarily political. They can be simply characterised as *practical* in that they relate directly to how we live our life.

Conversely, and from a more general standpoint,² we can conceive of social life, which is to say the human world, as a net of different ideals that we believe and desire, the point of intersection of which is the person.

Different forms of society can be seen as resulting from the interplay of various constellations of acceptances, beliefs, and desires of the persons who constitute it. Also different forms of social movement result from combinations of sets of ever changing acceptances, beliefs and desires (cf. Kennedy 1987). The latter bringing people together, serve as the cement that secures social identity of social groups.

2. Preliminary Elucidations

Some preliminary discussion of the very concept of a “mind group” is in order. Mind groups are different from physically determined groups of people, such as that of the individuals who live on Backer Street in London, or the group of all bald Englishmen. A mind group results from the interplay of beliefs, desires, and other intentional states—i.e., the elements of the mental ontology of its members.

The ideals the members of such groups strive to achieve, or to which they are willing to subscribe, are common property. While thus social in nature, mind groups are so only in this indirect sense. They differ from social groups in the strict sense, such as academic classes, leisure or civic clubs, or sports teams, whose members are personally acquainted with and influence one another. In general, the members of mind groups are strangers to each other, although they share the same dreams and desires.

The mind group’s ideals differ from any individual person’s private endeavors and plans, which might be to acquire wealth, for example, or to earn an academic degree, to become a champion in wrestling, or to win a prestigious award

² Such general point of view is useful, for example, by making explorations of social history.

for artistic achievement. Although the strongest desires and beliefs fuel such ambitions, they are private, not social. Still, these private plans are socially assigned. The motivation driving one person to become a wrestling champion might be to join the group honoured in the Wrestler's Hall of Fame; while what drives another's ambition to get rich might be the prospect of joining the society of rich. This point reflects the fact that no strict boundary sets apart private from group ideals.

Mind groups include what Margalit and Raz (1990) have called "encompassing groups", such as nations, which assume the right to self-determination and have precise, fixed boundaries. Included as well are ethnic and religious groups, and even informal groups—e.g., the "Tottenham Hotspurs" Football Club supporters—which have more porous boundaries.

The principal defining characteristic of mind groups is that membership in them is grounded upon *self-identification*, and thus upon part of the *self-definition* of their members. As a result, the kinds of problems that mind groups face are intrinsically related to problems of personal identity (a topic that the second Part of this paper addresses).

Correlatively, on the social side what helps cement the affiliation of individual members of encompassing and other complex mind groups is the same factor that holds together mind groups of the simplest make-up. We can for that reason analyze the latter in the interest of elucidating both the construction of complex mind groups and how they function.

Before turning to this analysis, it remains to observe that the philosophy of mind-group identity introduced and developed here is only one of many alternative models that aid inquiries into specific mind-group situations. In other words, what is on offer here is not dogmatic (canonical) but exploratory (investigative) project.

3. Emendations

The present section develops and refines, by way of emendation, the model of mind-group identity adumbrated in the preceding section. A possible critical remark against this model is that in many cases we join a social group, or we remain in one, despite the fact that it is not emotionally attractive to us. Consider two examples:

- (i) According to John Searle (2010: 14 ff.), the declaration, acceptance and recognition of "status functions" is the most important characteristic of

social life. Yet we belong to institutions or status quos whose validity we merely acknowledge *faux de meilleure*: they do not embody our ideals.

- (ii) Most intimate mind groups are built up around what one can term “general practices” that epitomize each individual’s framework relation to the practical world. General practices, such as the particular natural language we speak, are, as Peter Strawson noted, given to us. We acquire them through the cultural context in which we were born and raised. Not being a matter of our autonomous choice, our membership in such mind groups is something that we scarcely realize: they are simply part of our “organism”.³ Under such circumstances, it scarcely seems appropriate to debate the pictures of ideals that we “*make* for ourselves”. We remain content simply to be “at peace” with them.

In connection with such types of mind groups Strawson spoke, as we saw, about pictures of ideal *forms of life*. It may be better to explain the identity of mental groups in terms of this concept, employed by Wittgenstein, than in terms of his notion of “picture”, or even the concept of “ideals”. We shall speak here, then, of “forms of life,” although looking past Wittgenstein to its initial use by Eduard Spranger, who introduced the concept in 1916 to signal “different styles of thought”, which Janik and Toulmin gloss as “different systems of regulative principles” (1973: 231).⁴ Consistent with this usage, we shall understand forms of life as “shared ‘practices’ [or] ‘customs’ ” Seabright (1987: 11).

In light of the preceding commentary we can refer to “social alchemy” as the product of the interplay of different forms of life, every one of which has its specific character. After becoming part of a particular form of life, those affiliated with it simply “follow its rule”.

One can argue, further, that the ontological plane of “forms of life” is one level “higher” than that of ideals. Indeed, ideals are merely *constitutive means* for joining or remaining within a group. More particularly, they are the content of the intentional states that constitute the identity of the forms of life. By contrast, forms of life determine the “spirit” of groups (Pettit 2009), the way they think and act. In the classical sense, forms of life are the *essence* of mind groups. We feel affection for, or at least tolerate the forms of life in which we are involved.

³ Cf. with Wittgenstein: “Colloquial language is a part of the human organism and is not less complicated than it.” (Tractatus, 4.002).

⁴ For details see Spranger (1921).

The foregoing amplifications of the conception of mind-group identity do not require any change in terminology. Indeed, forms of life are time and again invisible or ineffable. Things look differently in relation to ideals that are demonstrable with a high degree of clarity. Moreover, it is often the case that our access to the forms of life is possible only through the ideals that lead to us to adopt them. For this reason the key concept of the present analysis is “ideals” and not “forms of life”.

II. PERSONS

4. Persons as Geometrical Objects

Authors that adopt constructivist accounts of social life are typically accused of “situationism,” according to which persons change the traits of their behavior in every new environment. Against it, neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics concentrates attention upon the character of the acting person. The character of the acting person guarantees that his actions take a particular “personological” form.

Besides criticisms that the neo-Aristotelian theorists have leveled against the constructivist philosophy of personality, another objection is that the latter cannot explain the objective character of moral norms. The proponents of this argument, the normative realists, claim that we cannot introduce moral norms based solely on the grounds of our practical taste. Obligations do not come and go in our life like our aesthetic preferences do: “People are not ... born free—they are born into a civil order that will impose duties and obligations on them.” (Blackburn 2001: 105)

We shall presently address these difficulties, eschewing the Aristotelian concept of character with its ineludible metaphysical baggage. The proposal here is that significant advantages accrue if we consider persons as quasi-geometric figures—as persistent geometric entities that have well-segmented topological structure. The idea is to conceive of persons as such figures in view of their idiosyncratic boundaries and shapes (personological Gestalts), determined by their practical intentions, which organize their “practical space”. The latter term functions here analogously to the term “logical space” as employed by Wittgenstein. Both logical and practical spaces differ from physical space. They are “to be understood [best] in the general mathematical sense, i.e. as a set endowed with a geometrical and topological or some other structure” (Mormann 1994).

As we shall see, albeit with some critical qualifications, Harry Frankfurt's theory of persons substantiates the quasi-geometrical view. Frankfurt was perhaps the first contemporary philosopher to speak of persons in geometrical terms:

As the set of its essential characteristics specifies the limits of what a triangle can be, so does the set of actions that are unthinkable for a person⁵ specify the limits of what the person can will to do. (Frankfurt 1988: 188)

By contrast with Frankfurt, however, the concept of persons as geometrical objects fielded here is not simply a simile but a more directly analogous heuristic.

That we can regard persons as geometric figures, limited and ipso facto molded within the boundaries that their intentionality establishes, is borne out by the fact that one of the most appropriate ways of assessing someone's actions, performances and preferences (taste) is by evaluating his *integrity* (wholeness)—the persistency of his *shape* (*Gestalt*) as a person. This is something to which practical situationists, who assume that persons are simply clusters (bundles) of desires and beliefs awaiting fulfillment, fail to do justice. Against Hume and Russell, we can construe these bundles as (i) necessarily connected together, (ii) in certain form, (iii) and ordered in a particular direction. They are *configured* within practical-geometrical figures that have relative stability.

We should note here that the necessity which obtains in this connection is not absolute in the Kantian sense but changeable, relative. This reflects the circumstance that a person's shape and boundaries alter over the course of time,⁶ and that it is our social taste that in part constructs the necessity in question.

This approach to the quasi-geometric structure of persons has considerable explanatory power. In particular, it proves instrumental to determining how people follow politics, persistently carry out life-plans, and so forth. Further, it aids to discover how they can be happy or satisfied or, on the contrary, nurture *resentment* over social or even natural events.⁷ They are all this since what happens in their social environment satisfies, or dissatisfies, their expectations which they have as cohesive wholes—as quasi-geometric forms. At the same time, these geometric forms are subject to change.

⁵ See the discussion of the *unthinkable* in § 6.

⁶ On this point we make use of the concept of “relative necessity” introduced by Michael Friedman in philosophy of physics (cf. Friedman 2001).

⁷ The latter was the main problem in Strawson (1962).

The theory of persons and mind groups outlined here directly challenges intensional theories of personality, specifically neo-Kantian ethical theories, such as that of Christine Korsgaard (see Korsgaard 2009). Korsgaard argues that it is only action that engenders a unity of the person, a kind of unity that acting in conformity with prescribed norms achieves. This conception fails, however, to do justice to the fact that we have our specific—personal—*contemplative* partialities (sporting, aesthetic, religious, and other preferences) that are not connected with plans for acting. Every one of the titular “three sisters” in Anton Chekhov’s play has a personal, an intimate affection for Moscow. The city is in effect an *ideal* shared by all of them. Still, this affection is not necessarily linked to their ability to act.

While the niches that—as practical–geometric figures—people build up around themselves (and thereby construct themselves as persons) are mental, they *not* merely imaginary. On the contrary, they are real, inasmuch as they are built up, superimposed upon facts—on material relations of geography, economy and social practice. Clearly this variant of social constructivism escapes any charge of relativism,⁸ a point corroborated as well by the fact that personal niches are most effective in the theaters of actual social and private life.

5. Ultimate Ideals

We noted in section 3 that it is through the nets of socially relevant dispositions, beliefs, and desires in which a person lives that he constructs a mental habitation, or niche, around himself. An additional factor that calls for consideration relative to this is that the intentional state that composes each person’s mental niche is often directed toward objects that he really “cares about,” in the special sense developed by Harry Frankfurt.⁹

One should not confuse *caring about*, in this context, with *liking* or with *wanting* this or that. Unlike merely liking or wanting, caring about this or that object or ideal involves *necessity*.¹⁰ We are committed to what we care about; this is our “practical commitment”. If we deviate from that commitment, we “suffer an uncomfortable sense of detriment or loss” (Frankfurt 1999: 160).

The objects we care about are our *ultimate ideals*. What binds us to our ultimate ideals is *love*, the most important type of bond “cementing,” as it were,

⁸ For criticism of social constructivism see Boghossian (2007).

⁹ We adopt the concept of “caring about” following Frankfurt (1988).

¹⁰ On what we mean under “practical necessity” see Part Three.

our practical affiliations. All other components of our personal mental habitation, being less important to us, are connected by way of intentional states of lesser intensity: sympathy, empathy, thrill, and so forth. The latter are a weaker kind of social bond, something manifest in the fact that we can exchange them without much suffering and sacrifice.

Below is a short scale of kinds of social bond (cement) ordered according to their cohesive strength:

- i Objects that we “care about” in Frankfurt’s sense: they are most important to us—we love them.
- ii Objects that we like or desire.
- iii Objects of sympathy, empathy, thrill, etc.
- iv Objects that we tolerate.
- v Occurrent objects that we merely allow to happen.

6. Ultimate Boundaries

Having delineated the boundaries of personological niches as mental in nature, and having defined them as ideals, we see how they serve as our regulative principles. In general case, ideals are vague. This means that, usually, we have no exact knowledge of the boundaries of our personality. We often learn what we really care about only when we are engaged in action. Of course, this does not imply that one’s ideals are connected only to actions; we have already observed that there are many contemplative ideals. Those ideals that enable us to act are simply the most determinate.

The point is that we test our boundaries best when we act. Indeed, we may sincerely believe that we wish to perform this or that action. But when faced with executing the action, “when push comes to shove”, we often find that we cannot bring ourselves to carry out our plan. We may recognize that it is *un-thinkable* for us to act in any such way. And it is exactly this factor of the “un-thinkable” that defines the ultimate boundaries of our personality.¹¹

Ultimate boundaries are as impermeable as the concrete walls of a house; they feature a genuinely geometric (topological) necessity. By the same token, they are largely invisible to us, and not only because we get acquainted with their actual configuration when we act. They are more discernible to outside

¹¹ We have typical example of boundaries-testing by sporting events: a team tests its boundaries first when it is on the pitch, playing a championship match.

observers. Teachers, for example, ideally know the personological boundaries of their charges as students better than the students themselves. Likewise, competent trainers ideally know the boundaries of their charges as players better than the athletes themselves.

The foregoing analysis elucidates in personological terms why what we want here and now is most often not what we really want: it is not part of the ultimate level of our volitions (Frankfurt 1988: 163). This explains why one's ultimate boundaries cannot be defined in terms of explicit (realized) conscious desires, or conscious judgments.¹² Indeed, (i) it is no secret that satisfaction of a specific desire does not guarantee that our real needs will be met. It may be the case that one's articulated desire is not one's true desire. (ii) Nor do we necessarily satisfy our needs when we follow our judgment. To be sure, as Frankfurt has remarked, "a person who acknowledges that something has considerable intrinsic value does not thereby commit himself to caring about it" (Frankfurt, 1999: 158).

These considerations bring us to the hierarchy of the individual person's mental ontology, which manifests a rather complicated structure. In a way, it is analogous to one's geographical environment. A person has a private dwelling, a town, a province, a country to which he belongs. He is committed to these socio-geographical strata with successively decreasing strength. Correlatively, each person acts within a hierarchy of successively attenuated orders of beliefs and desires.

When a one constructs one's mental habitation, one's niche, without reservation, his commitment to it is decisive. One is engaged in it wholeheartedly, "in the belief that no further accurate inquiry would require him to change his mind" (ibid.: 169). Frankfurt calls this "the resonance effect," in that the commitment resounds within the individual perpetually, whereby his personality achieves its definitive, its geometric integrity.

7. Criticism of Harry Frankfurt's Interpretation of Persons

As he concludes his account of the unthinkable, Frankfurt remarks that a person's "shape" is defined by "the boundaries of his will" (ibid.: 114). The practical necessity of a person's boundaries is thus intrinsically volitional. What we require in order to breach the walls of our mental niche is not power but will. A person does not overstep his boundaries "because he is *unwilling* to oppose

¹² Sigmund Freud's descriptions of such cases are widely known.

[them] and because, furthermore, his unwillingness is *itself something* he is unwilling to alter” (Frankfurt, 1988: 87). In other words, the person is content to reside within his personal habitation, regardless of whether outsiders censure such an attitude as willingness to stay in a self-imposed prison. Such a person simply cannot develop a desire to quit his mental niche. Frankfurt’s conclusion ascribes a form of irrationalism to our mental ontologies as persons: “Volition pertains more closely than reason to our experience of ourselves” (ibid.: viii).

Frankfurt’s position is open to fundamental question on a number of points.

For one, while it is really the case that we often do not want to quit our mental niche, this passivity is not merely a product of our will but of the quality and strength of our practical beliefs and desires. In cases of this sort it is apparent that our beliefs are simply not strong enough to produce the change, to motivate our will. The role of the will in such instances is rather supplementary to our social attitudes. In fact, the will simply “turns on” the act of changing the constellation of our practical stances, after which they reach a new equilibrium. This act of will, however, is itself occasioned by the changes in intensity of our practical tastes; the latter have priority over the will. One can invoke on this head the authority of Wittgenstein, who claimed in (1979: 87) that the will is an *act* and so does not pertain to the *content* of our practical world. The content consists instead of the ideals to which we stick by way of our beliefs and desires.

Embracing their conception, we reject the idea that the boundaries of a person’s will determine his topological form (boundaries). Rather, what determine an individual’s topographical form are his beliefs and desires, products of his practical taste.

To be sure, a person’s changing (acquiring, embracing or abandoning) of his ideals is generally a contingent matter and does not follow a predetermined plan. This element of contingency reflects the fact that belief is an involuntary act, by contrast with the voluntary act of deliberately *accepting* something (Wry 2001: 325). Indeed, “I cannot decide to believe at will the way I can decide to raise my art at will” (Elster 2007: 133). A typical example is the case of a person’s having a change of heart about some issue. Usually such change comes and goes without warning symptoms or signals; we can barely plan or produce such a transformation of inner attitude at will; the will comes when the new attitude has already emerged. Accepting a new ideal is a matter of good *feeling*, not a matter of will. Consider the change of our sporting partialities. We are fans of the team A. After a period of time, however, we start to feel unexplainable affections for team B; till one day we realize that our sympathies lie totally with team B. It is often difficult to say what precipitates such changes. But time and again our feelings simply change course.

8. Practical and Theoretical Reason United

A further objection to Frankfurt's argument is that the form of rationalism that he criticizes is rather one-sided. Thinkers such as Bertrand Russell (1918: 16–29), for example, see reason as always linked to human practical tastes. The latter are indispensable in rational life; we employ reason to assess them merely from time to time.

Similarly, from the standpoint articulated here, our rational and practical judgments (taste) throughout life go hand in hand. We rationally judge a practical state of affairs, determine how it will develop in the future. At the same time, we also assess it through our judgment of taste and either embrace it as part of our ideals and beliefs, or dismiss it. These two kinds of judgment are the principal means of further change in our personal geometry.

Another objection to Frankfurt's conception of person is that "caring about" is not only a practical relation; it can be also a purely theoretical one. Indeed, we stick to a theory for the same "deep" reasons that, say, we became fans of the "Pittsburgh Steelers": we feel a strong sympathy for it; it seems unthinkable to embrace another theory. This feeling can be only partly explained by the fact that new evidence or arguments cannot decisively refute "our theory." There is no *experimentum crucis* that speaks against it.

Substantiating this claim is Wittgenstein's (1956: III, §§ 30–33) conception that proofs in mathematics are the "bed-rocks" of calculation, these bed-rocks being constructed by way of beliefs and convictions instilled in us in the practice (drill) of calculating. In other words, mathematical proofs are mental quasi-geometric figures, built up through theoretical beliefs that it would be unthinkable for us to abandon.

Thomas Kuhn's conception of "paradigms shifts" that attend "scientific revolutions" runs along similar lines. The introduction of a new paradigm in science creates new boundaries that the plural subject of the scientific community is unwilling to quit.

Both in reasoning and in "love", our mental ontology is geometrical in the sense introduced above: It is defined through the boundaries of our intuition and taste. By contrast, Frankfurt sees a radical difference between the two in that rationality is essentially impersonal, whereas love is typically personal. In fact, however, a person can love not only another person but also an ideal (practical or theoretical) that he shares with other individuals, with a kind of "intellectual love".

Furthermore, Frankfurt finds it baffling that whereas, on the one hand, we appreciate both rationality and love as “especially valuable experiences or states of fulfillment and of freedom” (Frankfurt, 1988: 89), on the other hand, they are a relation of selflessness toward an idea that captivates the person. In other words, a person achieves his freedom only when caught up by specific ideals and consequently surrenders to their appeal (Wolff, 1977). What resolves this puzzle is that only by possessing our idiosyncratic mental habitation is one able to contemplate, act, think and feel freely and effectively; one can exercise one’s autonomy only rooted in it. It is true that in a sense one is “captivate” in his mental niche. Such captivity is anything but solitary, however, since what builds up this niche are elements that are common property and so are social.

III. FINAL THOUGHTS

The foregoing discussion has pursued a philosophical inquiry into social-group identity, an analysis that is at once descriptive, empiricist, and naturalist. Moral psychology has also played a seminal role in the investigation. The thrust of the paper’s argument is, in brief, that mind groups are constructs of practical beliefs and desires that we often share with other persons. These beliefs and desires are the cement that binds individuals in what we have characterized (in section 3) as “indirect” social groups. The formative law of such groups is the ideal that serves as a regulative principle drawing people down a specific socio-cultural path. From this standpoint, one can conceive the individual person as a nexus of all the particular ideals that he embraces.

Critics have routinely charged both similar and less radically individualistic accounts of the person (such as David Hume’s doctrine of personal identity¹³) with relativism. Their leading objection is that there is a reality of moral norms and traditions, independent of our practical tastes, of which we make ourselves a part in life (cf. Adams 1999). It is precisely such norms and traditions, so runs the charge, which distinguish normal from sociopathic thinking and behavior.

In answer to this and like charges the theory of personality introduced in this paper argues that persons have the integrity of their practical space, or of their “mental habitation”. Of course, the processes of our education and socialization supply some of the building material that goes into the construction of our habitation, and good deal of this material society simply imposes upon us when we are in no position to be intelligently selective by exercising practical

¹³ Indeed, while Hume spoke about “we”, our starting point is the “I”.

deliberation. Be this as it may, persons are essentially shaped by their boundaries, a fact that most psychologists affirm so far as they regard pathological deviates from the norm as individuals with eroded or even destroyed personal boundaries.

The heart of the concept of mind-group identity as we have considered it in these pages is that we are affectively bound to all supporting segments, the veritable walls and beams, of our “mental habitation”. This topological metaphor depictively renders the fixed unities of our mental ontology which feature as elements of necessity that make social life possible. These elements are empirical products of our practical tastes as members of the social, or *mind*, group. Traditionally, philosophers have subjected such mind groups to analysis in the form of a descriptive social philosophy that investigates the practical life of different persons, ideals, and forms of life.¹⁴

Individual persons construct their mental habitations out of materials that are social products, in the sense that what constitutes these elements are things that they share with other persons in what we have investigated here as “mind groups.” “Bad” persons (sociopaths) dwell within habitations that defective construction material has rendered precarious or worse. Their plight is not the result of any failure to observe a priori ethical laws. There are no such laws. Their practical spaces simply do not cohere with the practical space of other persons and so are not constitutive elements of any cohering ideal.

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¹⁴ Similar conception was developed in Reichenbach (1951: 276 f.).

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